

1 **Interview of retired U.S. Air Force Lieutenant Colonel Barbara Pratt-LeMahieu**  
2 **on her career in the military**

3

4Ruth Stewart: Barbara Pratt-LeMahieu is being interviewed as member of the  
5 WOSL of San Antonio Unit, Texas. This is January the 14<sup>th</sup>, 2004;  
6 and the recording is being made at the Army Residence  
7 Community. Ruth Stewart is the interviewer, assisted by Carol  
8 Habgood and Jim LeMahieu. [00:29] Barbara, tell me a little bit  
9 about your early life, like where were you born and where did you  
10 grow up?

11

12Barbara Pratt-LeMahieu: Salem, Massachusetts.

13

14Ruth Stewart: Okay.

15

16Barbara Pratt-LeMahieu: 1930-, 26<sup>th</sup> August 1930.

17

18Ruth Stewart: Mm-hm. [00:42] And you grew up there then?

19

20Barbara Pratt-LeMahieu: Yes. I went to grammar school, the, uh, St. Mary's Catholic  
21 School and...as well high school.

22

23Ruth Stewart: Mm-hm. [00:54] And then, what did you do after high school?

24

25Barbara Pratt-LeMahieu: I worked at, uh... What's the name of the place? Almy's, Almy's,  
26 which was a, uh, uh...what. What's the word for it?

27

28Jim LeMahieu: Department.

29

30Barbara Pratt-LeMahieu: Department store. Almy's Department Store and I worked in the  
31 credit department.

32

33Ruth Stewart: [1:19] Okay, is that where you got your start at administrative  
34 experience?

35

36Barbara Pratt-LeMahieu: Well, in... Yeah, I went through the, uh, high school...

37

38Ruth Stewart: You did a business course there.

39

40Barbara Pratt-LeMahieu: It was called a commercial high school.

41

42Ruth Stewart: Okay, [1:30] so that prepared you for that then?

43

44Barbara Pratt-LeMahieu: Yes, uh-huh.

1  
2Ruth Stewart: [1:33] So then, when did you get interested in joining the military?  
3Barbara Pratt-LeMahieu: I always was. [chuckle] And uh, I read in a newspaper... I read  
4 newspapers and still do, uh, every day. And Salem, Massachusetts  
5 expressed – no, wasn't expressing – whatever it was. At any rate,  
6 uh, uh, I had a good job and I enjoyed the credit department work.  
7 I interviewed the customers and took the...filled out the forms.  
8  
9Ruth Stewart: Mm-hm.  
10  
11Barbara Pratt-LeMahieu: And uh...  
12  
13Ruth Stewart: It's a very responsible job.  
14  
15Barbara Pratt-LeMahieu: It was, yes. Mm-hm. Those were times when people that could  
16 do, did; [laughter] or were encouraged to.  
17  
18Ruth Stewart: Mm-hm.  
19  
20Barbara Pratt-LeMahieu: And uh, one day I was reading the morning paper and they said we  
21 were enlisting – or the United States was enlisting women for the  
22 first time since WWII. And so, I said, "Oh, I'll join the navy".  
23 The navy would not... The navy age limit was 21; and I wasn't 21.  
24 So, a couple days later, they said the U.S. Air Force is, uh, is  
25 recruiting at an age that I was eligible for. [chuckle]  
26  
27Ruth Stewart: [2:58] And what year was that?  
28  
29Barbara Pratt-LeMahieu: Uh, let's see...December, yeah, on December 3, 1948.  
30  
31Ruth Stewart: Okay. [3:12] And so that's when you went into the air force?  
32  
33Barbara Pratt-LeMahieu: Yes, mm-hm. They had just separated...  
34  
35Ruth Stewart: [3:17] From the army?  
36  
37Barbara Pratt-LeMahieu: ...from the army, mm-hm.  
38  
39Ruth Stewart: Okay.  
40  
41Barbara Pratt-LeMahieu: And I was, I was, uh, in enlisted status until July 1971. No, that's  
42 wrong too. That's wrong.  
43  
44Ruth Stewart: [3:31] But you enlisted as an enlisted person?

1  
2Barbara Pratt-LeMahieu: Yes, and I...  
3  
4Ruth Stewart: [3:34] You went in as a buck private, did you?  
5Barbara Pratt-LeMahieu: Uh, yes. Mm-hm.  
6  
7Ruth Stewart: Mm-hm. Okay.  
8  
9Barbara Pratt-LeMahieu: Then the air force changed the nomenclature. I, uh, I was... I read  
10 in the paper that they were recruiting women for, uh, U.S. Air  
11 Force...  
12  
13Ruth Stewart: Mm-hm. Mm-hm.  
14  
15Barbara Pratt-LeMahieu: ...which had been separated from the Army Air Corps.  
16  
17Ruth Stewart: Mm-hm.  
18  
19Barbara Pratt-LeMahieu: And uh, I said... They said, "C'mon over". [chuckle] So I enlist...  
20  
21Ruth Stewart: [4:03] Did you do the same kind of administrative work there that  
22 you – similar to what you'd done...  
23  
24Barbara Pratt-LeMahieu: Yes, yes. Well I first had to go through basic training.  
25  
26Ruth Stewart: Mm-hm.  
27  
28Barbara Pratt-LeMahieu: And then Cheyenne, Wyoming for, uh, administrative, uh, training.  
29  
30Ruth Stewart: Mm-hm.  
31  
32Barbara Pratt-LeMahieu: And my, let's see, I was assigned to – yeah, okay, Colorado  
33 Springs Headquarters. Or it was Air Force Headquarters? No, uh,  
34 was it [inaudible 4:47] general...  
35  
36James LeMahieu: SAC? LeMay?  
37  
38Barbara Pratt-LeMahieu: It was to LeMay, yes.  
39  
40Ruth Stewart: Mm-hm.  
41  
42Barbara Pratt-LeMahieu: Okay, and I, I went into the service at Colorado Springs and later  
43 with the, when the, uh, Korean war developed, they reassigned  
44 headquarters to, uh, March Air Base, March Air Force Base.

1  
2James LeMahieu: It was the 15<sup>th</sup> Air Force.  
3  
4Barbara Pratt-LeMahieu: 15<sup>th</sup> Air Force, yeah.  
5  
6Ruth Stewart: Okay. Okay then, and uh... [5:20] But you spent quite a bit of time  
7 then in Colorado Springs, did you?  
8  
9Barbara Pratt-LeMahieu: Until the...  
10  
11Ruth Stewart: [5:26] Until the Korean war?  
12  
13Barbara Pratt-LeMahieu: Until they changed the – they closed Colorado Springs and moved  
14 the headquarters to March Air Base in California.  
15  
16Ruth Stewart: [5:34] Okay and you went to, to California then?  
17  
18Barbara Pratt-LeMahieu: Oh, yes.  
19  
20Ruth Stewart: You followed it there?  
21  
22Barbara Pratt-LeMahieu: Yeah, mm-hm.  
23  
24Ruth Stewart: Since that was during the Korean war, did you go to Korea at all?  
25  
26Barbara Pratt-LeMahieu: Not that – they were not, uh, sending women to Korea.  
27  
28Ruth Stewart: Mm-hm.  
29  
30Barbara Pratt-LeMahieu: They were nurses, but not to Korea – not, uh, administration.  
31  
32Ruth Stewart: [5:55] So what kind of work were you doing then, in the, at SAC?  
33  
34Barbara Pratt-LeMahieu: I was a secretary.  
35  
36Ruth Stewart: Mm-hm.  
37  
38Barbara Pratt-LeMahieu: And, and, what was it called? Uh...not public relations... What  
39 was it called?  
40  
41Ruth Stewart: [6:12] But, similar to public relations?  
42  
43Barbara Pratt-LeMahieu: Well that's the, the area.  
44

1Ruth Stewart: [6:14] You did that type of work?  
2

3Barbara Pratt-LeMahieu: Uh-huh. And we, not, I didn't, but my, my boss was a major who  
4 was promoted to lieutenant colonel; and, uh, one of the duties was  
5 to, uh, publish the weekly newspaper.  
6

7Ruth Stewart: Mm. Mm-hm.  
8Barbara Pratt-LeMahieu: So, I did that too.  
9

10Ruth Stewart: Mm-hm. Mm-hm.  
11

12Barbara Pratt-LeMahieu: And then, uh, let's see. I... We skipped a whole line.  
13

14James LeMahieu: That's okay. Now you've got – this is next... OCS  
15

16Barbara Pratt-LeMahieu: Yeah, then I... When, uh, they started recruiting for, uh, air force,  
17 enlisted people to go to OCS...  
18

19Ruth Stewart: Ahh.  
20

21Barbara Pratt-LeMahieu: ...when we were separated from the army.  
22

23Ruth Stewart: Mm-hm.  
24

25Barbara Pratt-LeMahieu: And uh, I was, that was 1952. And I graduated 52-C, was the, was  
26 the uh, designation, which was the third of four commission. And  
27 assigned to Montana.  
28

29Ruth Stewart: [7:28] So that... Was this a 2<sup>nd</sup> lieutenant or....?  
30

31Barbara Pratt-LeMahieu: Yes. Mm-hm. Yes. Uh, which was a, uh, MATS base at the time.  
32

33Ruth Stewart: Mm-hm. Mm-hm.  
34

35Barbara Pratt-LeMahieu: And uh...  
36

37Ruth Stewart: 7:52] Well, that was quite an accomplishment then to get through  
38 OCS and...  
39

40Barbara Pratt-LeMahieu: Oh yeah, yeah. Yep. I thoroughly enjoyed it. It was hard work,  
41 but...  
42

43Ruth Stewart: Did, did you go from... Well let's go back. It was hard work.  
44 [8:06] What did they ask of you to do in, in the OCS?

1  
2Barbara Pratt-LeMahieu: Well in the first place, I was in class with people who were college  
3 graduates – almost all – which had been a requirement.  
4  
5Ruth Stewart: Mm-hm.  
6  
7Barbara Pratt-LeMahieu: But when they opened it up because of Korea and I was taking off-  
8 duty education courses the whole time...  
9  
10Ruth Stewart: Mm-hm.  
11  
12Barbara Pratt-LeMahieu: ...at the local college.  
13  
14Ruth Stewart: Mm-hm.  
15  
16Barbara Pratt-LeMahieu: So, I...  
17  
18Ruth Stewart: [8:38] But, what kind of courses did you have to go through? Was  
19 it like...  
20  
21Barbara Pratt-LeMahieu: Administrative.  
22  
23Ruth Stewart: Administrative kinds of things.  
24  
25Barbara Pratt-LeMahieu: Yeah.  
26  
27Ruth Stewart: [8:44] Accounting and bookkeeping or...  
28  
29Barbara Pratt-LeMahieu: Well, I had had that...  
30  
31Ruth Stewart: ...personnel, all of that?  
32  
33Barbara Pratt-LeMahieu: I had worked with that sort of thing at, uh, in civilian life.  
34  
35Ruth Stewart: Mm-hm. Mm-hm.  
36  
37Barbara Pratt-LeMahieu: So, I just go into it and made it.  
38  
39Ruth Stewart: [9:02] And how...was that a year course, a one-year course?  
40  
41Barbara Pratt-LeMahieu: Oh no, not the admin thing. It was a...  
42  
43Ruth Stewart: [9:08] No, I mean the OCS.  
44

1 Barbara Pratt-LeMahieu: Uh, uh, right at a year – nine months, ten months?  
2

3 Ruth Stewart: Close to that anyway.  
4

5 Jim LeMahieu: Twenty weeks, twenty-four weeks, something like that.  
6

7 Barbara Pratt-LeMahieu: Yeah, something like that. I can't remember exactly.  
8

9 Ruth Stewart: Mm-hm. Mm-hm. [9:27] And then did – when you got out, then  
10 you went – you told me where you went from there, but I've  
11 forgotten.

12 Barbara Pratt-LeMahieu: Well, after I graduated from OCS, which was Class 52-C...  
13

14 Ruth Stewart: Mm-hm.  
15

16 Barbara Pratt-LeMahieu: ...I was assigned to, uh, uh, Montana – Great Falls, Montana. It  
17 was a MATS base and had been.  
18

19 Ruth Stewart: Mm-hm.  
20

21 Barbara Pratt-LeMahieu: And I stayed in the, I stayed...  
22

23 Ruth Stewart: [9:54] What was your position there? What did you do there?  
24

25 Barbara Pratt-LeMahieu: Uh, I was, uh, in... What was it called? It wasn't called public  
26 relations. Uh...  
27

28 Ruth Stewart: [10:03] Public information?  
29

30 Barbara Pratt-LeMahieu: Yes, public information [chuckle], PIO, my boss was the PIO. I  
31 had several bosses. And then low and behold I read in the *Air*  
32 *Force Times* they were recruiting for, uh, women to go through the  
33 first classes of OCS.  
34

35 Ruth Stewart: [10:27] That's before that though?  
36

37 Barbara Pratt-LeMahieu: Yes.  
38

39 Jim LeMahieu: Before that, yeah.  
40

41 Ruth Stewart: Okay.  
42

43 Barbara Pratt-LeMahieu: And uh, uh, I went – finished OCS and I was assigned to Great  
44 Falls, Montana.

1  
2Ruth Stewart: Mm-hm. Mm-hm.  
3  
4Barbara Pratt-LeMahieu: And in 1955, I, uh, volunteered to go to Tokyo with the  
5 headquarter.  
6  
7Ruth Stewart: [10:51] That was '60-  
8  
9Barbara Pratt-LeMahieu: 1955...  
10  
11Ruth Stewart: '55  
12  
13Barbara Pratt-LeMahieu: ...in Tokyo. Uh, I forget what was the name of it?  
14Jim LeMahieu: FEAF.  
15  
16Barbara Pratt-LeMahieu: Oh, FEAF. That's right. Far East Air Force.  
17  
18Ruth Stewart: Where?  
19  
20Barbara Pratt-LeMahieu: FEAF, in, uh, Tokyo.  
21  
22Jim LeMahieu: That was a command.  
23  
24Ruth Stewart: Oh, okay.  
25  
26Barbara Pratt-LeMahieu: Yeah, it was a command.  
27  
28Ruth Stewart: Okay.  
29  
30Barbara Pratt-LeMahieu: And then they moved the headquarters to Hawaii.  
31  
32Ruth Stewart: [11:16] Well, why were you in... How long were you in Tokyo  
33 then?  
34  
35Barbara Pratt-LeMahieu: I think two years, wasn't it?  
36  
37Ruth Stewart: Quite a while.  
38  
39Barbara Pratt-LeMahieu: '55, uh, three...  
40  
41Jim LeMahieu: Two  
42  
43Barbara Pratt-LeMahieu: Two plus.  
44



1 Jim LeMahieu: Two, two years, yeah.  
2  
3 Barbara Pratt-LeMahieu: Yeah, two plus. I thought so.  
4  
5 Ruth Stewart: [11:32] Okay, what was it like living in Japan, in Tokyo?  
6  
7 Barbara Pratt-LeMahieu: We lived in, uh, a hotel, which was the Daiiti, D-A-I-I-T-I or  
8 Daiiti, which was the way it was pronounced.  
9  
10 Ruth Stewart: Mm.  
11  
12 Barbara Pratt-LeMahieu: And then they moved the headquarters to Hawaii. Hated to leave.  
13 Tokyo – downtown Tokyo.  
14  
15 Ruth Stewart: Let's not leave Tokyo yet.  
16 Barbara Pratt-LeMahieu: Okay. [chuckle]  
17  
18 Ruth Stewart: You were living in this, well I can't pronounce it, you did.  
19  
20 Barbara Pratt-LeMahieu: Daiiti.  
21  
22 Ruth Stewart: But uh, [12:01] did you get out around in the city or country much?  
23  
24 Barbara Pratt-LeMahieu: Everywhere, everywhere.  
25  
26 Ruth Stewart: Mm-hm.  
27  
28 Barbara Pratt-LeMahieu: You know, it was like New York City.  
29  
30 Ruth Stewart: Just a big city.  
31  
32 Barbara Pratt-LeMahieu: Railroads and, you know, trains and... I had a ball, just had a ball.  
33 [chuckle]  
34  
35 Jim LeMahieu: Downtown Tokyo.  
36  
37 Barbara Pratt-LeMahieu: Downtown Tokyo, yep.  
38  
39 Ruth Stewart: Okay. [12:33] And you did enjoy it then?  
40  
41 Barbara Pratt-LeMahieu: Oh my, yes.  
42  
43 Ruth Stewart: Okay.  
44

1 Barbara Pratt-LeMahieu: I learned all the [laughter] language.  
2  
3 Ruth Stewart: [12:34] Did, did you have an apartment, or did you eat...  
4  
5 Barbara Pratt-LeMahieu: Oh no.  
6  
7 Ruth Stewart: .... with the mess?  
8  
9 Barbara Pratt-LeMahieu: That, that was, uh, it was just a room, you know, in a hotel.  
10  
11 Ruth Stewart: [12:42] So your food was prepared for you?  
12  
13 Barbara Pratt-LeMahieu: Yes, mm-hm.  
14  
15 Ruth Stewart: [12L45] And all your laundry and everything was done for you?  
16  
17 Barbara Pratt-LeMahieu: Everything was done, yeah.  
18 Ruth Stewart: That's a nice living, isn't it?  
19  
20 Barbara Pratt-LeMahieu: Oh, it was delightful. [laughter]  
21  
22 Ruth Stewart: [laughter]  
23  
24 Barbara Pratt-LeMahieu: I fell into all these good things, really. [laughter] I was very lucky.  
25  
26 Ruth Stewart: Very nice. [12:59] And traveled a lot then...  
27  
28 Barbara Pratt-LeMahieu: Oh yeah.  
29  
30 Ruth Stewart: ...in Japan?  
31  
32 Barbara Pratt-LeMahieu: Oh yes. The railroad station was within a 10 minute's walk.  
33  
34 Ruth Stewart: Mm-hm. Mm-hm.  
35  
36 Barbara Pratt-LeMahieu: And uh, everywhere. And we had, still had all the, uh, the military  
37 facilities – all the recreation facilities that had been there during  
38 WWII.  
39  
40 Ruth Stewart: Oh.  
41  
42 Barbara Pratt-LeMahieu: See, they never let go of'm. All the services...  
43  
44 Ruth Stewart: [13:20] So what kind of recreation was there then?

1  
2Barbara Pratt-LeMahieu: Well everything. All the army, air force, navy and...  
3  
4Ruth Stewart: Okay.  
5  
6Barbara Pratt-LeMahieu: ...was just available. And I took advantage of it.  
7  
8Ruth Stewart: Well that's good that you could have a...  
9  
10Barbara Pratt-LeMahieu: Absolutely.  
11  
12Ruth Stewart: ...have a nice time. [13:40] What was your...  
13  
14Barbara Pratt-LeMahieu: And I took off-duty courses at the colleges, because that was part  
15 of the program.  
16  
17Ruth Stewart: Mm-hm. [13:48] Did you have any interaction with the Japanese  
18 people while you were there?  
19  
20Barbara Pratt-LeMahieu: Uh, I had maids, you know, cleaning ladies, and so forth...  
21  
22Ruth Stewart: Mm-hm.  
23  
24Barbara Pratt-LeMahieu: ...that were Japanese. And they were, of course, they'd been  
25 screened thoroughly.  
26  
27Ruth Stewart: Mm-hm.  
28  
29Barbara Pratt-LeMahieu: So, I really had a good...  
30  
31Ruth Stewart: [14:06] That was a pleasant...  
32  
33Barbara Pratt-LeMahieu: Mm-hm.  
34  
35Ruth Stewart: ...relationship then?  
36  
37Barbara Pratt-LeMahieu: Yes.  
38  
39Ruth Stewart: [14:10] Then you said about two, a little over two years later you  
40 went to Honolulu? Or to Hawaii? Which...  
41  
42Barbara Pratt-LeMahieu: Hawaii. Hawaii, yeah.  
43  
44Ruth Stewart: It was Hawaii. [14:25] The whole headquarters was moved to...

1  
2Barbara Pratt-LeMahieu: Yeah. Oh, yeah. We hated to leave Tokyo. No wait a minute. I  
3 didn't... I went...  
4  
5Jim LeMahieu: You were in the [advance artic 14:36] for the relocation of FEAF.  
6  
7Barbara Pratt-LeMahieu: That's right...relocation of Far East Air Force.  
8  
9Ruth Stewart: Ah, okay.  
10  
11Barbara Pratt-LeMahieu: Yeah. Unfortunately, in Hawaii.  
12  
13Ruth Stewart: Well most people don't say that about going to Hawaii.  
14  
15Barbara Pratt-LeMahieu: But I did not – I was not in a position to really take advantage of...  
16  
17Jim LeMahieu: [14:59] How long were you there?  
18  
19Barbara Pratt-LeMahieu: Uh, three plus years.  
20  
21Jim LeMahieu: No, no.  
22Barbara Pratt-LeMahieu: ...in Hawaii.  
23  
24Jim LeMahieu: Not in Hawaii.  
25  
26Barbara Pratt-LeMahieu: Tokyo  
27  
28Jim LeMahieu: You, you were...  
29  
30Barbara Pratt-LeMahieu: Oh yeah.  
31  
32Jim LeMahieu: ...you'd transitioned...  
33  
34Barbara Pratt-LeMahieu: Yeah...  
35  
36Jim LeMahieu: ...in Hawaii.  
37  
38Barbara Pratt-LeMahieu: ...in Hawaii when the headquarters was moving. No wait a  
39 minute. Tokyo I was transitioned; they moved the headquarters to  
40 Hawaii.  
41  
42Ruth Stewart: Mm-hm.  
43

1 Jim LeMahieu: Right. [15:27] But your... The length of duty at that time for you  
2 with the headquarters unit was down to like four months?  
3  
4 Barbara Pratt-LeMahieu: Yes, four or five months.  
5  
6 Ruth Stewart: Mm-hm. [15:42]  
7  
8 Jim LeMahieu: And they...  
9  
10 Ruth Stewart: And then what, what were you doing during that four or five  
11 months?  
12  
13 Barbara Pratt-LeMahieu: I was, uh, I was enlisted in, uh, public information. My boss was  
14 PIO.  
15  
16 Ruth Stewart: Mm-hm. [15:57] You were still in public information then?  
17  
18 Barbara Pratt-LeMahieu: Mm-hm, yeah.  
19  
20 Ruth Stewart: Okay. Okay. And...  
21  
22 Barbara Pratt-LeMahieu: I went to OCS in...  
23  
24 Jim LeMahieu: No, [16:09] you're down... In, uh, '57  
25 Barbara Pratt-LeMahieu: Yeah, okay. '57 I was assigned to Lackland.  
26  
27 Ruth Stewart: Okay.  
28  
29 Barbara Pratt-LeMahieu: Squadron command for the training squadron.  
30  
31 Ruth Stewart: [16:32] What was it like moving from Hawaii to Texas?  
32  
33 Barbara Pratt-LeMahieu: I hated to leave Hawaii. I hated to leave Japan; and then Hawaii.  
34 [laughter] I hated to leave...  
35  
36 Ruth Stewart: [16:44] Well that's – it's great that you can grow to like a place so  
37 much that then it's sad to leave it.  
38  
39 Barbara Pratt-LeMahieu: Yeah.  
40  
41 Ruth Stewart: It's a lot better than...  
42  
43 Barbara Pratt-LeMahieu: Well that's right.  
44

1Ruth Stewart: ...whoopie-do I'm gettin' away from here. [laughter]  
2  
3Barbara Pratt-LeMahieu: Yeah, I was always flexible.  
4  
5Ruth Stewart: Yeah. [16:69] So when you came to Lackland then, were you still  
6 in public information then?  
7  
8Barbara Pratt-LeMahieu: No, that's when I, I went to Lackland to go to OCS.  
9  
10Jim LeMahieu: No.  
11  
12Barbara Pratt-LeMahieu: No, no. Wait a minute. Wait a minute. Lackland...  
13  
14Jim LeMahieu: You were squadron commander.  
15  
16Barbara Pratt-LeMahieu: Yeah, I was squadron command-, [WADS 17:12] squadron  
17 commander.  
18  
19Ruth Stewart: [17:15] And what does that mean? I'm not – I've never been in the  
20 military, so...  
21  
22Barbara Pratt-LeMahieu: Oh, okay.  
23  
24Ruth Stewart: ...I have to be dumb about these things.  
25  
26Barbara Pratt-LeMahieu: Uh...highly enlisted women were assigned... And this went back  
27 to WWII, uh, were assigned to, to a woman commander, you  
28 know.  
29  
30Ruth Stewart; [17:33] Oh, that's for all the enlisted women in the air force.  
31  
32Barbara Pratt-LeMahieu: All of the enlisted, yeah.  
33  
34Ruth Stewart: [17:36] And most of them went to Lackland then...  
35  
36Barbara Pratt-LeMahieu: Yeah...  
37  
38Ruth Stewart: ...for at least...  
39  
40Barbara Pratt-LeMahieu: Well, that was their training, basic training.  
41  
42Ruth Stewart: Okay. [17:45] Was that WAFS – Women in the Air Force?  
43

1 Barbara Pratt-LeMahieu: It was, as soon as the air force separated from the army. Before  
2 that, they were WAC and then – no, WAAC and then WAC. But  
3 that was...  
4

5 Ruth Stewart: [18:01] Okay so, you were their commander then in...  
6

7 Barbara Pratt-LeMahieu: Yes.  
8

9 Ruth Stewart: ...for all these young women coming in?  
10

11 Barbara Pratt-LeMahieu: Yea, uh-huh.  
12

13 Ruth Stewart: [18:06] Did you do training yourself or...  
14

15 Barbara Pratt-LeMahieu: No  
16

17 Ruth Stewart: ...were you supervising the trainers?  
18

19 Barbara Pratt-LeMahieu: I was the... No...yes, the enlisted trainers. Yes, uh-uh.  
20

21 Ruth Stewart: Mm-hm. [18:15] So that was a heavy job.  
22

23 Barbara Pratt-LeMahieu: Yeah, I think so. [chuckle]  
24

25 Ruth Stewart: Yeah. [18:21] And was that an interesting job for you?  
26

27 Barbara Pratt-LeMahieu: Oh yes, yeah. I tried to learn and keep up with off-duty education  
28 the whole time.

29 Ruth Stewart: Mm-hm. Mm-hm. [18:36] Were there special problems when you  
30 – in those early days – when women weren't necessarily a part of  
31 the military culture?  
32

33 Barbara Pratt-LeMahieu: Well, they were by the time they separated the services.  
34

35 Ruth Stewart: Okay.  
36

37 Barbara Pratt-LeMahieu: When they separated the services then, uh, we were...  
38

39 Ruth Stewart: Women were more common.  
40

41 Barbara Pratt-LeMahieu: Yeah.  
42

1 Ruth Stewart: We just had a comment from another interviewee about having  
2 been discriminated against because she was a woman in a new  
3 position, a new area. [19:06] Did you face that at all?  
4

5 Barbara Pratt-LeMahieu: No, no. I guess I was lucky. [chuckle]  
6

7 Ruth Stewart: Good.  
8

9 Barbara Pratt-LeMahieu: I had good bosses.  
10

11 Ruth Stewart: Good.  
12

13 Barbara Pratt-LeMahieu: I had fantastic bosses. Uh...a major who was, uh, in during WWII  
14 – he as a newspaper man; and the, uh, the one that recommended  
15 me for OCS was a lieutenant colonel, both had been, uh, in public  
16 relations.  
17

18 Ruth Stewart: Mm-hm. [19:37] And I understand that, that you were in Vietnam  
19 and in some interesting situations there.  
20

21 Barbara Pratt-LeMahieu: Mm-hm.  
22

23 Jim LeMahieu: Yeah. [chuckle]  
24

25 Ruth Stewart: [19:44] When did that... Did you volunteer to go there?  
26

27 Barbara Pratt-LeMahieu: Yes, I did. Yes. I had to go somewhere. I kept volunteering for  
28 Europe and I never got it. [chuckle]  
29

30 Ruth Stewart: [19:53] What year was that?  
31

32 Barbara Pratt-LeMahieu: Uh, let's see...  
33 Jim LeMahieu: Over here...  
34

35 Barbara Pratt-LeMahieu: No, that's Vietnam in '67.  
36

37 Jim LeMahieu: That's what she was [inaudible 20:02].  
38

39 Ruth Stewart: [20:02] 1967?  
40

41 Barbara Pratt-LeMahieu: Okay, yeah.  
42

43 Ruth Stewart: Okay.  
44



1Barbara Pratt-LeMahieu: Uh, October of '67.  
2  
3Ruth Stewart: Okay. [20:11] And what were you doing there then?  
4  
5Barbara Pratt-LeMahieu: Uh, well, let's see. I had been a squadron commander; and then I  
6 got promoted. And so, I was in administration.  
7  
8Jim LeMahieu: Personnel...  
9  
10Barbara Pratt-LeMahieu: Personnel services.  
11  
12Ruth Stewart: Personnel services, okay.  
13  
14Barbara Pratt-LeMahieu: Okay, we can leave her this whole thing.  
15  
16Jim LeMahieu: Yeah.  
17  
18Ruth Stewart: Okay. Yeah, we'll put that all together in your packet.  
19  
20Barbara Pratt-LeMahieu: Yeah.  
21  
22Ruth Stewart: But, it's nice to have your voice and telling us how you saw things  
23 at that time.  
24  
25Barbara Pratt-LeMahieu: Yeah, right.  
26  
27Ruth Stewart: That's part of what this is all about, Barbara, is getting, getting that  
28 down. [20:52] So how was your experience – Vietnam was a  
29 pretty horrendous situation. How was your experience there? Tell  
30 us about it.  
31  
32Barbara Pratt-LeMahieu: Well again, we lived in a hotel – what had been a hotel. And uh,  
33 the bad part was when I was a shift worker and had to walk from...  
34 [chuckle] I didn't have enough rank to, to have my own  
35 transportation. So, I had to walk to the headquarters. And if it was  
36 time for them to drop some bombs, [laughter] I just hid in  
37 doorways and so forth – at night.  
38  
39Ruth Stewart: Mm-hm. Mm-hm.  
40  
41Barbara Pratt-LeMahieu: It was weird...unique.  
42  
43Ruth Stewart: [21:35] And there were – there was bombing going on most of the  
44 time there?

1  
2Barbara Pratt-LeMahieu: Oh yeah, yeah. And I would...  
3  
4Ruth Stewart: [21:48] You must have been scared?  
5  
6Barbara Pratt-LeMahieu: Oh no.  
7  
8Ruth Stewart: No?  
9  
10Barbara Pratt-LeMahieu: I felt, you know, if a bomb is going to hit me, it's going to hit me  
11 [laughter].  
12  
13Ruth Stewart: Mm-hm.  
14  
15Barbara Pratt-LeMahieu: I couldn't worry about it...  
16  
17Ruth Stewart: Mm-hm.  
18  
19Barbara Pratt-LeMahieu: ...or I wouldn't have done this, all this in the first place.  
20  
21Ruth Stewart: Mm-hm. Mm-hm. [22:02] But it was difficult to go through?  
22  
23Barbara Pratt-LeMahieu: Not really. Not really, because, uh, in the first place I wanted to be  
24 there...  
25  
26Ruth Stewart: Okay, you volunteered to go and...  
27  
28Barbara Pratt-LeMahieu: Oh yes, yeah.  
29  
30Ruth Stewart: Mm-hm.  
31  
32Barbara Pratt-LeMahieu: We had to be volunteered.  
33  
34Ruth Stewart: And they needed you there.  
35  
36Barbara Pratt-LeMahieu: Yep, yeah. And let's see, after Vietnam...  
37Ruth Stewart: Well let's not leave Vietnam yet.  
38  
39Barbara Pratt-LeMahieu: Oh, we don't want to leave Vietnam. [laughter]  
40Ruth Stewart: [laughter] It seems – because there's so much in our, in our movies  
41 and papers and all about Vietnam still. [22:42] Did it affect –  
42 while you were there, did it affect any, your idea of war – of war?  
43

1 Barbara Pratt-LeMahieu: Oh yeah. I've never been fond of the war – from WWII blackouts  
2 and so forth. And the same things went on...  
3  
4 Ruth Stewart: Mm-hm.  
5  
6 Barbara Pratt-LeMahieu: But, you know, you're there...  
7  
8 Ruth Stewart: ...do what you do.  
9  
10 Barbara Pratt-LeMahieu: ...and made the best of it.  
11  
12 Ruth Stewart: Mm-hm. Mm-hm.  
13  
14 Barbara Pratt-LeMahieu: That's my philosophy, I guess. Okay, what do we want to do?  
15  
16 Jim LeMahieu: Tet...  
17  
18 Barbara Pratt-LeMahieu: Hm? Oh, the Tet Offensive?  
19  
20 Jim LeMahieu: You being interested in Tet.  
21  
22 Barbara Pratt-LeMahieu: I could be interested...  
23  
24 Ruth Stewart: [23:14] I've heard that you were – had something to say about the  
25 Tet Offensive.  
26  
27 Barbara Pratt-LeMahieu: Yeah.  
28  
29 Ruth Stewart: [23:20] Tell me about that.  
30  
31 Barbara Pratt-LeMahieu: Well, okay. What I wrote back...was my daily routine never got  
32 established after, after, uh, my first [inaudible 23:36] from [Glenn  
33 23:37].  
34  
35 Ruth Stewart: Mm-hm.  
36 Barbara Pratt-LeMahieu: They...  
37  
38 Jim LeMahieu: [23:42] What was [Glenn 23:41] doing there?  
39  
40 Barbara Pratt-LeMahieu: [Glenn 23:42] was in the newspaper...  
41  
42 Jim LeMahieu: [23:47] Okay, where was the place you were staying?  
43  
44 Barbara Pratt-LeMahieu: Uh, uh, what was it called? That wasn't [inaudible 23:53] ...

1  
2Jim LeMahieu: No. No, no. No.  
3  
4Barbara Pratt-LeMahieu: Oh, we had an apartment. That's right. We had an apartment – a  
5 small apartment in Vietnam – or in Saigon.  
6  
7Ruth Stewart: Mm-hm.  
8  
9Barbara Pratt-LeMahieu: And when the war started, they canceled all the [bases 24:11] for  
10 the newspaper people who had been there any length of time. Of  
11 course, they changed it later on...  
12  
13Ruth Stewart: Mm-hm.  
14  
15Barbara Pratt-LeMahieu: But that was, that was, uh, long after the Tet Offensive. Uh, we  
16 were then, after that time, uh, restricted to the base.  
17  
18Jim LeMahieu: Right. [24:40] When Tet happened, where were you?  
19  
20Barbara Pratt-LeMahieu: In downtown, uh, yeah, Saigon. [chuckle]  
21  
22Ruth Stewart: Mm-hm.  
23  
24Barbara Pratt-LeMahieu: They canceled [Glenn's 24:52] visa. And then I got assigned to a  
25 billet, shall we say. And then we...  
26  
27Ruth Stewart: But he had to leave...  
28  
29Barbara Pratt-LeMahieu: He had to leave Vietnam.  
30  
31Jim LeMahieu: And she was in an apartment when Tet happened.  
32  
33Barbara Pratt-LeMahieu: ...when Tet happened.  
34  
35Ruth Stewart: Okay.  
36  
37Jim LeMahieu: [25:19] How long were you there?  
38Barbara Pratt-LeMahieu: After he left?  
39  
40Jim LeMahieu: No, after Tet – in the apartment?  
41  
42Barbara Pratt-LeMahieu: I can't remember. Not very long.  
43  
44Jim LeMahieu: You said three days and you were running out of food.

1  
2Barbara Pratt-LeMahieu: Yeah, because I was running out of food and, and, uh, water.  
3 Water was very important because we had to get by with water and  
4 it was no longer available.  
5  
6Ruth Stewart: Mm-hm.  
7  
8Barbara Pratt-LeMahieu: And I had this all written down for you.  
9  
10Ruth Stewart: Okay good. Well, we'll include that in our material.  
11  
12Barbara Pratt-LeMahieu: Yes, mm-hm. We were restricted to the base.  
13  
14Ruth Stewart: Okay.  
15  
16Barbara Pratt-LeMahieu: And uh, with a curfew.  
17  
18Ruth Stewart: Mm-hm.  
19  
20Barbara Pratt-LeMahieu: And had only five hours a day to do shopping and necessary  
21 errands.  
22  
23Ruth Stewart: Mm-hm.  
24  
25Barbara Pratt-LeMahieu: Uh, all stores and shops were closed and President [inaudible  
26:18] declared a martial law. And on the morning of the 31<sup>st</sup>, I  
27 turned on the radio, which was Armed Forces Vietnam Network, to  
28 be told about the attack on our embassy in U.S. spaces. We heard  
29 that all military personnel would have to remain where they were  
30 until further notice. We couldn't even go to work. At this point, it  
31 was sort of a like a 'no school today' announcement.  
32  
33Ruth Stewart: Mm-hm.  
34  
35Barbara Pratt-LeMahieu: So, we had nothing to do but stay there and sleep...  
36  
37Ruth Stewart: Mm-hm.  
38  
39Barbara Pratt-LeMahieu: ...and eat within the facility. But it was not, not funny very long.  
40Ruth Stewart: No.  
41  
42Barbara Pratt-LeMahieu: And the radio announcement over the Armed Force's Network, uh,  
43 were to stay inside, so that nobody could...  
44Ruth Stewart: No safe.

1  
2Barbara Pratt-LeMahieu: Yeah, it wasn't safe. Nobody to guard, so we stayed, stayed there.  
3 And at the time, uh, three civilian women were shot by being  
4 curious and leaving their facility.  
5  
6Ruth Stewart: [27:37] Americans?  
7  
8Barbara Pratt-LeMahieu: Yeah, yeah.  
9  
10Ruth Stewart: Mm-hm.  
11  
12Barbara Pratt-LeMahieu: And one was on the roof of an American occupied hotel; one was  
13 looking out of a window; and the other was peering around the  
14 building, not far from our apartment.  
15  
16Ruth Stewart: Mm-hm.  
17  
18Barbara Pratt-LeMahieu: Our apartment was, uh, on the main road [Con Lei 27:54] to – uh,  
19 from Saigon to the base.  
20  
21Ruth Stewart: Mm-hm.  
22  
23Barbara Pratt-LeMahieu: Uh, 10 blocks from the American Embassy building. That  
24 afternoon, I watched the beautiful mean cobra helicopters  
25 [inaudible 28:18] [laughter] something in the slum area, three  
26 blocks from the apartment we were in. And I stood inside the  
27 living room and got a good view of where the action was. It was  
28 nothing but the noise of war.  
29  
30Ruth Stewart: Mm-hm.  
31  
32Barbara Pratt-LeMahieu: The sky was full of aircraft; helicopters – A-1E's and C-130's and  
33 jets – and all types of jets. And they circled over the house where  
34 the apartment was. And the noise the cobra's made when they  
35 released their rockets, it's, it's really unique – fantastic. And later  
36 that night, the sky was full of flares, about five times the number  
37 we used to see most every night. Artillery fire was continuous;  
38 and F-100's and C-47 [dragon ships 29:21] kept up. We didn't get  
39 much sleep. [chuckle]  
40  
41Ruth Stewart: I'll bet not.  
42  
43Barbara Pratt-LeMahieu: All this only a few blocks from the house. The second day and  
44 night brought repetition of the early assaults and I could hear

1 [inaudible 29:39] fire burning near the house. Tanks moved up  
2 [Con Lei 29:45] – that the street where the where the apartment  
3 was going back to the base.  
4  
5 Ruth Stewart: Mm-hm.  
6  
7 Barbara Pratt-LeMahieu: Um, on the third day, the radio informed us – that’s Armed Forces  
8 Radio still – informed us we could go to work if we had  
9 transportation. If not, we were told to wait until someone picked  
10 us up. The street outside was quiet by then and I packed some  
11 things and managed to flag a ride – [laughter] sit out in the middle  
12 of the street and flagged a ride in a military vehicle; and in my  
13 uniform, which was... I was a major at the time.  
14  
15 Ruth Stewart: Mm-hm.  
16  
17 Barbara Pratt-LeMahieu: And daylight, they just had to stop and let them give me a ride.  
18  
19 Ruth Stewart: Mm-hm.  
20  
21 Barbara Pratt-LeMahieu: On uh, [February 31<sup>st</sup> 30:50] I got back to the apartment and found  
22 that our maid hadn’t come back from her Tet holiday. No bus  
23 service and we were forbidden to use taxis. So, I managed to catch  
24 a ride back to the base. And unfortunately, indications are that we  
25 expect to continue – this was a, a letter I wrote...  
26  
27 Ruth Stewart: Mm-hm.  
28  
29 Barbara Pratt-LeMahieu: Uh, we could expect continued communist activity for some time.  
30 When I returned to our apartment several weeks later to collect my  
31 belongings, everything was just as I had left it. Nothing disturbed,  
32 nothing taken.  
33  
34 Ruth Stewart: Mm. That’s amazing.  
35  
36 Barbara Pratt-LeMahieu: It is. They were just amazing people. Should we go back... [end  
37 of tape]  
38  
39/al