

**Interview of retired Air Force Lieutenant Colonel Therese M. Slone-Baker  
on her military career**

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5 Ruth Stewart: Therese M. Slone-Baker is being interviewed on January 14, 2004, as a  
6 member of the Women's Overseas Service League, San Antonio Unit.  
7 The interview is being held at the Army Residence Community in San  
8 Antonio, Texas. The interviewer is Ruth Stewart, assisted by Carol  
9 Habgood. [0:29] Terry, start out by telling us a little bit about your early  
10 days.

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12 Therese Slone-Baker: My early days, well, I was born in New York City, New York, of  
13 immigrant parents. My father came from Poland and my mother from  
14 Ukraine, okay. I, uh, I grew up in a completely ethnic background where  
15 everybody spoke Ukrainian. Um, my parents were poor. They were  
16 uneducated, but they were hard-working people. Uh, my mother,  
17 unfortunately, had an unhappy marriage, so I did not know my father too  
18 well. Um, my mother is the one who took care of me and, uh, saw me  
19 through life, okay. The – um, in my growing up days as I said, I was  
20 living in a completely ethnic background and had seen that as I grew older  
21 I decided I did not wish to live in that type of background and I also felt  
22 that I needed security for myself, personal, uh, financial security. So as I  
23 finished school, I decided to break away from most of the jobs that my  
24 girlfriends of similar background were doing, and that was – and nothing  
25 wrong with their jobs, but they were things like waitressing and things of  
26 that nature. And I didn't feel that, that was my type of thing anyway, so I  
27 went to a business school and learned how to be a typist and a  
28 stenographer. Um, I did not finish my course there because then they,  
29 they put me through accounting and I just don't like anything to do with  
30 accounting. [chuckle] However, my, my training in, in stenography and  
31 typing led to some pretty good jobs that I, that took me out of the element  
32 I wished to become, to get out of that element.

33  
34 Um, I worked civil service at the – on December 7, 1941, I was working in  
35 Washington D.C. I was the secretary to the actuarial consultant for the  
36 Security, Social Security Administration, okay. Then, of course, Pearl  
37 Harbor Day came and I felt that I had to do something other than work for  
38 Social Security, so I looked around and I found a vacancy with the United  
39 States Maritime Commission in Wilmington, California. And I applied for  
40 the job and I was accepted and I transferred to California, working for the  
41 U.S. Maritime Commission. I had a great job. I worked for 95 inspectors,  
42 all male. And I have to admit that they spoiled me [chuckle] quite a bit.

43  
44 Ruth Stewart: Nothing wrong with that.

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2Therese Slone-Baker: But even though I was working for a defense industry, I still felt with the  
3 war going on that I had to do something else, I had to do something for the  
4 war effort; however, my bosses at that time, uh, would not release me  
5 because I was working for a defense industry. And I could have left them,  
6 but then I was afraid that I would break my security end of it if I just left  
7 and it would probably show up on my records and that wouldn't be a good  
8 idea, so I, I bided my time. And then in early – in late 1944 when the war,  
9 when the war was sort of winding down a little bit, my boss said to me  
10 that if I still wanted to go into the service that they would release me. So I  
11 checked around and the army was looking, still at that point recruiting  
12 people and they – I was enlisted. I went and enlisted in 19, um, it was the  
13 latter part of 1944, and I was called to active duty in January of '45 and I  
14 was assigned to the army air corps. There was not an air force at that time,  
15 right? [chuckle]

16

17Ruth Stewart: Mm-hm.

18

19Therese Slone-Baker: Uh, and, and my experience – by that time I had been working for almost  
20 10 years, so I had a good deal of experience in office management, uh, in  
21 secretarial work and all. And consequently, most of my assignments at, at  
22 that, at that time were, were very good assignments for a young, for a  
23 person who had not had military experience before. As a matter of fact,  
24 my first assignment was at Camp Davis in Wilmington, North Carolina,  
25 which was identified as a rest and rehabilitation center and I was assigned  
26 to the special services as, um, as a clerk typist. And the chief of that  
27 section learned of my background so he sent them a letter, a, a waiver  
28 requesting that I be assigned as a stenographer skilled 213. Well,  
29 [chuckle] the base commander approved all of those requests for waivers  
30 and things of that nature. At that time, I was just a private, above private.  
31 And when he saw my application for a waiver of skill, he decided he could  
32 use me as a secretary, so I was assigned as a secretary to the commanding  
33 general at, at the, at the station.

34

35 And that seemed to be the trend of things as I went along because after  
36 that when the Camp Davis was closed down, I was sent to Indiantown  
37 Gap, Pennsylvania, and there the chief of personnel decided I was going to  
38 be his secretary. And then when Indiantown Gap, Pennsylvania closed  
39 down, it was a separation center at the time, when, when that closed down  
40 for another mission, the director of personnel – they were sending all the  
41 WAC to Fort Meade, Maryland. And the director of personnel felt I  
42 should not go with all the WAC at Fort Meade, Maryland, so he found an  
43 assignment to me, for me at, um, in Baltimore, Maryland with  
44 Headquarters Second Army Recruiting. And there I had my first

1 experience of being a boss so to speak and my job was in the special  
2 events section. I worked with radio personalities, with news media, and  
3 establishing special events for the Second Army Recruiting. Um, and  
4 even though the war effort had w-, wound down quite a bit, they were still  
5 recruiting people and I came up with this idea of a special recruiting  
6 program involving the American Legion, and I called it the VALAR  
7 program, Voluntary American Legion Army Recruiting. And we enlisted  
8 over 100 men [chuckle] for which I received the Army Commendation  
9 Medal because we were the only organiza-, the only army recruiting  
10 district that had enlisted that many people at one time.

11  
12 At that time, this was, by now that was 1946, 1946, um, my mother was  
13 living in Long Beach, California by herself. I felt that the war was over,  
14 that I had to go back and to where, back to civilian status and help my  
15 mom because she was working and living alone and I was brought up with  
16 the, uh, with the, um, knowledge or, or...

17  
18 Ruth Stewart: Value.

19  
20 Therese Slone-Baker: ...that, yes, that the children take care, care of the parents so I had to, I felt  
21 I had to go back and help my mom. So I went back into civil service.  
22 This time I, I, I found a job with the, uh, the air force was [inaudible  
23 11:44] by that time, um, at an air force reserve training center where I  
24 started off as a, a secretary to the public relations man, but then the base  
25 commander found me and he decided I had to be his personal secretary.  
26 [chuckle]

27  
28 Ruth Stewart: But you were a civilian then.

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30 Therese Slone-Baker: I was a civilian at the time, yeah. And while I was in that civilian status, I  
31 joined the air force reserve. In 1951 and '52, there was, um, a, a  
32 regulation came out saying former top 3 graders if they qualified on the  
33 ACOC exam (the Aviation Cadet/Officer Cadet exam) would be given a  
34 direct appointment. So my bosses prevailed upon me to try that, to apply  
35 for that, um, program and I did. I passed and I was recalled to active duty  
36 as a second lieutenant and that began my career as a commissioned officer  
37 with the air force. Um, in the air force, I had many assignments. I was  
38 personnel officer. I was an administrative officer. I was a commanding  
39 officer of the WAC squadrons of 2F squadrons. I was a training officer, I  
40 was a public relations officer, and I was a recruiter. Um, the, um, my air  
41 force career, or my entire military career really, was not a dramatic one,  
42 but it was – I felt I was doing something that needed to be done, otherwise  
43 I wouldn't have had so many opportunities given to me...

1Ruth Stewart: Mm-hm.

2

3Therese Slone-Baker: ...to, to carry out what I wanted. And I stayed on active duty for 20 years.  
4 I had 5 years in the reserve during my civilian time, so I retired as a  
5 lieutenant colonel with 25 years of service for pay purposes, so I had my  
6 security that I had planned for all my lifetime. Uh, I, I couldn't have done  
7 any of this without having been in the service. I really feel that military  
8 service for me actually was what got me out of my beginnings of being an  
9 immigrant daughter. And there's nothing wrong with being an  
10 immigrant's daughter, except it was not my way of life.

11

12Ruth Stewart: Mm-hm, mm-hm.

13

14Therese Slone-Baker: Okay. Now is there anything else you need to know about me? When I  
15 retired, I received the, uh, Air Force Commendation Medal and  
16 Meritorious Service Medal upon retirement.

17

18 Um, all my assignments were good assignments, although there were  
19 times when I ran into discrimination being a woman, okay. Uh, one of my  
20 assignments was to, um, be the executive officer for a base commander in  
21 Bermuda; however, the colonel in charge of the base, the base commander  
22 at the time, had never had a woman on his staff and evidently he was not  
23 going to give me that assignment. As a matter of fact, he had me  
24 unassigned for about 2 months while he made up his mind what to do with  
25 me. Um, he finally called me in one day and he said – I was captain at the  
26 time. He said "Captain," he said "I understand that you had personnel  
27 background." I said "Yes." He said "Well, how would you like to be a  
28 personnel officer rather than the base executive officer?" So I looked at  
29 him and I thought, well, for one thing, the personnel office was way on the  
30 other side of the base. [chuckle] And I thought, well, I think I would like  
31 to be a personnel officer because personnel is so varied. Um, there are so  
32 many different types of duties involved that to me it sounded more  
33 interesting than just sitting at a desk and signing off on pieces of paper, so  
34 I agreed to do that. So what he did is he took the personnel officer, made  
35 him the base exec officer, and made me the personnel officer.

36

37 And it really worked to my advantage, even though I was a little upset at  
38 the time. But it really worked to my advantage because, um, I was the  
39 only woman on base, woman officer rather, uh, uh, non-medic, because  
40 we did have a small hospital there, and, uh, the, um, the base used to use  
41 me [chuckle] for various, uh, community activities. I was a speaker. I  
42 spoke to the various organizations on Bermuda. I met many fine people,  
43 Bermudians, as personnel officer. One of my subsidiary duties was  
44 schools officer, so consequently I became involved with the school system

1 in Bermuda. It, as I say, it worked to my advantage. And then one day I  
2 remember I was at base headquarters and the colonel – we had a visitor  
3 from TAC. We were a TAC organization. And the general was with the  
4 base commander in the hallway and as I walked by I just, I just said “Good  
5 morning, sirs.” And the colonel, the base commander called me back and  
6 I thought, oh-oh, did I do something wrong? And I, I went back and he  
7 said “I’d like...” He said to the general who was visiting, he said “I’d like  
8 you to meet my personnel officer. It’s the first time I’ve had a woman on  
9 staff and now I wonder why I didn’t before.”  
10  
11 Ruth Stewart: Great.  
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13 Therese Slone-Baker: So I felt I had accomplished something...[chuckle]  
14  
15 Ruth Stewart: Mm-hm.  
16  
17 Therese Slone-Baker: ...for women in the service at that time.  
18  
19 Ruth Stewart: [19:10] Did he tell you originally that he did not want you as the base  
20 executive officer, was that the title, because you were a woman or?  
21  
22 Therese Slone-Baker: No, no.  
23  
24 Ruth Stewart: You had to surmise that.  
25  
26 Therese Slone-Baker: I surmised that, yeah, mm-hm.  
27  
28 Ruth Stewart: Mm-hm.  
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30 Therese Slone-Baker: Because otherwise why would he keep me unassigned when that spot was  
31 vacant there...?  
32  
33 Ruth Stewart: Mm-hm.  
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35 Therese Slone-Baker: ...as the base exec?  
36  
37 Ruth Stewart: Mm-hm.  
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39 Therese Slone-Baker: But as I say, it worked to my advantage.  
40  
41 Ruth Stewart: Mm-hm.  
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43 Therese Slone-Baker: It really...  
44

1Ruth Stewart: Mm-hm.  
2  
3Therese Slone-Baker: Um, I didn't make a big hoo-ha about it. I know some women may have  
4 felt that th-, that the discrimination was such that they had to fight against  
5 it, but I, I never did that. I, I found that if I just did the best I can,  
6 whatever I'm doing, that things would work out okay for me.  
7  
8Ruth Stewart: Mm-hm.  
9  
10Therese Slone-Baker: And they did.  
11  
12Ruth Stewart: Mm-hm.  
13  
14Therese Slone-Baker: So, um, I'm, I'm very proud of my air force career.  
15  
16Ruth Stewart: [20:09] Where were you overseas?  
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18Therese Slone-Baker: I, I was in Germany twice during the Army of the Occupation and I was in  
19 Bermuda.  
20  
21Ruth Stewart: [20:24] The Occupation would be post World War II?  
22  
23Therese Slone-Baker: Yeah.  
24  
25Ruth Stewart: The Army of Occupation.  
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27Therese Slone-Baker: Yeah, the Army of Occupation in Germany. Yeah, mm-hm.  
28  
29Ruth Stewart: [20:38] And that was following the Bermuda experience?  
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31Therese Slone-Baker: No.  
32  
33Ruth Stewart: No, that would have been earlier.  
34  
35Therese Slone-Baker: Bermuda was my last overseas tour. Yeah. No, that was during, um,  
36 World War I – World War II, pardon me. [chuckle]  
37  
38Ruth Stewart: Yeah, let's not get that on the record. [chuckle]  
39  
40Therese Slone-Baker: Um, that was during – the Occupation was in the early 50s and that's  
41 when I was in Germany, mm-hm.  
42  
43Ruth Stewart: [21:05] And what were you doing there then?  
44

1Therese Slone-Baker: I was an administrative officer with ACS communications. I was WAC  
2 commander at Ramstein Air Base. And I guess that was it,  
3 communications, yeah, mm-hm.  
4

5Ruth Stewart: Mm-hm.  
6

7Therese Slone-Baker: So those were more administrative type, uh, type things.  
8

9Ruth Stewart: Mm-hm. [21:36] Did you live on base or were you in the economy then?  
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11Therese Slone-Baker: Um, I, I lived on the economy for a while. My mother, who was my  
12 dependent, um, was permitted to – as an officer, uh, she was permitted to  
13 join me, so she joined me. And it was pretty interesting because here she  
14 was, a woman who had been born in Europe, and now living in even, and,  
15 and living in Europe in Germany, of course, at the time. But my mother  
16 was a very patriotic woman, and I credit her a lot with my feel-, strong  
17 feelings for wanting to do something other than, um, being a, just a plain  
18 worker. I remember when I was a little girl, the church was having  
19 Ukrainian classes. The priests were having Ukrainian classes and I said to  
20 my mom "I'd like to go to take that Ukrainian class." And she would not  
21 permit me to go because she said she did not come to America for me to  
22 learn Ukrainian. She came to America to be an American.  
23

24Ruth Stewart: Mm-hm.  
25

26Therese Slone-Baker: So she – I think she fostered a lot of that strong feeling I have about being  
27 in the service, mm-hm.  
28

29Ruth Stewart: [23:15] And she had learned English.  
30

31Therese Slone-Baker: Oh yes. She was self-taught. Um, she learned to write. Of course, her  
32 writing was phonetic. Uh, if she was saying, she would write me a letter,  
33 she'd say "I am riding a fu words." And she'd say "riding" r-i-d-i-n-g.  
34

35Ruth Stewart: Hm.  
36

37Therese Slone-Baker: And "fu" f-u. [chuckle]  
38

39Ruth Stewart: Mm-hm.  
40

41Therese Slone-Baker: A "fu" words.  
42

43Ruth Stewart: Mm-hm.  
44

1Therese Slone-Baker: And I remembered that when I was in basic training at Fort Des Moines,  
2Iowa during World War II that whenever I received a letter from my  
3mother, all the women would gather around me because they wanted to...  
4[chuckle]  
5  
6Ruth Stewart: Hm.  
7  
8Therese Slone-Baker: ...hear, hear her, hear her letter.  
9  
10Ruth Stewart: Mm-hm, mm-hm, mm-hm.  
11  
12Therese Slone-Baker: Yeah. And that in essence is all I have to offer to the oral history program,  
13just my own personal experience, mm-hm.  
14  
15Ruth Stewart: That's exactly what it's all about though, it's your and other individuals'  
16individual history.  
17  
18Therese Slone-Baker: Yeah, mm-hm.  
19  
20Ruth Stewart: Did being in the – the military gave you security, as you pointed out.  
21  
22Therese Slone-Baker: Mm-hm.  
23  
24Ruth Stewart: Although there were opportunities that you took advantage of.  
25  
26Therese Slone-Baker: Yeah.  
27  
28Ruth Stewart: [24:31] Um, did it change you in any way?  
29  
30Therese Slone-Baker: Oh, I think so. I, I think it made me a more independent and responsible  
31individual. Um, I, I exerted my-, myself more be-, because when I, when I  
32was a younger person, I was very, um, uh, withdrawn. Everybody thought  
33I was very, very shy. In fact, when I decided to go into service, the people  
34who knew me all my life were sure I would never, ever make it through,  
35but I fooled them. [chuckle]  
36  
37Ruth Stewart: Mm-hm, mm-hm.  
38  
39Therese Slone-Baker: Yeah.  
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41Ruth Stewart: [25:26] Did being in the military affect your views of military as such or  
42war?  
43





1 an ethnic area, uh, and doing work that would not have, have brought me  
2 the security that I was looking for.  
3  
4Ruth Stewart: Or satisfaction.  
5  
6Therese Slone-Baker: Yes, mm-hm.  
7  
8Ruth Stewart: Mm-hm.  
9  
10Therese Slone-Baker: Mm-hm, yeah.  
11  
12Ruth Stewart: [29:28] Besides WOSL, have you joined other military organizations or  
13 veterans' organizations since you...?  
14  
15Therese Slone-Baker: Yeah. I, I'm a member of the Retired Officers Association, the Military  
16 Order of the World Wars (MOWW), the American Legion. Of course,  
17 Women's Overseas Service League. Um, I'm also a member of Freedoms  
18 Foundation at Valley Forge, and I joined that organization simply because  
19 I felt that it was a, an organization that sponsored good things for  
20 America. They have a youth program, a youth leadership program, which  
21 I have enjoyed working with young people, selecting them to attend a  
22 leadership conference. That has been very satisfying. That's about it.  
23  
24Ruth Stewart: So you've continued to contribute in, in many ways throughout.  
25  
26Therese Slone-Baker: I, I suppose.  
27  
28Ruth Stewart: Yeah.  
29  
30Therese Slone-Baker: Yeah.  
31  
32Ruth Stewart: Yes.  
33  
34Therese Slone-Baker: Uh-huh.  
35  
36Ruth Stewart: Well, you've had a notable career, Terry, and we really appreciate getting  
37 this down on this tape and, and...  
38  
39Therese Slone-Baker: Well, as I say...  
40  
41Ruth Stewart: ...the various records.  
42

1Therese Slone-Baker: As I say, I didn't do anything dramatic, but I, I, I did what I felt was  
2 necessary. And evidently the service, the air force felt that I could  
3 contribute something in, in, in my own way.

5Ruth Stewart: And you obviously did. And thank you very much.

8/mlc