

**Frances M. Tait
Veteran**

**Unclear Second Person
Friend of Frances**

**Mike Russet
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New York State Military Museum
Interviewers**

**Interviewed on March 22, 2006
Albany New York**

Q: Could you give me your full name, date of birth and place of birth, please?

FT: Frances M. Tait, that's Frances with an e. [Laughs] Tait is T-A-I-T.

Q: When were you born?

T: May 26, 1924

Q: And where?

FT: New York City

Q: What was your educational background prior to entering the service?

FT: I was a high school graduate.

Q: Do you remember where you were and your reaction when you heard about Pearl Harbor?

FT: It was a Sunday morning and I was home.

Q: How did you hear this, was it on the radio?

FT: On the radio.

Q: What was your reaction when you heard about this?

FT: Shock really, cause we, at least I didn't have any indication we were going to go to war

Q: Did you have any idea where Pearl Harbor was?

FT: No, never heard of it [Laughter]

Q: Most people hadn't at the time. Alright, you joined the US army, why did you decide to enlist?

FT: I just felt that that was the thing to do. A way for me to do something to help out.

Q: Why did you pick the army?

FT: Well was advertised more really than the other services were as far as women went.

Q: So you joined in august of 1944?

FT: Yes

Q: Where did you go for your training?

FT: Fort Oglethorpe Georgia.

Q: Now was this the first time that you were really away from home?

FT: Yes

Q: How did you feel when you got there?

FT: Well I was so busy I didn't have time to be homesick. [Laughter]

Q: What kind of training did you get, was it a regular basic training or specialty training?

FT: It was just regular basic training.

Q: How long were you there?

FT: Six weeks.

Q: Where did you go from there?

FT: Camp Upton, New York.

Q: Did you receive any specialized training?

FT: No

Q: What did you do at Camp Upton?

FT: Well they called me a company clerk. In other words, you were really just a clerk in a WAC orderly room. We did morning reports and all that.

Q: So you had a background in typing and shorthand and stenography?

FT: Yep. I was a legal secretary when I joined the army.

Q: Uh can you tell us some of the duties you performed. As a company clerk?

FT: Well typing, filing.

Q: Reports, morning reports?

FT: Oh yes morning reports

Q: Now did you live in barracks at the time?

FT: Yes

Q: What are they like?

FT: [Laughs]

Q: How did you feel living in those?

FT: [Laughs] Well they were comfortable, nothing fancy obviously. Double deck bunks.

Q: Did you have to stoke the stove for heat? The old coal stove?

FT: Not normally, once and while we got stuck doing it but normally they had the men that did it.

Q: Did you get to go home often? Since you were in front of the area?

FT: No. Well I really wasn't there too long I don't think. I was there for six months and then I [unclear] go overseas.

Q: Ok, Where did you go?

FT: Europe. France

Q: Now how did you get there?

FT: Boat. Ship.

Q: Did you go with a convoy?

FT: Yes it was a troop ship.

Q: What was it like on the ship? You must have been in a separate place from the men.

FT: It was nothing to write home about, I mean we had a bed, and it was cold. And I was sea sick the whole trip. [Laughter]

Q: How was the food aboard ship?

[Unidentified Person]: Good question. She'll tell you.

FT: [Laughs] I've eaten better.

[Unidentified Person]: They were English cooks.

FT: British Cooks.

[Unidentified Person]: They uncooked everything. You get raw bacon, fish heads.

FT: That's true. But we survived.

Q: No wonder you were sea sick.

FT: [Laughs]

Q: Where did the ship land?

FT: We landed in Scotland. I can't remember where though.

Q: How long were you in the British Isles?

FT: Uh, Well let's see I went from there to France. I spent most of my tour in France.

[Unidentified Person]: I think you should mention that the day you landed the war was over.

FT: Oh the war had ended the day we landed.

Q: Really? So what was it like when you went into all these celebrations? What was that like?

FT: Lots of happy times. Especially the soldiers, they were happy they were going to get to go home.

Q: They were leaving and you were just coming.

FT: I had just arrived. [Laughs]

Q: What did you do in France when you reached France?

FT: Clerical work mainly.

Q: Were you processing soldiers to go back home?

FT: No, I worked in a WAC unit.

Q: Was it a large unit?

FT: It was pretty large, about 200 women then.

Q: Did it have a designation, numerical designation or anything you can recall?

FT: Oh dear.

Q: That's ok, so all of you were basically there to do clerical duties then.

FT: Whatever they told us to do we did.

Q: Did you get to travel around France much or did you get much leave time?

FT: I had leave, I went to Switzerland and I went to Holland and I think we visited Germany that was before we were assigned there.

Q: Did you have to pull duties like KP or guard duty or anything?

FT: Pull KP, not guard duty.

[Unidentified Person]: But not when you were overseas.

FT: No we didn't because they used

[Unidentified Person]: the local nationals

FT: yeah

[Unidentified Person]: You pulled at basic training right?

FT: Oh yeah we pulled everything at basic training

Q: How long were you in Europe?

FT: Two and a half years.

Q: What were some of your other assignments while you were there?

FT: Well they were all administrative type jobs. But I worked at the ordinance.

Q: Did you notice a lot of rebuilding the country going on?

FT: Not too much then. By the time I left, they were doing a lot of it. Because it was really pretty torn up.

Q: Alright, you said you were in Germany?

FT: Yes

Q: What was it like the destruction inside?

FT: Well it was in pretty bad shape, it was pretty bad, but you know those Germans are very ambitious, and they worked hard at rebuilding.

Q: What was your equipment like, was it, modern or up to date for the time?

FT: Yes, I think so.

Q: Did you notice any types of shortages of equipment or clothing or rations or anything?

FT: Well, off and on they went short, but you know eventually there was a shipment from the United States in over there.

Q: What were your officers like?

[Unidentified Person]: Beautiful

FT: [Laughs]

[Unidentified Person]: I'm just kidding.

FT: Most of them were very good. They really were. I learned a lot from some of them.

Q: Were there any incidents or experiences that kind of stand out over others? Maybe something that was kind of humorous or inspiring or sad?

Unidentified Person]: You tell them about basic training where they issued you men's clothing because they didn't have any clothing for women.

FT: [Laughs]

[Unidentified Person]: It's true. Have you ever seen someone my size in a male overcoat?

Q: You know I heard that, the women were issued men's clothing.

[Unidentified Person]: That's right, because they didn't have any. Then you might mention, you know she was one of the first women to be promoted to sergeant major.

Q: Oh really?

FT: Yes

[Unidentified Person]: And she was, prior to that, selected by the director of the Women's Army Corps to come up and be the sergeant major for the Women's Army Corps in her office.

FT: In the pentagon

Unidentified Person]: In the pentagon.

Q: Oh so you went back to the pentagon?

FT: Oh yeah

[Unidentified Person]: She served three years in the pentagon.

Q: How many years total service did you have?

FT: 22 and a half

Q: Oh so you retired from the service

FT: Yes I did. I had a break, but then I went back in.

Q: What year did you retire?

FT: December of 1968

Q: Oh? So you saw a lot of changes then?

FT: Oh yes.

Q: What were some of the changes you saw in the military?

FT: [Laughs] Oh boy.

[Unidentified Person]: The deterioration of discipline as a result of the country as a whole. Failing to maintain discipline in schools and every other place.

Q: So you saw the changes from the old brown boot army to

FT: Yes to the black shoe army... And it was quite a change.

Q: Now did you spend most of your time then after coming back from Europe in the Pentagon?

FT: No, when I first came back from Europe, I was assigned to several organizations in the state. And then I was first sergeant in a WAC unit for seven years.

[Unidentified Person]: Right, well you were also in Atlanta with the WAC attachment in Atlanta Georgia. And you weren't at Useless were you?

FT: No, not fort Useless.

[Unidentified Person]: But you were assigned to Fort Hamilton and you served there as first sergeant, which was when I first met her, for seven years because of her mother who was in the hospital for having a major stroke. And she had to be assigned to the area where her mother was so ill.

Q: Now as a first sergeant major, you probably experienced a lot of problems with you know, with the typical, the article 15s and things like that, disciplinary problems.

FT: We didn't have too many with the women though... We had some, but not like the men did. Most of our women behaved well.

[Unidentified Person]: And well the thing is there were all volunteers. And you must remember the draft. Where they scuffed up everybody and so forth and that's why an important fact the men had more disciplinary problems, because of the people that were drafted.

FT: Well they didn't want to be there in the first place.

[Unidentified Person]: That's right.

Q: What do you think were some of the major changes you saw in your entire career?

FT: Oh Boy...

Unidentified Person]: Well you could start off with the uniform changes.

FT: Yep.

[Unidentified Person]: And then you could start off with when General Abrams integrated women into the reg...

T: Regular army

[Unidentified Person]: And they lived in the barracks with the men.

Q: Do you think that was a good thing or a bad thing?

FT: Well, at the time I had mixed emotions about it. But it worked out well. It really did.

Q: How were the women received by the men into the regular army?

FT: Uh...

Q: The Male army [laughs]

FT: The Male army [laughs] Well, originally, I don't think they were too fond of us. But they grew to love us. [Pause] Well, you know, we did our jobs and they did theirs.

Q: And Basically, you paved the way for the women of today that are in the combat arms, they're flying helicopters, their basically doing everything the men are doing

FT: Everything.

[Unidentified Person]: Except be on the line of battle, they're not fighting forces, you know? Even the helicopter pilots of today, while they do get into it, they're not combat is what I'm trying to say.

Q: Right.

FT: But it was a good life, it really was. And besides which they paid me every month.

Q: Plus you got all the benefits, the health benefits, you get a pension for life.

FT: That's right.

Q: How do you think your time in the service had an effect on your life?

FT: Well, I think I grew up in the army. I really did.

[Unidentified Person]: Drastically

FT: Drastic yes. (laughs)

[Unidentified Person]: In the sense of Long Island, you know it was nothing at the time, that's where she lived even though she was born in New York City. And it was a farm community for all types of purposes. Well you take a young lady out of the [unclear] lands, and put them in these wide experiences, they can't help but you know

Q: Where did you live in Long Island?

FT: Saville

[Unidentified Person]: And so then you put them in the army; still happens today. Take the kids out of the farms and the small cities and villages, and it's a traumatic change. All for the better might I add, same with young men. They grow up in the army, they're disciplined, and everybody would give their right hand to be able to hire retired military or people who served in the service, just because they're disciplined.

And although I am speaking for Frances, we discussed it for years so I'm not encroaching upon what she's saying, but it was a dramatic experience and she wouldn't be the person she is today if she had not had. She would not have been successful, say in the civilian community, women weren't working as you recall. Well you probably don't, but I recall. Women weren't working. They were clerks and typist and [stenos] and that, but you didn't see them promoted into positions of authority and so Francis succeed all through her military career and subsequently served the United States government with civil service in the pentagon for oh I don't know. Ten years after you retired from the military.

FT: Yes. Twelve Years.

[Unidentified Person]: Twelve Years. I'm sorry. So again, you had to ask yourself where would you be today if you hadn't went on with a high school education to join the military, be exposed to responsibility and discipline. That's the nearest I could express Fran's [unclear] around 17 mins]. Am I wrong Frances?

FT: No.

Q: Did you ever make use of the G.I Bill at all?

FT: No I didn't

Q: Did you ever join any veteran's organizations?

FT: No

[Unidentified Person]: Yes you did. NCOA, the Non Commissioned officers association.

FT: Yeah I did. Forgot about it.

Q: Did you ever stay in contact with anyone that served with you?

FT: Uh, you know truthfully I think most of the ones I served with are not here any longer.

[Unidentified Person]: The answer to that question however Frances, is that she went to the WAC reunions at Fort McClellan in Alabama every year, which was then the home of the women's army corp. And every year, she associated with people that served under her, enlisted people. She also met people who she worked for, the cornels, the highest ranking women in the military who were all friends of hers because she worked in the pentagon. And so, in this regard, she attended every reunion and became re-associated with all her friends.

FT: All war stories.

[Unidentified Person]: And the fact that she brings (out) is the fact that all the people that died in World War Two and for the matter Korea, died in such large numbers, that most of our friends, mine too, I was a late Johnny come Late, but most of her friends are dead, both officer and enlisted. Either that or their in old soldier homes in Washington or they are otherwise disabled.

Q: Ok, well thank you very much for your interview.

[Unidentified Person]: I'm sorry I butted in.

Q: No, that's great.

FT: That's good, she remembers more about me than I remember.

[Unidentified Person]: Well that's only because we've known each other since 1962.