

1 **Former U.S Air Force Major Ruth Rowntree talks about her eleven years of active duty,**
2 **first in the Women's Army Air Corps and later the U.S. Air Force**

3
4

5 Ruth Rowntree: [-ember in 00:00] 1985. I was in the WAC originally and then I stayed in.
6 I was mostly with the air corps and then when the air corps separated from
7 the army I was an air force officer. I stayed in for all of 11 years. I went in
8 originally, as I think most of us did, for patriotic reasons. I couldn't even
9 understand the people that were trying to find reasons not to go in because
10 it was the World War II and we had been so upset with what was
11 happening in Poland and Czechoslovakia and to, and although we didn't
12 know much about the Jews, we did know what had happened in those
13 other two countries. At the time of enlistment, I was working for White
14 and Wyckoff Manufacturing Company as a secretary to the factory's
15 superintendent. There was no reason that the White and Wyckoff
16 should've promised me, as they did the men, their job back but they did,
17 and they gave me the same time to go and volunteer that they would have
18 to any of their me-, male employees, which I was very appreciative of.

19

20 [1:28] After about 8 months in, I went in in October of '42, after about 8
21 months, why I, at first Des Moines and then Ruston, Louisiana, I went to
22 OCS. My first real assignment after OCS was with the central tech
23 training command, and two of us had been sent there on probation. Well,
24 the colonel, when we reported in, thought that was terrible to say that an
25 officer was on probation, and so for 30 days, the probation period, we did
26 nothing but study because he felt that an officer, once they had the gold
27 bars, was to be given a job. And as soon as I was permanently assigned, he
28 assigned me to the statistical control section. There, I met a lot of
29 resistance because at that time statistical control was a field that had been
30 started by McNamara and the men had all been educated at Harvard, and
31 since Harvard was not taking women students, I didn't have the school.
32 And they said I couldn't do it. Well, I did it for a good many years. I did it
33 there at, in central tech training command. When the command closed, I
34 did it for, at Scott Field.

35

36 [2:48] Then I got transferred to Germany in '46, and again I ran into it. I
37 was a, by this time, I'd been working in the field for some time, but they
38 looked at me and said, but you're a woman. And I said, well, I've always
39 thought so. Well, they did not assign me. This was in, back with the Army.
40 They would not assign me as a statistician. And so after a couple of very
41 frustrating months with nothing to do, I managed to be transferred back to
42 the air, air corps at Wiesbaden to the stat control unit there, and I stayed in
43 that career field for the rest of my military service. I made regular in 1947

1 – no, 48. Is it? I, I, 48 or 49. I applied in '48. And I was on the first group
2 of officers to be made regular air force, much to my amazement.
3

4 [3:53] When the comptroller career field was established as such, I
5 became a management analysis officer and was assistant wing comptroller
6 at, I was wing comptroller and assistant division comptroller when I got
7 out of the service in 1953. I [throat clearing] as, I, by that time, I was a
8 major. I would've stayed in for my 20 years 'cause I believed it, in what
9 we were doing. I had been disappointed that the United Nations charter
10 had not provided more security arrangements, that it had left the veto a
11 such important part, and so I felt that nation strength was going to be
12 important to the maintenance of peace. And I married in 1950, and right
13 about that time, the Korean War started and so I didn't even think of
14 getting out at that point, it was so busy, first of all recalling officers back
15 to active duty. My husband went overseas to, for Korea. I would've stayed
16 in permanently, I, I, for my 20 years, I think, if it had not been for the fact
17 that just about the time my husband returned from Korea I was on orders
18 for Germany, and they said he could not go, and I could not stay.
19 Therefore, I decided that I had not got married to live in a separate
20 continent from my husband, and that's why I got out.
21

22 [5:39] All the way through my assignments, well, I did have one short
23 period in squadron duty at, as first as the squadron adjutant and then for a
24 short period I was squadron commander. Both the women and I were
25 happy when that period ended [laughing]. I found th-, that 150 women,
26 there are always some that give you some problems and they were more
27 than I wanted to take.
28

29 [6:11] While I was in Germany, w-, was the s-, at, at the end of the war,
30 and then during the beginning of the Berlin airlift. Now I've discovered
31 since I've been back that not many people realized that before the Berlin
32 airlift we had had another smaller crisis when the Russians had blocked
33 the road to our airbase in Vienna, in Thule. At [throat clearing] we
34 suddenly realized that although we knew how many military people there
35 were on that station, and at that point I was in personnel accounting, we
36 didn't have any idea how many women, children, civilian employees, or
37 anything else we would have to supply or have to evacuate if worst came
38 to worst. And so it was up to me then to try to figure some way to get into
39 our personnel records the number of dependents that a man had, and also
40 not only whether they were dependents but whether they would be able to
41 be evacuated by vehicle or whether we were going to ha – or if out of the
42 theater by ship or whether we were going to have to fly them.
43

1 So we put into the, their record into the little IBM card in one column, uh,
2 numeric or alphabetic code if you had, if you were there alone, you had
3 nothing in the column. If you had your wife there, you had a 1 in it. If for
4 some reason she had to, could not travel, and that was usually because she
5 was more than 6 months pregnant, why we became, it became an
6 alphabetic code. So we watched some of our dependents during this period
7 go from being a 1 to an A to a B, because the child was now less than 6
8 months, to 2 dependents, and, but we were able at any time to figure out
9 how many military we had and how many dependents and where they
10 were. This was one of the more interesting things that I did.

11
12 [8:28] Also, while I was in Wiesbaden, at the time the army separated
13 from the air force, why we decided to put the air force processing at
14 Bremerhaven into the, into the air force system. Up until that point, it'd
15 been in the army system once they had reached the replacement depot.
16 And went up there, and we discovered that an awful lot of people that
17 supposedly had been listed as AWOL or lost in the theater had actually
18 gone home because of the way they were handling the orders at the time.
19 If a man shouted here at the wrong second, he might get put on the ship as
20 somebody else, and then he was listed as being missing. The states knew
21 who they had received, but this other, and we were showing all these
22 people as lost in the theater, and that was one of the interesting things, we
23 established our own personnel accounting system out of Bremerha-
24 haven. I was up there 3 months on temporary duty.

25
26 [9:34] It was nice for me in a way because when time came for me to ship
27 home, why, I was the only woman officer on a troop ship of 1100 people,
28 and there were only six male officers, and originally I was to have been
29 down in the hold with the other military females, but because the people in
30 the transportation corps now knew me after three months, I, they gave me
31 a cabin of my own. It was an interesting trip back. Because there were so
32 few officers, we had multiple duties, and I was not only the adjutant for
33 the [troop movement 10:13] but I was in charge of the first class
34 inspections and everything of that nature.

35
36 [10:21] The only other thing that I was really in, interested in while I was
37 in Wiesbaden was that I was one of the officers at the time that just, that
38 we changed [script 10:31] at the same time as the mark changed because
39 [throat clearing] we had to go down in the middle of the night, and being
40 the only woman officer in the unit, the only woman in there, they had a
41 hard time figuring duties for me with that unit but they did have me as the
42 exchange, fun-, money exchange officer, and, uh, it was very interesting to
43 do, go through that and to see the difference in Germany from the day that
44 we were, they went on to the new mark until I left Germany. Up until that

1
2
3
4
5
6
7/jw

day, rubble had just stayed rubble and the black market had flourished. Almost immediately, the shades were up on the stores, things were available for sale, and they started cleaning up and the country started coming back. And that's all I have.