

This interview is being conducted on Wednesday, June 25, 2008 at the home of Angela Shubic (nee) Roti. Angela served in the U.S. Air Force WACS and is a veteran of World War II serving in the European Theater. My name is Fran Prokop and I am interviewing Angela at her home. She learned of the Veterans' History Project through me and has kindly consented to participate in the National Archives Veterans' History Project. Here is her story:

When and where were you born?

In Ishpeming, Michigan, January 14, 1922.

And what were your parents' occupations?

My mother was a housewife; my Dad worked in the iron ore mines.

How many brothers and sisters did you have?

There were five girls and one boy.

Angela and I spoke in advance of this interview and she told me her brother was in the service. What is his name and his branch of service?

Richard Francis Roti and he was in the Army.

And he also served in World War II?

Yes, yes, infantry. His story is funny – he was always interested in airplanes and used to go model airplanes all the time. and he volunteered to join the Air Force, and of course his eyes were bad and they wouldn't – once he was in , they needed infantry men so he got to go to the infantry.

And you mentioned that he was wounded?

Yes.

How did that happen?

I have his records – in Europe, in Germany

Ardennes?

I'm not sure.

What did you do before entering the service?

I was working for the Metropolitan Insurance Company.

In the office?

Yes. A clerk in Muskegon, Michigan.

Were you drafted or enlisted?

I enlisted - my birthday was on the 14th and I enlisted on the 19th.

Why did you choose that particular branch of service?

That's all there was at that time. The Navy wasn't even in force.

And when did you actually enlist – what year?

January 19, 1943.

Where did you go to boot camp?

Fort Oglethorpe, Georgia.

And what did you do there – basic training?

Basic training.

How long did basic training last?

Four to six weeks.

What was a typical day in Fort Oglethorpe?

I'm trying to think –

What was it like being there?

I don't think we did any hard training of any kind because that came later when I was training for overseas. Just marching and learning to, I guess, to follow instructions.

You didn't have any rifle or gun training?

No, not there.

How about classroom instructions.

We must have – basic training, Army regulations, Army procedures.

How did you adapt to military life – physical regimen, the barracks ?

Oh, fine – I gotta tell you this story – it used to be cavalry – we were on an old cavalry post, circular cavalry post, and the barracks had been occupied by military men and our bunk beds – they have three high – and the toilet facilities and showers were all open on the wall. And they had an awful problem with the women. So they finally put partitions in curtains in them –

Right.

That's one thing I remember. Of course we did KP – peel the potatoes, wash the windows.

Angela has two photo albums full of pictures both in America and overseas in Europe while she was in the service and they're very, very interesting. I couldn't choose any from there – will try to get a couple of pictures. Continue – doing KP

Doing KP and learning to march with a company, and general management – how to maintain your appearance – because it was cut your hair, shorten your skirt – don't wear your skirts too short –

Like a fashion type –

Well, it was – like a prison –

Ha, ha

For real, when you stop and think about it, that's where you had the regulations, right?

Regulations.

Your hair had to be up, you know –

Hair cuts –

Hair cuts and ears level; and skirts had to be below the knee.

They didn't have that for men – but they had regulations too.

Yeah, they'd line you up in formation and make sure you were in a straight line – and you know women, some are flat breasted, it was so comical – we'd laugh. These guys are trying to line up the women in straight rows and there would be a bust sticking out –

Ha, ha.

Ha, ha, he's have her move back and then her shoulders were out of line. That was the funniest thing – I always remember that.

But you wore pants, didn't you? Most of these –

No, skirts.

How about during training?

No, we had skirts.

So the whole time you were training you had skirts on?

We had skirts; yes.

That was your uniform – a blouse and a skirt.

Yes, when we first went in. And we had fatigue dresses for KP, you know.

Fatigue dresses?

Yeah.

It's interesting. You're the first woman soldier that I've interviewed so this is all new. Okay, after Fort Oglethorpe where did you go?

I went to Arkansas State Teachers' College for Business Administration.

And then – what else?

And I was recommended for OCS – Officer Candidate School. At the same time, they were announcing that they needed women volunteers to serve in Europe. So, not wanting to be a company officer, telling them to keep their hair short and their skirts long, I decided I wanted to volunteer for overseas duty.

How did you like the food and everything else in the barracks?

Well, in this country it wasn't bad. In California I worked --\

Wait, after Arkansas you went to California?

Yes. When I volunteered to go overseas, we were sent to California because they were going to form a company of women that were going overseas.

Where in California did you go?

Santa Ana – Cadet Air Base.

How long did you remain there?

I was there from May '43 to the end of the year. January '44 we shipped out for New York for overseas. January we were sent to Camp Shanks, New York for overseas training.

And you did receive overseas training?

Oh, yes.

What did that consist of?

That consisted of the gas mask; the – over the hurdles, you know, like the long hikes with the full pack, learning to handle the M rifle, take it apart, maintain it for overseas.

Because they didn't know what we were gonna end up with, you know. What else?

Even though you supposedly were going to be in an office, right?

Well, we didn't know for sure. Yes, I was listed as a clerk-typist but you don't know what the conditions are going to be like.

Right.

Because they were bombing real heavily at that time – remember – the heavy bombing?

So we had no idea where we were going to be at.

Okay, so overseas you had regular training like the men receive.

Yes.

Wearing a gas mask –

Wearing food packs –

Maintenance, marching with a full pack –

Yeah, and they would march – some people -- a lot of the gals couldn't take it or didn't want to do it – that kind of stuff.

So how many people – you had quite a few like 200 – what's a full company?

I have no idea; I'm not sure.

Out of the full company that started out, how many actually remained?

I have no idea; I was so naïve, I didn't pay attention. I know there were a lot of us. Do I have a picture of us loading on the ship -- I don't know?

I'll try to get some pictures or take some of these pictures.

If I run across one somewhere –

We'll look at them later. We're going into wartime service now. Where did you serve? Where's the Marne Headquarters? Where was that?

That was in Brampton Park, England.

Angela was with the First Bomber Division – before that, how did you – I want some details of your trip abroad. How did you get to England?

On the Queen Mary; on the Queen Mary.

And the Queen Mary was outfitted for carrying troops at that time?

17,000 troops, we were told.

At one time?

Yes.

Oh, my God, that's unbelievable.

17,000 troops, the ship was unescorted.

Unescorted; and that was in January of '44?

January of '44, yeah; we were on the high seas in January, because I remember that.

Angela has some pictures of the Queen Mary. Angela has two loose leaf books full of photos – here's one. How was your trip abroad? How long did it take?

Five days.

How was the trip? Were there any storms at sea?

Oh, yes. It was very stormy; the waves would wash over the deck of the Queen Mary and we would have –

Were you seasick?

Yeah, oh, that's another story. We had to go down to the stairs to the swimming pool area to eat. And we were on a British ship, so they had boiled potatoes and kidney soup – Ha, ha, that was the meal of the day.

Ha, ha.

Otherwise we had K rations. So anyway, you're down in the pit – it was hot and steamy, and I got sick. And of course, as you came up and down the steps, the GIs that were on all the other levels of the ship would come to the railing waiting to see the gals –

Of course.

And the nurses – where you from? – where you from? They'd yell. But anyway, I was sick, so I'm heaving. And they're laughing at me – but I made it up.

So you were with the nurses?

Yeah, the officers, the nurses, Red Cross workers – we were on the upper decks.

But you had to go down in the ship to eat.

I don't know about the others, because on the way back we got to eat in the officers – that was important; I've got pictures of that in here too. And the menu and everything. But on the way over, it was not that way.

We'll take a look later at the menu. So it took you about five days and you made it across and you landed in – where did you land?

Stone, England. That's where all the airplane parts came in – they came in through Stone, England. It was pitch black, dark outside – complete blackout at that time because of the bombing, and you couldn't see a thing. And they led you by the hand in the dark into the barracks.

Wow! What was the highest rank you achieved?

Corporal.

Were you discharged as a corporal?

Yes. Yes.

Now, once you got into Europe and in England, what were your actual duties?

I kept files for the bombing raids, as to what happened on the flights, what planes actually had problems, whether they were missing in action – if they were assumed killed in action – determinations were made by their company officers, but we would get the records and kept the records. Whether they saw parachutes coming from the planes, and then we would get parcels in the mail with parts of uniforms, with the ID numbers, that kind of stuff. And all those records were checked in our office and then our officers would determine "Missing in Action". If a plane went down in the water and you didn't see

parachutes – basically – so they knew who was on board. Some were definitely killed in action. If the plane went down over land and they saw parachutes – they're "missing in action" – that type of thing. So that's what we would see. And of course I had to type up

And they had regular headquarters and an office complex of whatever in Stone?

It was one of the old English mansions converted into offices.

Okay. And that was a little village in England.

Yes. I traveled from where our barracks were at Brampton - I don't know how many -- I always thought it was three miles. They issued us bicycles – they were G I Bicycles, khaki colored with your serial number on it.

Wow!

They were – that's another story – that's off the record. So we drove to work in the morning on our bicycles.

So you had like a 9 to 5 or 8 to 5 job?

Yeah, or six or whatever it was – yeah, a regular job. I better tell you about this one time we had our bikes, we'd drive into Brampton, it was the next little town – and the Red Cross had a facility there for service people – English as well as Americans – mixed, you know. And I rode down there with my bicycle, like I used to do, spend an hour or so, and I came back to get on my bicycle, and it's gone.

Where was it?

Some GI was due back to his encampment, or whatever you call it, took the bicycle because he wasn't going to make it on time, so guess what -- they caught him and he got court martialed –

Wow – really?

I had to go to the court martial, bring the bicycle in, wheel the bicycle in – that was as serious as taking someone’s gun.

Sure. Wow

Can you imagine that?

Did you have a gun on you while you were in Europe?

No. No, no.

You worked in the office and went back and forth.

Yes.

But you had an ID on your bike and he was court martialled for that – theft of a bicycle.

I think he was court martialled -- I don’t know what the sentence was. I was a naïve little

How old were you when you went in?

21. You did what you were told, especially in that situation; you do what you’re told.

How many of you were at this facility? How many women in the office?

In my office?

Yeah, doing the same type of job as you.

There were about 5 or 6 of us and the same number of men – of guys.

Working in the office.

Yeah.

What about the nurses? They went to other places?

Uh-huh. Yes, yes.

Those that came over with you on the boat.

I don’t know where some of them went; they went to different places. Then we had a company of our gals went to the same place, but the nurses – they were all dispersed

from Stone – wherever they went, I don't know. My brother was in this hospital – those were Army nurses, so maybe some of them were sent to these places. Oh, and then where we were stationed, there was a big Army hospital there but I can't think of the name of it – and we would bicycle over there and go and visit these young guys. And I'll never forget the one, laying in bed, all bandaged up – so he could sit – he got burned on the face in a fire – and I'll never get that picture out of my mind.

You visited your brother – he was injured and he was in another hospital?

Oh, yeah, he was in the – he had been injured in England – excuse me – in Germany, and he lost most of his leg. They shipped him to England for treatment and surgery and stuff and I was notified. They notified me at the office and arranged for me to fly there to be with him.

That was nice.

Yeah, so that was nice.

So how long were you there with him?

Couple of days; couple of days I suppose --

He was surprised; happy to see you, I'm sure.

Oh, he was a devil. He's laying in bed and the nurse is going to come in to dress his leg and I said, I'll wait out in the hall. Oh, no, he says, I want you to see this. I want you to see this. So, here's his bed and here I am, so I'm standing there and they take the bandages off; It's gory, I shouldn't say that, but I can still see it. They take all his bandages off and they start pulling – I could see the bone of his leg –

Oh, my God!

From the knee to the hip, that was all – and there's a hole, and they're pulling –

Oh my God. Was he shot or what –

Shrapnel; Oh, he thought he was cool too; he was tired of the infantry, marching, so he volunteered. They were looking for somebody to sit in the observatory post to -- so they can notify the artillery where to shoot. So guess who the enemy was looking for -- ha, ha, so he got hit. But anyway, penicillin was first introduced and it saved his leg. So he was shipped back to the U.S. -- was it the Gardner Hospital in Chicago -- where they had rehabilitation at that time downtown by the Sherman Hotel -- yeah, there was a big Army hospital at one time. He ended up being a Mr. America --

Really?

Yeah -- because he was doing all this to build up his leg muscles -- his whole body got built.

So he was able to use that leg? He never lost the leg?

No., but it gave him a lot of trouble.

He is passed away right now?

He had a -- he came back out of the service and went to the University of Michigan and studied -- architect. And went out to California and started -- you know, blueprints and drafting and worked his way up and became a very successful businessman.

Wow!

And a year ago Christmas, he was turning his company over to his employees -- over the years they had worked together so well -- he turned his business over to his employees -- about six of them, and they were holding a dinner party on New Year's Eve, he stepped up to the podium accepting the honors and he had a heart attack!

Oh, you're kidding! Oh my God!

Right up there, got a concussion and died. But he led a very active life -- very, very active fulfilling life.

How old was he at that time?

About 83.

Wow!

In the meantime, when they wouldn't give him – when he first came out of the service – he went and bought himself an airplane. He bought an airplane?

Did he learn how to fly?

Yeah, he had a private plane; and then he had a heart attack and they wouldn't give him a license anymore. So then he buys a motorcycle – a huge, big, motorcycle – travels all over Europe and everything –

He was determined.

Came from this little tiny town where we grew up didn't go anywhere or do anything – and then he ended up with a sailboat.

Okay, that's his story. Let's get back to you. How about your friendships formed and camaraderie of service?

I'm still seeing some of the girls, yes, yes. There were like 20 of us. In fact I have a reunion – that's another story

So you attend these reunions?

I haven't been this last year or two, but I have been going to them. But when we first got back we did regular family reunions with these girls and their husbands and kids.

That's nice.

But I keep in touch; I'm still in touch with about 8 or 10 of us that are left.

Okay;

That I know of.

That's very nice. Are you a member of any veterans' organizations?

There's the WAC veterans in Chicago – they just got after me. I belong to the Winds Overseas Service – that's what I was in many, many years.

These are new to me; I'm not familiar with this. They have their own organization.

Oh, yes. And I belong to the 8th Air Force Historical Society.

Do they have them in Chicago or do you travel?

Oh, no, I travel to a lot; their headquarters are in Savannah, Georgia.

When you were in service, how did you stay in touch with family and friends?

By these tiny little letters – almost postcards – V-mail.

V-mails – tiny – 3x5 inches only.

There's a special name for them.

I'll get a picture of them. Angela has photo albums but not marked – one is a European book and one an American book – I will try to photograph them.

What about receiving letters – how long did it take to get a letter from home?

Oh, I have no idea. The mail was censored. You couldn't write about anything.

So what were your recreational or off-duty pursuits? You said that when you had a couple of days off you would visit other countries – where did you go?

We went to Stratford-on-Avon; we went to Belfast, Ireland where we got food that wasn't rationed. Scotland, London and Bernwith, a resort area in southern England.

How long were you in Stone, England. When did that end?

The end of World War II -- after D-Day, 1945.

D Day was 1944; V-J Day was August 1945.

Yeah, that's when I came home, it was in '45.

But you stayed in the same facility until at least August 1945?

I came home in September of 45 – the actual discharge, if I'm not mistaken 9-28-45.

Okay, the war is over, how did you return home?

On the Queen Mary, on the Victory Ship or whatever they called it.

You were the first –

The first shipment of the armed forces.

Were there wounded guys on there too?

I have no idea.

How many people were on that ship?

I don't remember anything but being on board, on the deck, coming into port with all the planes and the bands playing and everything in New York Harbor.

That's really something – to see the Statue of Liberty after all that time.

Oh, yes; that was something to see – so you know how the immigrants must have felt when they came over.

Yes, yes. Where did you go once you landed in New York?

That was just a confused time; I don't remember. The next thing I knew I was at Fort Sheridan.

Did you go by train?

I have no idea; I suppose. I have no idea; I can't remember. They shipped us out so fast and then the next thing I know I was in Chicago, and I thought, how did I get here?

You were discharged from Fort Sheridan?

Yeah and then I'm in Chicago and my family's up in northern Michigan. I didn't know where to stay. I got in a cab and talking to this cab driver and he said I can take you to the women's Y.

Oh, yeah, the YMCA.

And that's where I stayed.

The YWCA.

Yeah.

So you stayed that night at the Y.

Yeah, and the next day – you'd think that the Army would – I had a friend in Chicago and called her and spent the next day with her. And then I took the Chicago Northwestern train to Michigan.

Back to Ishpeming?

Back to Ishpeming, Michigan.

And how was your reception by family and friends?

Did they know you were coming home or not?

Oh, yeah, my Dad was so proud of me; he took me all over town. Ha, ha.

Ha, ha, that's nice.

I don't think people thought too much of women in the service at that time.

I don't think so, from what I heard, I was just a little kid. How was your readjustment to civilian life?

Pretty good; I made mistakes.

Did you get a job, stay home for awhile?

Yeah, well I went home and I had four years of college education that I could have free from the government and I wanted to study merchandising – so I'm looking at this school in New York, I could have went to this famous school, I looked at DePaul, and then I ended up coming to Chicago and going to Vogue School –

Fashion school.

Yeah, fashion merchandising.

Did you want to be a designer?

See, I'm so chicken, I went to enlist and I was gonna study fashion designing, 'cause I always played with makeovers, and I get up there and got cold feet, so I switched from designing to fashion merchandising, and I ended up – I graduated from Vogue School – and I got a job in Mandel Brothers downtown store on State Street, assistant buyer, Junior coats and suits.

And how long were you there?

Oh, quite a few years.

You like it there?

Oh, yeah; the I went to Merchandise Mart, working for a buying office, doing the same work.

You said you were in contact with fellow veterans over the years.

Oh, yes, in fact one lives in Lafayette, Indiana; another one lives outside Gary. I have one that lives in southern Illinois.

And you all get together occasionally?

Well, we don't get together too much now because these girls were older than I was. It's getting kind of sad because we're getting up there.

How did your military experience affect your life?

I don't know. Well, I was raised in a family; you didn't get spoiled as a kid. I got married when I was 29 years old.

So what kind of life lessons do you think you learned in the military? Just the traveling and everything you did – you got to see a lot of the world.

Oh, yes. I've never been sorry that I enlisted. I've always been very proud of the fact that I did and made so many good friends.

Angela has a booklet entitled, “The First Air Division Over Germany” – with Quonset huts – you can see them. You didn’t tell me about the Quonset huts.

Oh, yeah, when we first got there we were - got out of one of the big Army trucks they had us in one of these big Army trucks, taking us from Stone, England over to this Army post, and we’re driving up the road and here’s this big English estate like you see in the movies with the big law – so gee, and they pull in there and we get in there and the building is all empty except for cots – it’s war time.

Yeah.

We had a fireplace to heat – we used to have to bank our fire at night, you know, and you were rationed a bucket of coal a day.

Okay, these are the things you want to hear – a bucket per person?

No, no, our group in our room – this was all in the estate house when we just got there. And we would have to bank the fire so we took turns – get up out of bed in the morning to start the fire, and bank it at night, you know, Boy Scout style. And then they moved us from there when they were bringing in a group of girls from Signal Corps who would be working on different schedules and they needed privacy, you know. So we were moved into the barracks – 20 of us, into the barracks.

Here’s a picture of you on your bicycle.

There you go .

How about that! With somebody –

One of my friends I went to work with – it was always called a roundabout – I have other pictures on my bicycle. Aren’t they terrible; they’re all fading out.

Black and white photographs; Well, now that you told the story about the bicycle.

There is a story; I don't know if you want to record it, but when we bicycled out to the Air Base to visit a couple of these mechanics that serviced the planes – when we were at the Red Cross Club –

We can't go into that; just tell me about it.

I'm trying to remember; we visited – let's see; we went through a B-17 – (reading from notes) -- they were mechanics that we met and they worked at the Air Base. We rode down there on our bicycles; we went through a B-17 Flying Fortress and got to talk on their ear phones. We took many rolls of films; we had on a parachute, goggles, etc. We had a wonderful time. Next week on Monday we are going to go up in one of the ships.

Oh, my God! Did you ever do that?

Yes. They took us up; there were supposed to test radio equipment, so once we got up there, I think they knew that the WACS were up there. So they sent us way up – we were in shirt sleeves, like this , freezing, freezing.

They didn't have any kind of – no climate control up there?

We didn't have any of that slacks or anything; we about died! But it was a wonderful experience, you know.

Yeah – big. Those B-24s were big.

Did you ever see any of those when they come on tour around here?

I might have –

What you got to see, if you ever have an opportunity, is to look where the gunner sat. They have the belly gunners, which is a bubble on the bottom of the plane, and the side gunners – that's where these guys used to be.

One guy was a belly gunner there.

Yeah, they got clobbered.

And he said they were just doing target practice and the plane came in on the ground with him in there (reading from an article). (looking at photos and memorabilia in albums)

This is the way these guys would get shot up.

He said he hasn't been in a plane since then.

They used to give them these little metal caps to protect their skull. You know what the guys used to do with them? They'd put them on their crotch –

Ha, ha, to protect that more than their heads.

That's a side story – the guys won't tell you that.

Here's a nice picture of your brother along with newspaper clippings from the Ishpeming, Michigan local newspaper. Here's pictures of you in the office with filing cabinets –

This is when we –were first over there and they were talking about where the girls worked -- the WACS –the different jobs they were doing.

Looking for volunteers.

I suppose it was part of that.

They were on bicycles too, see.

Yeah, there you go. (other dialogue not transcribed)

(I tried to take photographs and will include some herein).

Angela has a lot of pictures, hundreds and hundreds – decal of the 8th Air Force Historical Society – very interesting . You are the first woman that I have interviewed from the Second World War. I'm going to interview another lady who lives in Carillon, Anne Werch.

Yeah, she was at the training base at Fort Oglethorpe. She stayed there during the war.

Did you move here with her? Did you know her?

No. I joined the Chorus here and she joined.

Did you recognize each other?

Well, she knew that I'd been in the service and she approached me; wanted to know where I served. She was stationed at Fort Oglethorpe. And I was in California at this fancy Air Base where a lot of famous people were – actors who did charity work – I joined the chorus there too. I was always in the chorus and Bing Crosby was doing the Christmas Show in 1940 – what was the year he did the famous Christmas show? – but anyway, our chorus sang the background music. So we went there for the whole day to rehearse, all through the day. And they picked – according to that night, on television – Channel 7. So I had a lot of good experiences.

I just took a picture of Angela with her WWII Honoree – Angela M. Roti – activity during WWII, served with the Women's Army Artillery Corps and then reenlisted with Women's Army Corps; served in England; received the European-African-Middle Eastern theatre Campaign Ribbon, one Silver Battle Star, Bronze Star, Women's Army Auxiliary Corps Service Ribbon, three Overseas Service Bars and a Good Conduct Medal. I took a picture of Angela holding her uniform with all her medals and bars on the uniform. It is in pretty good condition.

Someday I will donate it. I don't know where.

I'll try to find out; another man had his uniforms too and I'll call the library to see where items may be donated.

I don't know who to give it to and I hate to just get rid of it.

It should be in a museum somewhere on display. How about the hat?

I have the hat; they wanted me to wear it at a function on the 4th of July at the end of the program , did you ever see it – at the end of the program they do all the military songs – then they say who was in the service – stand up! She insists I put my hat on –

Sure, I don't see why not. We have a program at Carillon on the 4th of July and Angela will be in it.

I'd have to get it altered to fit into it; they 'd get after me at the Legion --

(reading) here's a promotional picture – end of tape side 1 – no further recording.

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