

**Julia Biss  
Veteran**

**Michael Russert  
Wayne Clarke  
NY State Military Museum  
Interviewers**

**Interviewed on  
29 June 2007  
New York State Military Museum  
Saratoga Springs, NY**

**Q:** Okay, we're rolling

**Q:** Alright this is a home interview, Wilton New York. Um, it is the 29<sup>th</sup> of June 2007 approximately 10:15 AM. Interviewers are Mike Russet and Wane Clark. Could you give me your full name, date of birth and place of birth please?

**JB:** Yes, it's Julia H Biss, I was born here in South Wilton, ah, on December 20<sup>th</sup>, 1921.

**Q:** What was your educational background prior to entering services?

**JB:** High school graduate.

**Q:** Okay, now, ah, why did you decide to go in, go into the service?

**JB:** Well Pearl Harbor, and I knew my brother was over in the Philippines and I thought wow you know why do they have to bomb us? I mean was that because of that?

**Q:** Mhm, okay

**JB:** But I had to wait until I was 21, I was 19 I think when the war started.

**Q:** Alright, um.

**JB:** 20 or 20, I guess.

**Q:** Now what, what branch of service did you join?

**JB:** Well I joined the women's army auxiliary corps ...they always forget that there was an auxiliary corps before the army, women's army.

**Q:** Yes, before the war.

**JB:** Yup, and that was in February of 1943.

**Q:** Where did they send you for your basic training?

**JB:** I went to Fort Oglethorpe in Georgia

**Q:** Okay, and what was that like? Was it

**JB:** That was, that wasn't too bad, but it was it was it was a nice place to be but ah, we had to you know the barracks were brand new yet to go the bath, bathroom. We had a bathroom in the barrack, but to take showers and stuff you had, well I was in the very last barrack so we had to go all the way down and of course it, when it rained you got,

you know you went down you got your shower you came back walking through the mud and stuff, but it was it was a good place to get basic training. When I was only there for like 3 weeks.

**Q:** Was that your first time away from home?

**JB:** No, no I was already away from home. I joined from, I was working in New Jersey.

**Q:** Oh, okay

**JB:** So, I joined from Newark,

**Q:** Mhm

**JB:** I left from Newark, New Jersey. But when I got through with basic it ah, I was scared to death I was gonna get cooks and bakers [laughs] I didn't want that. They sent me to Stephen F Austin State Teachers College in Nacogdoches Texas, Texas or administrative training and that was good. That was very good there I like that.

**Q:** How long was that training for?

**JB:** I think I went there it was the end of March and then to the end to the beginning of May. March, April, May. About two months, two or three months really and from there I got transferred to down field in Boise Idaho, which was an Air Force. I'm the air force waste.

**Q:** Mhm

**JB:** And I was there till the end of the war.

**Q:** Were there many other women stationed there?

**JB:** We had about, there were two barracks, so I think we were about a hundred or so there, maybe I can't remember how many were in each barrack, but there were two, we had our own section, we had our own mess hall, we had our own code you know our own build, our own little spot where we, they built for us.

**Q:** Now what were your duties there?

**JB:** Well, when I first went my first job there was ah, I was worked on an orderly room and I liked that and then this was a strange thing that happened, this fella came to the base and he had don't know how many degrees so they were so excited about this fella he was going to straighten things out at the headquarters that needed straightening out and so forth, but the poor guy was I think more of a you know he was so busy getting his visa, degrees and things that he couldn't really do anything.

**Q:** Mhm

**JB:** So, they replaced, they took, they gave him my job and they sent me out I went and luckily, I loved it working out there. I was sent off to the main gov, main tower on the gunnery range and that's the work that I you know this is where you are, they had that but the crews had to have certain amounts of training in weapons and so we had this you know we had little places, we had to schedule their whole you know whatever they had to do and I liked that it was the main, big control tower. We got to fire the 50 calibers [laughs]

**Q:** Oh, you got to do that?

**JB:** Just because you know I wanted to

**Q:** huh

**JB:** Then I fired some carbine, a couple of other weapons I would have liked to have tried to fire but I never got to.

**Q:** You know growing up in the growing up in the country have you fired guns before?

**JB:** No, never know when I fired the first time I fired that 50 caliber I did, they told me just one click at a time well I pushed it down and got about three or four clicks and my hat went flying I had to hang out so I didn't go flying, but that was then a other thing that happened while I was out there that one of the B-24s crashed right at the end of the runway I mean at the end of the gunnery range. I don't think anyone got killed because I saw him going down and it went down kinda you know they knew they were going to go down so the they pilot it down so they came down sort of in the nose but flattish so it it didn't burst into flame or anything and I think some of them got hurt but I don't think any of them got killed, so I was there for you know, until the end of the war and I like Boise. Boise was a great place.

**Q:** What did you like about it?

**JB:** Oh, it's just nice you know see green, the weather, everything you know

**Q:** Mhm

**JB:** And it was just the people were nice, so it was just a great place to be for you if you had to be there then I then when the war ended you know they let us out on the point system after the war and of course having gone in right from the start well practically from the start they weren't sure they were gonna keep the women so I had to you know take a discharge.

**Q:** Now what rank were you when you were discharged?

**JB:** I was a sergeant and about a year later, they called and said that they were take they were gonna start taking women back, but by that time I was working at GE and I just decided well maybe no I wasn't working at GE, I was still in New Jersey, working in New Jersey. So, then I came back, my mother got sick and I came back and got a job at GE and ah, I wasn't too happy and, in the meantime,, they had split the air Army and the Air Force, so I decided to go back you know then they had women in the Air Force. Oh, the other thing I was in September of 43I really, we were discharged from the auxiliary corps and immediately taken in if you wanted to stay and girls got out, but I wanted to stay in I had we had signed up for the duration of the war plus six months.

**Q:** Mhm

**JB:** So at that point in Boise I reenlisted and that's that that's when I became women in the army W.A.C. but then when we got to the Air Force. I went down to this Kelly field and the other field down in San Antonio, Kelly and I can't the one where I went just for assignment. I didn't have to go through basic again, but they gave us a whole big choice of schools we could go to, so I chose Machine County, which was

**Q:** It must have been Lackland.

**Q:** Lackland Air Force Base?

**Q:** Yeah, it's right next door.

**JB:** Lackland that's right. I was there

**Q:** Killing down the air and up the hill and Lackland

**JB:** for like three weeks until you had to pick and get an assignment.

**Q:** Mhm

**JB:** And I chose machine accounting which was the beginning of the counting age so from there I went to La Torre air for space in Denver and took, you know the there I was there about six months I think in Denver and then from there they gave you a choice of bases and the closest one to home was about well um in Washington where they take off um, my memory is not as good as it should be and some on these names but the one where the presidents take off Roman... Andrews

**Q:** Andrews

**JB:** That was a little pentagon

**Q:** Uh-huh

**JB:** I like that, that was a good assignment that was Matt's military transport service headquarters and then one of the girls that was there was being transferred to Westover Air Force Base in Massachusetts and she didn't want to go and I said oh boy I'd love to go there because that's close to home so I managed to get transferred to Westover and I was at Andrew's I don't for about a year or so I think and then in Westover for about a year or so and then the where I worked it I was always in headquarters' group sat at Westover the Master Sergeant we had there we became kind of friends and there was an opening in Hawaii so he says Julie how would you like to go to Hawaii as well I don't know I'd like to but let me think about it and in the meantime I had been babysitting for the Cornel so about 3 o'clock in the afternoon the cornel comes in he says Julie I hope you're not going to be angry with me says I'm going to let you go.

[laughter]

**JB:** So there, I stayed there about a month later a call came from the Pentagon for people to replace you know where they to replace people in the nobody, you couldn't that he couldn't do anything about that so I got sent to the Pentagon spent about I don't know about a year and a half at the Pentagon. I loved that I like that, that was a good, that was a good place to be.

**Q:** Did you see any important Generals?

**JB:** Oh yeah [laughs]

**Q:** Like

**JB:** The one I liked the best was meeting the face no I didn't speak to him I probably should have saluted but I didn't General Omar Bradley

**Q:** Uh-huh

**JB:** And then I did see you know sort of at a distance um General Vandenburg and at for general Vandenburg he was dying with cancer and he didn't want a big, he was retiring and he didn't want a big to do so they had a small parade for him Andrews in which we went you know we were in and then the other one was North Strident, General North Strident, North Stradder North strand ... so know you and you'd see different people and walking. I like the Pentagon it was the concord was nice, men down in the basement, they had all these stores and things. That's where I saw Don Walmart Bradley, I guess he went shopping or something and then the voice of America was down there too, so I liked I had all good assignments I really did so and ah.

**Q:** Now what kind of housing did you have when you were in Washington?

**JB:** We had we were in it was called Fort Myer but there were two barracks for men for the Air Force men and two barracks for the Air Force Women,

**Q:** Mhm

**JB:** You know separate. They were good we each had a room that was you know we didn't go in the dorm, it wasn't like a dormitory, it was little rooms we each had our own room.

**Q:** Oh

**JB:** When I was at Westover they built knew housing for the officers of course you know the married officers and so they we gave up we were in barracks when I first went there you know where you had the open barrack and then they the women were given their housing that the old housing that the officers families were vacating so we had to look you know there was like four of us to an apartment so that was nice and what else there was something else I was thinking of... well I guess that's what I was going to say about the apartments at Westover but then when uh when the Korean war ended they said that anyone that had three and a half years on you know I had a four year enlistment I couldn't take a discharge so I just I had I only had three more months to go so I decided I was going to take the discharge but the one thing that I that was disappointed in I got out as a staff sergeant but I almost made tech but this one they decided to give us tests they prior to this it was recommendation you know by your officers and this time they decided to do a test and the fellow they had make the test up put questions in there that we needed that didn't really need to have

**Q:** Mhm

**JB:** And I missed by I missed out on tick by about five points and even the smart ones didn't get very you know didn't make uh that that high grades because of those there were like two or three questions in there that everybody complained about he said why were these in here because they're just

**Q:** Mhm

**JB:** It's nothing that we would have used you know, so anyway but on the whole I sometimes wonder if I should have stayed there or should of got but anyway I got out and I got a job in GE and worked there for 28 years.

**Q:** Oh

**JB:** I was but it was it was a great experience I would I don't know about today if I would join but the way that we were separate we had everything separate.

**Q:** Mhm

**JB:** In during the war we had bed check at 12 o'clock you had to be there at you know during the with the rest of it when I was in the Air Force of course we weren't at war so we could wear civilian clothes but during the war you wore nothing but your uniform.

**Q:** Mhm

**JB:** Which I didn't mind I didn't mind I liked the uniform I liked it better than any they have now even the we had the khakis and the Air Force was blue.

**Q:** Uh-huh

**JB:** But, in then the whack it was the khakis colors but I met some wonderful people from all walks of life but there was I probably would have done better you know ah, maybe rank but you know there's so many more people in during the war that the world later on.

**Q:** Yeah

**JB:** Easier later on nut you still have to know your you're what you were doing I was I charge of at the pentagon for not too long of a time I don't know about a year about a half maybe not quite a year I finally they put me in charge of worldwide aircraft unfortunate making the records doing the records for the US so that was if we use all this IBM equipment you know the old equipment

**Q:** Well

**JB:** Now they have these things that little tiny slots then machines.

**Q:** Must have been a whole room.

**JB:** Yeah, yes it was one room full that I shouldn't have really gone into provided I was cleared for a secret but not top and this room was top secret but I had a friend that worked in there and the equipment that was there, there was a console in the middle of the room and all this huge big machines around it you know to take down all the records and now they can get it out a pin head but there was one room that had nothing but light bulbs, neat but the officer there told me what to buy and what they had but I remember thinking boy if you wanted to punish somebody just stick them in that room for a minute with all those light bulbs going, I never saw so many light bulbs in one place in one like this room it was about this size and the whole thing had nothing but light bulbs, lit, they were lit [laughs] so , but why don't you want anything else to ask.

**Q:** When did you finally discharge?

**JB:** In September of 53.

**Q:** Now have you stayed in contact with any of the people you served with?

**JB:** I pretty much lost contact with most of them one girl up until about two years ago and she had cancer so I haven't heard from her since, I've sent her cards and I get no

cards so at Christmas time we would exchange so I assume she gone I don't know no because over the years you kind of you know you go your separate ways.

**Q:** Yeah

**JB:** Other things come and you just you know you're doing other things I don't I just what I still have one from the when I was in the WAX we were good friends and when she got married I was her maid of honor and so we still exchange Christmas cards and they exchange a letter at Christmas time.

**Q:** Mhm

**JB:** But he husband has he died several years ago and she's you know well we're both the same age so I don't know how I don't know she did have a problem but I don't think I don't know if she has I think she's doing fairly well now but.

**Q:** Now you've had several brothers in the service.

**JB:** All four, all four of us, I had three brothers to myself so the whole family was in the service.

**Q:** Hmm

**JB:** No, John went in first actually what he wanted was to go to West Point and my mother at that time in debt do that thing in duval (?) I don't know if anybody remembers them the lawyers King in Duvel (?)

**Q:** No

**JB:** Well in those days you know even here in Saratoga, you couldn't even get a job in Saratoga, that was during the depression and so my mother did go to do Joe deval he tried but they never never nothing ever came of getting him into um West Point ... and

**Q:** What about your other brothers?

**JB:** So when the war when I when you when there was John we found out that he was you know what I've been in trophy and it was missing I joined first that the black came up first then ship joined the Marines I think he joined I joined in February and I think he joined like him Iris he just died but Iris could tell you more about his service, you know I was away from home so much I never really you know stayed here that long until I came back after I retired, but she has pictures.

**Q:** So he was in the Marines in the Pacific?

**JB:** He fought in the Pacific at Iwo Jima he was on Iwo Jima.

**Q:** That must have been pretty stressful for your parents.

**JB:** Yeah and then after Mike couldn't go in until because was in high school still but you know... I think he had three weeks of basic training whatever they call it in the Navy. He joined the Navy and I can't he was in on the enormity D-day anyway, he was , he has three weeks in bate in his training then immediate he was shipped overseas but it there was is um I forget the ye had to been 44 when he went in.

**Q:** Mhm

**JB:** The war didn't end until 45, it was towards the end of 44 because Normandy, wasn't that the end 44?

**Q:** Yeah well, I'm June of 44.

**JB:** June of 44 yeah, so that's that's what he was part that he washed only had three weeks, I remember he had boot camp three weeks, I think the guys they said.

**Q:** So everybody survives though

**JB:** We all survived the war, yup ... until it's natural you know until you get to the old age but

**Q:** Mhm, did you ever use the GI bill, was anything

**JB:** Yeah I used it once, I went and took ah, did I take it once or twice because after I got out I decided to go to I took a course in interior decorating in New York City and that's why I did that and then I lived for a year in he bought a house John bought a house in West Palm Beach, Florida and so I lived down there and so I went to a junior secretarial school and that was in West Palm Beach so that's, never used either one of the things though, and when I got when I worked for GE I worked in accounts payable and I did requisition billing and stuff like that you know so.

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

**JB:** It changed my life about 360 degrees because before that, actually the crazy part was up until I was 21 I was Helen this Helen this my mother wanted me to be named Helen Julia and I guess when my father went to sign me up either they misunderstood at the you know where they sign you up,

**Q:** Mhm

**JB:** But anyway, on my birth certificate I'm Julia Helen, never knew that until I was 21. [laughter]

**JB:** And it just I was I was not the happiest person though, until I was 21 because I was always so very shy and everything and I never felt comfortable with Helen, never understood why until I gotten and found out that I was Julia not Helen so for 44, since 1943 I've been Julia Helen but one I've told people I don't answer to Helen Butone's (?) family still calls me Helen. They've got it wrong and when Chip, its Chip's family they put it with everybody says who is Helen J you know, they knew I had brothers but they didn't know who Helen J was. They got it right when they put it in for Mike's obituary, but anyway that was all four of us back in 1940 about around 1944 so I think it was also an article in The Saratogian where they had all four of us pictured and told you know that we that the whole family was in, we got our 15 minutes of fame. [laughter]

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

**JB:** And I don't know I have to I thought um Lisa wanted to be here for this and but she works and she can't get away all the time so I'll get the papers.

**Q:** Okay, I'll give you

**JB:** You could write down and give me an address.



**Q:** I'll give you my card with the address so you can send it to us.

**JB:** Okay I'll email it to you or well if um Mick would have liked to have been here for this but you know he left on the 24<sup>th</sup>.

**Q:** Yeah

**JB:** Father died on the 25<sup>th</sup> no the 20, yeah the 25<sup>th</sup>. Well what do we do?

**Q:** Okay well thank you very much

**JB:** I don't know are you are you interested in doing the other two interviews, won't be able to do interviews except with their children.

**Q:** [Camera shuts off]