

**Interview of Jane Piatt on her service in the  
Women's Army Corps during WWII and in the Korean War**

5Elsie Hornbacher: Elsie Hornbacher acting as the interviewer for Jane Piatt for the Lansing  
6 Unit of the Women's Overseas Service League on April 21, 1983. [00:12]  
7 Jane what did you do overseas and why did you go into the service?

9Jane Piatt: Well as it happened, I was, uh, um-, my father had no bo-, no sons to go to  
10 the service, and when war broke out and I was in, uh, University of  
11 Michigan getting my master's degree, uh, the idea, uh, was being established  
12 that there was a possibility we were going to have a women's service. And  
13 so I followed it very carefully and as soon as the applications were-, uh, had  
14 been printed and were being distributed, I had, um, – a friend of mine picked  
15 up a couple of them, and she and I both applied. Uh, we were very good  
16 friends in Lansing, and as it happened, uh, both of us were selected out of  
17 the first 4 women selected from Michigan. And all in all, there were 440 of  
18 us who, uh, had been, uh, selected out of the 1500-, 150,000 women who  
19 applied. And we reported to Des Moines, Iowa, uh, on, um, July 21, 1942.

20  
21 The experience of the training was a lot of fun. Uh, to begin with, most of  
22 the men who were working with us were cavalry men, and they were not the  
23 least bit, uh, happy about being stationed in Des Moines working with a  
24 bunch of women. We thought that the story they'd have to tell their  
25 grandchildren was going to be pretty sad when instead of out fight-, being  
26 out at-, fighting the battle, they were teaching women to march. However,  
27 before we finished our training, we had sold the men on the idea that women  
28 could do the work.

29  
30Elsie Hornbacher: [1:49] Weren't there any horses there?

31  
32Jane Piatt: Yeah there were a few horses, literally, around there, uh, and all of our  
33 officers dressed in the typical, uh, uh, uniform, you know, with the breeches  
34 and the boots and, uh, also carried their little sticks and, uh, wore the cavalry  
35 hats. So, it was s-, a lot of fun. I mean, they, and they really, most of the  
36 officers were really fine people and they, they became very fond of the  
37 women and very proud of us. And there was a lot of competition between  
38 the different, uh, platoons. And, uh, the day we graduated, there were not  
39 just a few tears among the men as we marched down for our graduation  
40 ceremony. Uh, actually it was pretty exciting. Mrs. Hobby, who was at that  
41 time the only colonel-, the only woman colonel, came to visit us twice  
42 during our, uh, time, and I think most of us would have followed her right  
43 out into battle at that point because she was a very impressive person.

1 After I was, uh, commissioned, I received the, um, uh, assignment of being  
2 the first women, uh, mess officer. And I was given a 300, what was called a  
3 300-man mess, uh, that I was to be the chief officer for. Unfortunately, I had  
4 to take it over from the man who had been our foods instructor during our  
5 classes who knew literally nothing about foods. And, uh, he was more than  
6 happy to see me, uh, embrace his little mess that he had had, uh, uh, had not  
7 done very well with. But we had very good luck. I had all women working. I  
8 had a woman baker, a woman butcher, a woman mess, uh, sergeant, and all  
9 women employees in the, uh, in my mess. And they loved it, uh, from the  
10 gals, uh, working on the dishes right on down to my baker and, and butcher  
11 who, uh, really, uh, took a lot of pride. And before very long, we were not  
12 feeding 300 people, we were feeding almost 800. Everybody that could was  
13 eating in our mess.

14  
15 We changed from the typical cafeteria style to family style. I found out that,  
16 um, we had, uh, plenty of dishes, uh, in the storage room and we turned in  
17 all the trays and, um, got, uh, requisitioned, uh, sheets from the hospital to  
18 be used as table cloths. The girls took some of our, of empty pickle jars and  
19 decorated them and went out in the field and got in, got wild flowers. And  
20 the, the morning that we opened the mess, we had a beautiful-looking dining  
21 room. And the general and everybody else on the all – everybody else that  
22 possibly could find their way to our mess, ate with us. And the food was  
23 excellent. And I had that mess for about, uh, oh 5 months, and then they  
24 transferred me to the officers' club, uh, which I only took for 3 months  
25 because I was very unhappy there, uh. There was a lot of racist feelings. We  
26 had some really fine Negro women in the first class of women officers, and  
27 they were not being allowed to use our officers' club. And so, in protest, uh,  
28 I asked to be transferred, and then I was sent to Des Moines.

29  
30Elsie Hornbacher: [4:48] Back in th, those days did they use the term Negro instead of black?

31  
32Jane Piatt: Yes they did. Negro was the word. Black came in sometime later. I'm, I'm  
33 not sure-, I think black even came in, in the 50s, and this was in the, in the  
34 middle and early 40s. So, uh, but, uh, Charity Adams was one of the first  
35 women officers, uh, to get-, uh, to become, uh, a major. And, uh, she was a  
36 beautiful woman. I traveled with her, uh, for a period of 2 weeks at the  
37 direction of the, of the general to, uh-, we went with – it was for a 200  
38 radius of, uh, Fort Des Moines to find out what the feeling was in the small  
39 towns. And we found out that, uh, when Charity was alone, she was not  
40 allowed into a – to stay in a hotel, and if, if we went in together, we were not  
41 allowed to stay, but if I went in alone I could, I could get a room without  
42 any problem. And it was very upsetting to them. Then when I went back to  
43 get my luggage and I came back with Charity with me and they couldn't do  
44 anything about it, uh, but they – we told them that this was going to be

1 reported, uh, to the army because they, uh, there was not not supposed to be  
2 any discrimination at that point, and Charity was, uh, a really very fine  
3 woman. So that was our, our very beginning.  
4

5Elsie Hornbacher: [5:58] And this was in Iowa?  
6

7Jane Piatt: Iowa. Fort De Moines, Iowa. Uh-huh. And, uh, we still had men on the posts  
8 at that time, but, uh, by the, by the time we had been there about 6 months, it  
9 was all turned over to the women. We had all women, except the general.  
10 They, uh, the, the colon-, the base, uh, colonel and the general were men on  
11 the base. So, uh, at that point, we only had 1 woman colonel and that was  
12 Colonel Hobby, Oveta Culp Hobby, who was a very interesting person.  
13 And, uh, she came, uh, to visit us as did Mrs. Roosevelt in February of, uh,  
14 1943. We had a, a very impressive parade both on the base – on the post and  
15 downtown in Fort Des Moines. And the temperature was 9 degrees below 0,  
16 and Ms. Roosevelt and Colonel Hobby stood out and pra- – and watched the  
17 review of the troops outdoors in the wind. And it was so cold that the, um,  
18 commanding, uh, officers of the various platoons while we're waiting for  
19 the, uh, officials to arrive would have to have their girls marching and  
20 jumping to keep us from freezing our toes. Uh, I was walking where the  
21 officers and marching with the officers, and so we didn't get the opportunity  
22 to, to, uh, get warmed up the way the enlisted women did and then I had to  
23 leave the ranks and go to the hotel where she was going to be coming to eat  
24 because I was responsible for it.  
25

26Elsie Hornbacher: [7:18] What month was this again?  
27

28Jane Piatt: In February of 1943.  
29

30Elsie Hornbacher: [7:22] And was there a great deal of snow in Iowa then?  
31

32Jane Piatt: Yes, we had a lot of snow, but, uh, mostly at that particular time right on top  
33 of the snow we had extremely cold weather for about 10 days. And some of  
34 the women-, the enlisted women, uh, did not have proper uniforms and they  
35 had to send to a nearby army base and have them send over men's clothing.  
36 And we had, um, some of the small women were wearing overcoats that  
37 were so large that as they walked along they literally took about 2 steps  
38 before you saw the coat move. You couldn't see their hands – their hands  
39 were way up in the sleeves – and they had knitted caps that came clear down  
40 over their ears. Uh, they were a pretty sorry looking bunch of people,  
41 believe me, but it was all, you know, a joke, and before very long they, they  
42 did get their correct uniforms. They had a much bigger supply of women  
43 than they actually had originally anticipated. The, the volunteerism among  
44 women was a fantastic thing, and all you had to do to say to a woman if she

1 complained was, you know, you volunteered to do this job, nobody made  
2 you come. And, uh, we didn't have too much trouble with women, uh,  
3 getting, uh, into problems of that kind.  
4

5Elsie Hornbacher: [8:25] Jane, what was the pay during those days, do you remember at all?  
6

7Jane Piatt: Mm, I well remember – \$50 a month, uh, and that then – and then from that  
8 you pay – you were given a food allotment, uh, to eat in, uh, in the, uh, on  
9 the base. If you ate off the base and – you paid out of your own pur-, out of  
10 your own money, um. And, uh, uniforms were supposed to be furnished, but  
11 for most of us, they didn't fit very well and so we sent home for money and  
12 had our uniforms tailored as soon as we possibly could. But, um, the, the  
13 uniforms were at that time, uh, the typical, uh, uh, green, uh, army, uh, olive  
14 green I suppose you would call it. Uh, it was really kind of a sickish, sickish  
15 brown. And, uh, we wore the same colored skirt as jacket and then a, tan  
16 shirts with the, um, light, uh, tan, uh, necktie and we had the regular high-  
17 collar necked shirts with a foreign hand, uh, ne-, uh, ties and we had, uh,  
18 what I always called were the, the foreign legion-type cap, the, the round  
19 cap that stood up about 3 inches on our heads. And, uh, uh, actually they,  
20 then our summer uniform, of course, were, was a khaki uniform and then  
21 with our dress uniform we did have what was called a pink skirt. It was  
22 really a pinkish gray.  
23

24Elsie Hornbacher: Mm-hm. You mentioned \$50 a month. Uh, compared to the years 1943  
25 when I was teaching, I was making, uh, \$140 a month, uh. In the factory that  
26 same year, I worked in the summer and I made \$280 a month in the  
27 precision department at General Motors in Flint. I thought it would be nice  
28 to make this comparison.  
29

30Jane Piatt: Yeah well that, it really was something and – 'cause I wouldn't, the \$50 a  
31 month, uh, wasn't really as bad as it sounds because we did get an extra  
32 allotment for food as officers and the enlisted personnel got their food free  
33 on the, you know, they had nothing to pay, um. It was, I don't think any of  
34 us really gave it much thought because we were, we had nothing to spend  
35 our money on and in the first, uh, 5 weeks when we were being trained, we  
36 were so tired, uh, that we didn't wanna go anywhere until about Friday after,  
37 uh, Saturday afternoon. We had to work all through Saturday morning.  
38

39Elsie Hornbacher: [10:40] You ment-, you mentioned free time. About how much free time did  
40 you have?  
41

42Jane Piatt: Well, I don't think that we really had as – uh, what you'd call free time more  
43 than about, uh, through our lunch period, uh, which was exactly an hour, uh,  
44 and then we had classes until about 4:00 in the afternoon. And then the, the

1 instructors were free to m, make us do extra drill or, uh, extra class work or,  
2 if they thought that we needed it. So there were many times when we didn't  
3 – we would report in 15 minutes before we had to march to dinner at night  
4 and then, uh, as soon as we finished dinner, we had to, uh, extra classes or  
5 had to go drill again. So, I don't think – we, we didn't do anything like going  
6 to movies or anything like that. We had no time.  
7

8Elsie Hornbacher: [11:26] I'm sort of curious, uh, uh, did the gals, uh, drink, uh, beer or wine,  
9 uh, or, uh, uh, the men?  
10

11Jane Piatt: Yes we did, um, and I, I'm sorry to say I think that there were many women  
12 who literally became alcoholics as a result of their service because in their,  
13 in, during our serv-, our, our training time, uh, weekends primarily were the  
14 only time that we were really had any opportunity to drink. At night we  
15 honestly and truthfully were too tired to do anything except shower and go  
16 to bed, uh, and, and study. We all had to study awfully hard because  
17 transferring from, from, um, a civilian's life to military life, uh, involved a  
18 whole new way of, uh, living, including a, a jargon, a language, uh, that was  
19 totally different too. And, uh, we had a lot to learn in the 5 weeks. Normally,  
20 uh, uh, that class, it was 6 weeks but because of the fact that they, our  
21 uniforms were not ready and the, all of the staff wasn't, uh, on hand, uh, we  
22 ended up with 5 weeks. So that was hard  
23

24 But after we became officers and had free time at night and free time on  
25 weekends, we did drink. And, uh, at, at first, uh, at we were, at first, we  
26 weren't allowed at the officers' club and then they, they did. They opened up  
27 the officers' club. That was when I said they wouldn't let the Negro women  
28 come. But we would, we drank in our rooms. And we did, we drank an  
29 awful lot. Uh, as I look back on it now, I, I sometimes, I don't see how we  
30 managed because we would go into Des Moines on, uh, Saturday at noon  
31 and take rooms in the hotels, and most of us just went to bed and slept for  
32 about 5 hours and then got up and did the town. But we could – we really  
33 couldn't do much in the town as such because we had to wear uniforms and  
34 you are not allowed to drink in uniform. So, uh, that cut that sort of thing  
35 until later, uh, when people began disobeying, but in the first, in the  
36 beginning, uh, bunch of us, we were pretty law abiding, I mean we, we were  
37 pretty terrified of breaking rules and, uh, any drinking we did, we did in our  
38 hotel rooms or at private clubs.  
39

40Elsie Hornbacher: [13:30] What about your sleeping conditions, were you in bunks, uh?  
41

42Jane Piatt: No, well we had regular typical army beds in dormitories in, uh, in our  
43 training period, uh, you were, you were, uh, dormitoried by platoons. And,  
44 uh, there were in each, in each company, there were 4 platoons. And in the

1 first class, there were 4 companies. So there were 16 platoons and, uh, we  
2 had about 30 women, I think, in each platoon. And, uh, those were big  
3 dormitory rooms. And, uh, I, um, had a bed, uh, next to a gal who was 52  
4 years old and she was a, a political appointee. Her name, uh, she was, um,  
5 um, she came from a very wealthy family in, uh, in, uh, New York City and  
6 had never had to do anything, uh, to kind of, type thing that we had to do –  
7 scrubbing floors and, and walls and woodwork and making your own bed  
8 and all of that sort of thing. And she was a JP Morgan granddaughter. And,  
9 um, but she was a good sport and, and to top it off, she had a very bad back  
10 and was, uh, partially deaf but she was, she-, and she need not have gone  
11 through this training. She could have gotten a commissioned appointment,  
12 uh, direct, but she chose to go through with us, and it was mighty hard. And  
13 she so she marched – she was tall, and she marched [inaudible 14:51], uh,  
14 right near me. And so she used to watch me and, uh, but if she took her eye  
15 off of me and we were given a command and she didn't hear it, she was  
16 liable to find herself marching down the field by herself, but she was a good  
17 sport.

18  
19 And one day I came in to, uh, the quarters and Helen had been excused  
20 from, um, a, a drill because of her back and, uh, I, it was hot night and I  
21 came in and unfastened my shirt, the top of my shirt and had my hat on, on  
22 the back of my head and, um, discovered somebody sitting on my bunk.  
23 And believe me that's a, a, a crime punishable almost by death because at all  
24 times our beds were supposed to be so tight and taut that you could bounce a  
25 quarter off of'm. And uh, I, I marched over to this gal and, in all intent to  
26 really say something and I happened to notice that there were eagles on her  
27 shoulders. We only had one officer with eagles on her shoulders and that  
28 was Oveta Culp Hobby. And it turned out that she was a very good friend of  
29 Helen's and so, uh, Helen introduced me to her, and Colonel Hobby jumped  
30 up and said "Oh I'm so sorry I, I'm sitting on your bed, aren't I? And I know  
31 that's against the rules" and I said, "Oh man do sit on my bed, I would be  
32 proud to have you do it."

33  
34 And I had several other contacts with Mrs. Hobby after that. I, I served her  
35 when she was back, came back to, uh, Fort Des Moines one time with a bad  
36 cold. And, uh, two of us went over and spent the evening with her and  
37 rubbed her back and, uh, tried to get her to feel better because she was  
38 supposed to go out, uh, the next day but it, she was feeling so badly that her,  
39 um, her, uh, aide, uh, asked us if we would stay with her while she went  
40 down to the railroad station to make a change in reservations. And we had  
41 an opportunity to really give her some insights on what was going on. This  
42 was when we told her that the women never should be – have to lift those  
43 hundred-gallon G.I. cans that we were having problems and this kind of  
44 thing. And she, uh, listened to us and wrote it all down and, uh, so from then

1 on whenever she came wherever I was, if she found out I was stationed  
2 there, she'd look me up and it, it was a nice contact.  
3

4Elsie Hornbacher: Back in the factory back in those days we weren't to lift over 25 pounds.  
5

6Jane Piatt: And, and you know, this is still a, a problem, uh, the men are saying if the  
7 women want to do everything that the men do, then they should have to lift  
8 all these things. And, uh, we're having, uh, uh, really quite a bit of  
9 controversy about this, although I, I now hear that they've decided that it's  
10 better not – for the women not to do all of the training with the men.  
11 They've gone back to separating the women because of the fact that their  
12 bodies are just not built in the same way. There are some women who  
13 literally can compete, uh, job for job with a man but, uh, we, we made up in,  
14 um, in quantity by doing a better quality of our job we felt. And, uh, eh,  
15 every woman was perfectly willing to, to lift 2 50-gallon cans as opposed to  
16 1, uh, hundred-gallon can.  
17

18Elsie Hornbacher: [17:38] How long did you stay in Des Moines?  
19

20Jane Piatt: Uh, I was transferred from, um, um, [inaudible 17:45]. I stayed in Des  
21 Moines – after I got to be an officer, uh, I got to be, I was commissioned at  
22 the end of August and the next, um, March I was sent to Washington to be  
23 one of the first 4 women in the, um, um, inspector general school, uh.  
24

25Elsie Hornbacher: [18:05] This is in 1944?  
26

27Jane Piatt: 1943, 1943 March of '43. It was a [month's 18:10] course and there were 4  
28 women and 175 men. Most of the men were colonels and lieutenant colonels  
29 and we were lieutenants and captains and, uh, we, we, we came out the top  
30 of the class, the 4 of us. So it, uh, but the problem was because we spent our  
31 time studying most of the men didn't. The, they spent their nights carousing  
32 and having good times and then they, they flunked their exams but they –  
33 we worked like the dickens and we got good m-, good grades. Then I came  
34 back and I was an inspector on our post until, um, uh, uh, October. And in  
35 October of '43, I was transferred to the Army Air Corps and sent to the first,  
36 to the first air force headquarters in Tampa. And, uh, I was sent down as  
37 inspector gen-, as an inspector general, but when I got there, I heard about  
38 the air inspector's office and, uh, listened to the, uh, the man in charge of the  
39 air inspector office, and I was so fascinated with that job that, uh, I went to  
40 the office and asked to see him. And his executive officer kept putting me  
41 off and telling me that he was busy and he couldn't see me and so on. So I  
42 found out what the, wh, what day the executive officer had off and then I  
43 went in and, uh, and presented myself personally to Colonel[Ennis 19:20],  
44 and he gave me an interview and handed me a portfolio and said the car-, I'll

1 have a car outside and you'll be sent out to make your first inspection and  
2 you'll, you'll meet the team out there.

3  
4 So I had an opportunity then to travel with a team of officers by plane when  
5 we were inspecting units all over the eastern coast. And, uh, out, oh I can't  
6 remember just how far out west we went but, um, we had some kind of hairy  
7 experiences. And, uh, I, I did the, had that job from, uh, October of 1943  
8 until, uh, July of 1944 when I was transferred to Florence Army Air Force  
9 Base, uh, with Colonel [Ennis]. He was sent there to take over. We had made  
10 an inspection and found a very terrible situation going on, and when we  
11 reported it back, uh, my colonel was promptly sent there to head the, to head  
12 the, um, uh, program there. And he, um, the, uh, officer that we were  
13 replacing was discharged with a dishonorable discharge. And, um, he and I  
14 went out and, uh, he wanted me to take over a, a squadron of women, but he  
15 wasn't able to get them and I was glad that he wasn't because I, I had had,  
16 the only training I had had in giving orders for marching was in my basic  
17 training in my officers, uh, uh, school. So, uh, I was very grateful that he  
18 was never able to get the women and instead, uh, he made me then officers'  
19 club officer and I had a chance to take a very bad situation and, and turn it  
20 into a, a really fine club. And, um, I was there until, um, October of 1944.

21  
22 Elsie Hornbacher: [20:58] What were your activities in the officers' club that made it a very  
23 fine club?

24  
25 Jane Piatt: Um, well to begin with, the man that had been in charge had been in cahoots  
26 with the base colonel and with the, uh, uh, uh, officers' club sergeant and the  
27 supply officer and his sergeant. And they had been stealing and, uh, then,  
28 uh, uh, serving very poor food. The officers' club was a mess, it was filthy,  
29 dirty and so were the officer's quarters. And, uh, so it didn't take very much  
30 to get in and, and really clean it all out. I had a little, uh, I, I was given the  
31 opportunity to, to pick my own mess sergeant, uh, officers' club sergeant.  
32 And I found out that they, one of the units had a man who was really  
33 fantastic, and I went down to the squadron and watched him work. And  
34 finally propositioned him to come and be my, my mess sergeant and, uh, he  
35 told me no he couldn't come because he was due to have a leave and he  
36 hadn't had one for 3 years. So, I, I went back and talked to my colonel and he  
37 said well make him any offer you can. So I went back said well if, if you'll  
38 come and work a week to get it started then I will see to it that you have a 3  
39 week leave and also that you get 1 more, you'll get a promotion. And, uh, he  
40 came to me but he came back at the end of 10 days he was so excited in the  
41 change we were making in the officers' club.

42  
43 Elsie Hornbacher: [22:15] In what sort of a building was this club housed?  
44



1Jane Piatt: It was a wooden, uh, it was a frame building, uh, at, at the officers' club was,  
2 uh, really quite nicely laid out. There was a great large living room, huge  
3 living room. When we took it over, the rug had been rolled out – up and it  
4 was out on the front porch and it was rotted. And all of the lamps had no  
5 shades and one bulb in it. All of the upholstery had burn spots and, and  
6 broken springs. It was really a, a, a depressing place. And, uh, the colonel  
7 gave me permission and almost carte blanche money to, uh, go ahead and  
8 do, get something done about it. And we went, uh, his wife and I went to  
9 Charlotte, North Carolina, uh, to a large store there and were able to get a  
10 hold of a Persian rug that was, um, 60, 60 feet by 40, and we got it for \$700  
11 with the, uh, agreement that at the end of th-, of time, that if the base were  
12 closed, it could be returned for the same amount of money. And, uh, they,  
13 uh, when we brought it back, everybody said well it'll never last because the  
14 men will ruin it and I said they won't ruin something this nice, and they  
15 never did. I never had anybody grinding a cigarette into the floor or, or, uh,  
16 spilling stuff and that sort of thing. The club was kept beautifully. And we,  
17 we put in all new lamps and new chairs with davenports and, um, jukebox  
18 and the whole works.

19  
20Elsie Hornbacher: [23:38] What was the building used for before you used it as an officers'  
21 club?

22  
23Jane Piatt: It was built as an officers' club. Uh, the air force base had been there as a  
24 training base before the war started. And, uh, we had, uh, something like 45  
25 units for, uh, officers' quarters. And they were little, like little wooden motel  
26 rooms and they were – when we got them they, they had a bed and a chair in  
27 it and a single light bulb in the center of the room. And I put in rugs – not  
28 carpets but rugs – and a comfortable chair and a desk. And we got all new  
29 beds and mattresses and put in drapes and lamps. And, uh, the men didn't  
30 mind paying their money then. Before I wouldn'ta blamed'm if they'd all  
31 stood up and said we're not gonna pay to live in this hog pen. But there was  
32 no place else to live and South Caro, in, um, Florence at that time. They had  
33 1 hotel, and, um, it was almost impossible to find a, a room, you know, so  
34 they had to live on the base.

35  
36 I was able to live off the base 'cause they had no quarters for women in all,  
37 at all and so I, I lived – one of the officers had, had asked me, he and his  
38 wife asked me to live with them. And I lived with them until I was able to  
39 locate a room, which turned out to be about 8 months that I stayed with  
40 them and then I found a, a room. I had a room and bath in, uh, uh, the  
41 parents of one of the officers in the club. But it was a, it, it was mix-, it was  
42 a fun experience and it was a successful one and then I went from there, I  
43 became a – I was ordered to, um, Fort Dix as a counselor. The war was over.

44

1Elsie Hornbacher: [25: 07] Where is Fort Dix?

2

3Jane Piatt: In New Jersey. And, uh, the men were all coming back from service and I  
4 was, I was counseling them, uh, as to what their benefits were and, uh, how  
5 they could go about getting housing if they were single people and how,  
6 where they could go to apply for jobs [inaudible 25:23]. I tried not to tell  
7 them about the benefits that they could have financially if they didn't get a  
8 job because we had discovered that most of'm just plain didn't try to get a  
9 job; they just took the benefits, uh, but I was there from – only from October  
10 until, um, the third week of December and I had enough points then to get  
11 out. And since my mother had died, I decided to, um, go home and, and be  
12 with my dad and go out of service, uh, but, uh, we were told that we weren't  
13 not being allowed to actually go off of, uh, service. We were called, uh, we  
14 were considered to be in, uh, United States Army, uh, still and, uh, could be  
15 called back at any time.

16

17 And then in 1948, they decided to, uh, go on and have a women's, uh, army,  
18 uh, per, uh, on a, um, a permanent base, uh, idea, and, uh, I had an  
19 opportunity to go into the, uh, uh, as regular or to go in as reserve. And  
20 since I had [build 26:20] another nursery school by that time, I decided that I  
21 better take a reserve commission and go into the air force 'cause I had been  
22 serving with the Air Corps. So I took a reserve commission in the air force,  
23 and in 1952, uh, 50, at the end of 1951, I was re-called, uh, time of Korea.  
24 And, uh, I was recalled to recruit women from-, uh, university women and,  
25 uh, supposed to have been just a temporary 1-month assignment, but at the  
26 end of the 1 month, I received orders for the next year. And, um, then before  
27 that year was up, it was extended to 2 years and then that was when I was  
28 sent to England. And, uh, in, in England, um, I was, we were, I was sent to a  
29 big air force base. In fact, it's the largest supply depot in, uh, the world. And  
30 there we did do all the supplies, strangely enough, for Korea and training all  
31 of the officers. And much of my job was a secret and so that I had to have a  
32 special kind of a clearance.

33

34 And, uh, first I was a air inspector at Burtonwood Air Force Base, which  
35 was this big depot, and then I was sent down to Brize Norton, which was a  
36 special training base down about, uh, 50 miles north of London. And there,  
37 I, uh, acted as administrative officer, which was the, uh, equivalent to the  
38 old [inaudible 27:36] and I had, um, a young, uh, officer, commanding  
39 officer, uh, who was a very interesting person and, uh, uh, I enjoyed  
40 working with him. He just turned over the job to me until he found out that I  
41 was having to, uh, pass out prophylactics and then, uh, he was very  
42 concerned about the fa-, that I would have to do such a terrible job. And I  
43 told him that I, it didn't bother me at all. I was very glad to do that I lectured  
44 the men when I passed them out and, uh, I had a sergeant who actually

1 dispensed them. But, um, I worked with the, um, English people who, uh,  
2 were working on the base. I heard their, uh, problems and their complaints  
3 and, um, I had to talk to the mothers of, uh, women who were pregnant and,  
4 uh, help to straighten out the affairs of the men, uh, uh.

5  
6 And then I was a go between the, uh, the, um, the, the, um, squadron  
7 officers and the colonel. And, uh, if they came to see him and I felt that the  
8 colonel was having a bad day, I would tell'm to come back in the afternoon  
9 or the next day or something, uh, so that, uh, we wouldn't, uh, to make as  
10 little friction as possible. And he was a very interesting person. He had, he  
11 was known in the beginning as being the strictest man I guess in England,  
12 and he even was doing such things as having church call, which had long  
13 gone out and, uh, the men just hated that. But he, uh, had given that up when  
14 I got down there. And he had a wife and 5 children that were delightful  
15 people. And, uh, I think he learned a lot, I mean, he was a, a, a, he really  
16 was a good officer. And he took me, I, I, I went on several trips with him to  
17 the continent and, um, the last trip we came back and he wanted to sleep so  
18 he turned the plane over to me. And I had been, uh, something I had eaten  
19 apparently had, uh, had disagreed with me and when they had called me to  
20 tell me to go out and get the plane ready to go get it stacked with  
21 sandwiches and coffee, I was half sick. So, when halfway over the channel  
22 when he said here you take the wheel, uh, I was petrified. And he slept and  
23 he, he stayed asleep until we got way past the White Cliffs of Dover, and I  
24 knew that we should be making a turn, and, uh, I, I, I, didn't know anything  
25 more about handling the plane.

26  
27 I couldn't get him to wake up finally he just said oh you can do it, but, uh, I  
28 finally got it. Impressed him with the idea that we were already past our  
29 point of turn and, uh, I was there from, uh, uh, Jan-, uh, February of 1953  
30 until, um, July of 1954. And I came back to the United States and stayed in  
31 the reserve and, uh, uh, was assigned to Selfridge Air Force Base where I  
32 went on, um, a-, I first went down once a week. And, um, then it was, uh, it,  
33 it got to be too much with my teaching in Lansing and I, uh, asked to be put  
34 on a, another type of service where I went only once a month. And then, uh,  
35 in 1967 I decided that the rat race of getting up and leaving Lansing at 4:00  
36 in the morning and, and, uh, in the winter time having to go down, um, in  
37 the-, all the way down and all the way back in pitch dark, uh, and then in the  
38 summer time having to follow, uh, cars pulling boats and all this other thing,  
39 uh, at the crack of dawn, it was just getting to be too much of a hassle. And  
40 by that time, I had some, uh, 29 years' time, so I took a retirement and, and,  
41 eh, became a air force, uh, reserve retired.

42  
43Elsie Hornbacher: [31:09] Then, may I ask, uh, what financial benefits you have from this?  
44

1Jane Piatt: I got a pretty good, uh, retirement at the time. I thought, you know, if I got  
2 50 or \$60, it would be enough to make a payment on something but, uh,  
3 much to my amazement, uh, uh, that pay now is, is up over \$500 a month.  
4 And, um, uh, they-, we have-, I have-, could have the benefit of, of using  
5 military hospitals if I was anywhere near enough to do it. But, uh, the way,  
6 uh, my military insurance is set up, I can use any hospital that's, um,  
7 approved, uh, hospitals it would be-, uh, taking Medicare, uh, benefits and,  
8 um, my Mediplus, which is what the military insurance is called, uh, is, uh,  
9 a great help. And, um, I could also, um, uh, be using, uh, commissaries and,  
10 uh, post exchanges but we don't have any anywhere near Lansing.  
11 Frequently, if I'm traveling and going near a military base, uh, I will go on,  
12 uh, the post and, uh, use the officers' club or something like that, particularly  
13 if it's a famous one, a well-known. And I had-, they do, all, also have, uh,  
14 accommodations if you want to ask for them, uh. And sometimes they're  
15 quite nice in the officers' clubs and you can have-, take your family or your  
16 friends whoever is traveling with you. But I, uh, I haven't done anything  
17 much with the military now for a number of years.

18  
19 I came into WOSL in 1963 when I, when I moved back to Lansing and, uh,  
20 that was the first I'd heard about it and, uh, one of the teachers that I was  
21 working with, uh, was, uh, uh, WOSL and she's the one that asked me. I  
22 actually feel like I sort of came in on a shoe string or by the back door  
23 because I did not serve in a country that was at war at the time I was there.  
24 Of course, England was no longer at war, uh, but we were serving Korea  
25 and that's what the war was all about. And England itself, uh, apparently, uh,  
26 hardly knew the war was over. They still, um, traveled, uh, with their dim  
27 lights on in the cars, they still were on rations on meat and butter and, uh,  
28 certain clothing items, um, they kept their shades pulled down at night.

29  
30Elsie Hornbacher: [33:23] What year was this?

31  
32Jane Piatt: And this was between 1952 and 1954. And in London and in areas that had  
33 been badly bombed, very little effort had been made to replace these, uh,  
34 they just put up big fences around and marked that a bombed-out area. And I  
35 when I traveled in Germany, it was just the opposite. They were working  
36 frantically to rebuild and, and replace all of the bombed-out areas. In  
37 England, they came to work about 9:00 in the morning and worked until 4  
38 with 2 good tea breaks plus their lunch break. And, uh, in Germany, they  
39 worked from 7:00 in the morning until dark and, uh, right through the  
40 weekends. It was very interesting to see the difference in the attitude.  
41 'Course England was getting no help from us because they were on our side.  
42 Germany, on the other hand, was the enemy, and as you know, our custom  
43 has been to help the enemy after we've defeated them. But, um, I loved  
44 England and, uh, I was given very good care. I, uh, was allowed to live off

1 the base finally, uh, because they did not have good quarters there. I, uh-,  
2 the women officers didn't have as good quarters as the, um, uh-, as the  
3 teachers, as the civilian employees. They were given an allotment to live off  
4 the base, but we were not allowed to at first. And then, uh, then they allowed  
5 me to for about 2 months and then they took it away so-, but they did let me  
6 live on my own and I lived in a lovely, lovely home.  
7  
8Elsie Hornbacher: Back in '53, '54, I hesitated to go to England because it was cold during the  
9 winter time when I could have gone.  
10  
11Jane Piatt: Well, [throat clearing] um, you know the kind of a winter we've had in  
12 Michigan this year has been a, what we would call a mild winter. And they  
13 didn't have, uh, any, an-, even as cold weather as we had. We, a couple of  
14 times we had some cold weather. One time it went down to 19 degrees and  
15 you'd have thought – it felt like it was 9 below because it was damp.  
16  
17Elsie Hornbacher: [35:12] I'm referring to the rooms you had.  
18  
19Jane Piatt: Oh.  
20  
21Elsie Hornbacher: You, were you warm at night?  
22  
23Jane Piatt: In the, in the, uh, apart-, in the house that I lived in it was a 900-year-old  
24 house. It had belonged to the church in the little village of Combe and, um,  
25 uh, the church had long ago had to give it up. They could no longer support  
26 anything like that. So then some of the, of the, um, uh, titled, uh, families  
27 had taken on these big homes and by, when the war came on, they couldn't  
28 support them either. And the house that I lived in had been purchased by a,  
29 a, an older woman that only had had a third-grade education but who had  
30 gone to work at [Blenheim 35:49] Palace during World War I. And had  
31 gotten lots of contacts while she was there, and when World War II came,  
32 she put in an application to build the roads at Brize Norton and she got the,  
33 um, uh, contract. And she and her, and her son built the roads at Brize  
34 Norton. And with the money that she had, she had elevated herself out of a  
35 contact with the local people because she had money, but she could not  
36 associate with the upper class because she had no education. And so she  
37 had, uh, no upper mind that her life would be with the Americans.  
38  
39 So she, uh, made this lovely big home had, it had 3-, uh, 4 very nice  
40 apartments in it, including hers. And, uh, then she, and the gate, gate house  
41 was an apartment and also the garden house. And the grounds were, were  
42 just gorgeous. Beautiful flowers and vegetables and all this sort of thing.  
43 And Mrs. Bishop took a liking to me, and so when I went, uh, to get, to rent  
44 the apartment, she said what she, could I wait for 4 days while she had it

1 cleaned. Well when I got back there, she not only had had it cleaned, she'd  
2 had all new carpets put in. She had, um, uh, taken the refrigerator, which  
3 had been in the hall and was supposed to had been shared by everybody, and  
4 that was now in my kitchen. And when I said something about it, she said  
5 don't worry about that. She said they can all get refrigerators of their own at  
6 the PX. [chuckle] So I had the only refrigerator in the building beside the  
7 one that she had.

8  
9 And, uh, her husband, uh, furnished me with vegetables for – for 2 weeks I  
10 had, uh, uh, uh, cook, uh, uh, uh. After I'd been there for 2 weeks, she  
11 suggested that I get a, that I have a cleaning woman. And she said don't have  
12 her come in the morning, just have her come in the afternoon and build your  
13 fire and cook your dinner, so I did. And, um, uh, I hadn't made any  
14 arrangements for any special food or anything and the first night I came  
15 home, I had lamb chops and potatoes and Brussels sprouts and the typical  
16 kind of thing that you have in England, the pudding. And, uh, it, it's, this all  
17 came courtesy of Ms. Bishop and, um, I, I said well, you know, I want to  
18 pay you for this. No, no, she wouldn't let me. But I discovered that they  
19 couldn't get good beef or pork. So I used to buy beef and pork for her in the  
20 commissary and then she bought lamb and veal for me and, uh, which, uh,  
21 pleased me greatly.

22  
23 And so I had a, a very, uh, lovely experience with my cleaning women,  
24 cook, uh, combination who unpacked my trunks when they came, pressed  
25 all my clothes, mended them, and, uh, when Halloween came, she insisted  
26 on making a costume for me and, uh, baked and did all this kind of thing  
27 and she did all the planning. I didn't do anything. I would say to her, you  
28 know, what do you want me to bring home, and she'd say oh we've got  
29 things. Well then, I found out, I watched how they bought their meat. The  
30 meat man came around with a little truck and, uh, actually, uh, had a horse  
31 and, um, the people, the neighbors would go out with their pans and the  
32 meat was all hanging up inside and they'd pick out what they wanted and  
33 he'd cut it off and put it on their platter and they'd bring it back in the house.  
34 And, uh, it wasn't the most hygienic kind of service in the world, but I never  
35 had any problem with it.

36  
37 And, uh, then I met people who, uh, worked at the, um, at the, at the post  
38 exchange and, uh, they invited me to their home in Cheltenham and, uh, I  
39 frequently went there for weekends. Now that, I was the coldest I ever was  
40 anywhere when I went to visit them because they had a, an old apartment  
41 that had been at one time bombed out and repaired. And it would, it had to  
42 be at least 9 feet – the ceilings had to be at least 9 feet tall and the "central  
43 heating" was a small pipe about, um, 2 inches in diameter that ran around  
44 the, the base of the floor. And then at one end of the room, they had a very

1 small fireplace with a firebox that – what I would say wasn't more than 8 or  
2 10 inches deep and probably, um, uh, um, dimensions of about 15 by 20  
3 opening. And, uh, you know, that, that, it's typical of the English women,  
4 the backs of their legs were all red, and this was from standing in front of  
5 heat, literally.

6  
7 And, uh, but these people were simply great to me and when I went there I  
8 wore my uniform 'cause it was a heaviest thing I had and, uh, would take a  
9 sweater to wear in bed at night. And they would put a soapstone in my bed  
10 and, uh, all these puffs and all this kind of thing, you know. You felt like  
11 you were gonna be smothered. But then in the morning, they would bring  
12 you in your tea when you were so cold you couldn't imagine putting your  
13 arms out to take the tea. And then, um, uh, and they used their rations – this  
14 is the thing that always worried me and I always felt so guilty because then  
15 when I got ready to go home on Sunday, I would go on Saturday, and, uh,  
16 when I got ready to go home Sunday, I felt like a school girl going back to  
17 home, uh, to school after spending the weekend at home because they would  
18 pack boxes of, uh, food for me to take home. Leftover roast and puddings  
19 and cakes and gelatins and all sorts of things, you know, to take back to my  
20 room with me or to my apartment with me. But, uh, they were very friendly  
21 I, I loved them, I, uh-, and I kept thinking I'd go back, but I haven't been  
22 able to.

23  
24 **Elsie Hornbacher:** Few more minutes.

25  
26 I really think that, uh, my association with WOSL has been a, a really nice  
27 experience. At the time that I went into it, um, I really didn't know anything  
28 about the reason why I was in it to tell you the honest truth. I didn't really  
29 know, uh, I had not realized that, uh, teachers, for instance, uh, were sent  
30 over by the, uh, State Department, uh, and, uh, worked under the military. I  
31 mean, I knew that we had teachers at our base and, uh, but I didn't really  
32 know anything about their background. And in our unit in Lansing, the  
33 majority of our members are teachers because I guess it was started by  
34 teachers. Is that true?

35  
36 **Elsie Hornbacher:** I don't know. Jane Power was one of our first members.

37  
38 **Jane Piatt:** And she was Red Cross.

39  
40 **Elsie Hornbacher:** Red Cross or nurse I'm not certain.

41  
42 **Jane Piatt:** I think she was Red Cross. Yeah but, uh, it's been a, a really fun experience  
43 and, uh, was one of the few social things that I did when I first went in and I  
44 was teaching in Lansing, uh, and I was so tied up with my teaching and

1 professional work that, uh, it was kind of a relaxing thing to go and be with  
2 the gals at WOS. And now since I've been retired and have been so busy  
3 with volunteering. I think I still, it's one of the few things that I do that isn't  
4 something that's going to require a lot of work. At least my unit, uh, work  
5 isn't. I, I ended up with a lot of, uh, national jobs but, uh, it's been a, a really  
6 remarkable experience and I've enjoyed it very much. I can't think of  
7 anything more that I should say, do you? Uh, anything more you want on  
8 the questions?  
9

10Elsie Hornbacher: I guess not.  
11

12Jane Piatt: I think that, uh, this is, uh, program that's important for us to do an oral  
13 history on our members and, uh, Lansing is really, uh, having a lot of  
14 success getting the members to volunteer to, to be taped, and I'd like to see  
15 this go on.  
16

17Elsie Hornbacher: Thank you Jane Piatt. The biographical data on Jane Piatt is listed in, in a  
18 separate paper. Her address is Jane Piatt, P-I-A-T-T, 13420 Bower Road  
19 Eagle, Michigan 48822. Her telephone is 517 (this is the area code), and the  
20 number is 626-6601. Further contacts can be made directly with Jane.  
21  
22  
23/hm