



MS 315. Veterans History Project

Agnes Maye Arrington Transcript, April 6, 2005

Agnes Maye Arrington

Life in the United States Air Force

*Interviewed By: Ronnie Earnest Hines Jr.
April 6, 2005*

Ronnie: Where were you born?

Maye: Jacksonville Florida

Ronnie: How many siblings do you have?

Maye: I had two half-brothers and two whole ones.

Ronnie: What High School did you attend?

Maye: Muhogee High School of West Palm Beach County

Ronnie: What helped you make the decision to go into the military?

Maye: I was a nurse and not long after I finished nursing school, the build up started for WWII, Europe was having a lot of fighting and Poland had fallen, and so more and more of our young men were being drafted and I wanted to be a part of the whole thing.

Ronnie: Why did you pick the Army?

Maye: I did not meet the Navy requirements.

Ronnie: A very good reason.

Maye: I was too under weight.

Ronnie: Usually that is not a problem.

Maye: It was. They had to take me in on a waver because I was 20 pounds under weight.

Ronnie: What was the reaction of your family when you decided to join the Military?

Maye: Horror

Ronnie: They were afraid?

Maye: They thought I didn't know what I was doing.

Ronnie: Did being a woman at that time make that decision that much harder or was it just something that just came to you?

Maye: No. They were three of us in high school that went off to be nurses together and then we went off to be in the Army together, and then we went to Fort Benning, Georgia together.

Ronnie: So when you went in, did you face any obstacles by being female or were you treated...

Maye: No! When we got to Fort Benning there were three thousand young men in the infantry school.

Ronnie: What year did you actually join the military?

Maye: September 15, 1941, I had my 22nd birthday on active duty.

Ronnie: So your first job in the Army was as a nurse?

Maye: Yes.

Ronnie: So, you enlisted solely to be a nurse, was that your goal?

Maye: No, I was already a nurse I went into serve as a nurse.

Ronnie: Were you aware at that time of any fields that women were not allowed to be in the Military?

Maye: No. Later on women got into everything, but we just did women things, I didn't notice any restrictions.

Ronnie: Did you notice any overall tones toward women by other enlisted personnel or were you just equals?

Maye: Yes! And they were so happy to have us!

Ronnie: What was the housing situation like during your early military days for women?

Maye: We lived in the nurses' quarters, dormitory style living. We each had our private little room. We ate in the mess hall; we had our own mess hall.

Ronnie: What rank were you when you enter the military?

Maye: We had what they call relative rank, and we were called Miss, it was equivalent to a Second Lieutenant and then later we were in the Army of the United States and were made full Lieutenants, with equal rights and equal pay.

Ronnie: That's great. During World War II, were there any accommodations that you received from the War?

Maye: There was one on our rainbow of ribbons that indicated that you were serving when Pearl Harbor happened. Then it shows that I served in the Pacific theater and another one for the Army of Occupation in Japan. I can't remember, that was 60 years ago.

Ronnie: That was plenty of awards right there. How did the tone of the Army stay during WWII, was it an anxious tone or did it remain the same?

Maye: No, it was just a glorious adventure. Everybody knew that we were going to win, and so when you are on the side of the winner everything is ~~gun-oh~~.

gun-oh

Ronnie: When the Air Force came in existence, when you switched from the Army to the Air Corp at that time did you have a choice?

Maye: Yes.

Ronnie: Why did you choose to go into the Air Force at that time?

Maye: I had not yet been to Flight School; I wanted to go to Flight School.

Ronnie: So when you entered the Air Force were you allowed to enter Flight School.

Maye: Oh no, they didn't have such a thing.

Ronnie: That was a no go.

Maye: That didn't come along until later.

Ronnie: When you made the change over from the Army to the Air Force what were some of the differences that you noticed?

Maye: Everyday duty things – not any.

Ronnie: Just did the same oh, same oh.

Maye: Just hospital duties and taking care of the sick.

Ronnie: I know at that time there was some resentment from the old Army to the new Air Force, did you experience any of that or was everybody on the same team and let's just go and do our job?

Maye: I didn't notice any resentment.

Ronnie: So did you feel any ...

Maye: Just the same that we were here till it's over.

Ronnie: When the Korean War came about some time later, where were you stationed at during the Korean War.

Maye: I was in Japan and then I came home. And then I was out for awhile. I got married and resigned my commission.

Ronnie: When you got married, were you forced to resign your commission or was that just a choice that you made.

Maye: It was a choice I made. For a while you had to get out if you got married. But I had a choice.

Ronnie: In the Korean War itself what role would you say you played?

Maye: The same, I was a nurse, the same duties.

Ronnie: Being in Japan did you see a different level of casualties or injuries then you saw in WW II?

Maye: In WW II, I was on the Atall in the Central Pacific, and we had a little field hospital and we sent the patients back up to Honolulu and the sicker ones went on to the United States.

Ronnie: So during WW II, you were on an Atall? What is an Atall?

Maye: It's a coral island with a lagoon around it.

Ronnie: So basically when you got them in there you made the decision or the decision was made to keep them or sent them home for more treatment?

Maye: Yes, or send them back to duty or wherever they needed to go.

Ronnie: What during that experience during WW II, sticks out in you mind the most?

Maye: I was just 22 and to me it was just one glorious adventure. It was all exciting.

Ronnie: I am guessing at that time being a female and going into that situation basically being one of the first females in that situation had to be a rush or an exciting moment for you?

Maye: Oh yes.

Ronnie: And then you got to do it with some of your friends that made it more special.

Maye: Yes,

Ronnie: Basically you were just living out a childhood dream going through life. With the Korean War then ---

Maye: I didn't have much to do in that.

Ronnie: You weren't as active as you were in WW II.

Maye: No

Ronnie: So after the Korean War you came home and resigned your commission at what point did you reenter back into the Air Force?

Maye: Not too long after. I was able to get my grade and commission back. It was 1949 and it seems like I came back in 1950.

Ronnie: Was getting your original commission back was that something that was difficult?

Maye: No. I knew people in Washington.

Ronnie: How would you say over time I guess from the start of when you first went in at 22, till the time you were 35 or 36 did your role as a woman in the service change or did it change?

Maye: Well, with rank came more responsibility, more opportunities, like I could go for education to the University and I took advantage of that. Back in those days they had a BSN, a Bachelor of Nursing Education, I got that and then I went on with some additional schooling. Then I went to the University of California San Francisco for a year and got my Bachelor's Degree in Nursing Administration.

Ronnie: So you took advantage of a lot of opportunities the Air Force provided you.

Maye: Yes

Ronnie: That was wise. How did you feel about basically being a pioneer for a lot of females...

Maye: One thing, when the Women's Army Corp came along, nurses had been the only kid on the block and then came the WAFS, and we had been titling along with just our relative rank and not even full pay. Well when those women came along they demanded full rank and full pay, so because of them we went to bat and got it to.

Ronnie: Basically as time went on women received equal pay and equal rank.

Maye: Yes, It seems like they jumped in and got all the promotions and everything and we had been doing all the work.

Ronnie: At that time did you noticed any resentment from the men?

Maye: No-no-no the men always respected us and admired us.

Ronnie: What advice would you to a female entering the military?

Maye: Go girl go

Ronnie: Make it a career.

Maye: The sky is the limit; you can do anything you want to.

Ronnie: Often times we hear that women were treated so poorly in the military.

Maye: Not in the Nurse Corp, because it was all Officers I don't know what it was like with the ...

Ronnie: To me it is refreshing to hear what it was like, sometimes it see like people want to tell about the gloom and doom and the mistreatment, and to me it sounds like you had nothing but fond memories and good times.

Maye: Absolutely, but it might have been different if I had been a PFC in the Women's Army Corp.

Ronnie: What is your greatest memory of your whole military career?

Maye: The idea of being young and being a part of something big and important and wonderful, because so many of us were in it together.

Ronnie: When you first went in your parents were in horror of your choice as time went on how did they feel?

Maye: They were so proud.

Ronnie: I can imagine. You retired as a Lieutenant Colonel, at that time how many female Lieutenant Colonels were there? I know you might not know exactly.

Maye: Not too many. We had just made our first General and now we have a two or three star (general).

Ronnie: So you said, you had gone into the military with your friends, where you able to keep in touch with your friends through out your military career?

Maye: Oh yes.

Ronnie: Are there any other memories that you want to put down?

Maye: Well, you will have to buy the book!

Ronnie: I appreciate your time and letting me interview you and getting all this good information down. I think it will be very helpful to some people who will do research later on, maybe they can come in and get an accurate report of what historical went on. I think a lot of the time when you read some of the books you get a tainted picture, so it is always good to get it first hand report.