CANADIAN WAR MUSEUM

ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPT

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INTERVIEWEE: PATRICIA ASHBAUGH

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Patricia Ashbaugh

Interviewed 17 May 2010

INTERVIEWER: Canadian War Museum Oral History Interview with Pat Ashbaugh, conducted at Ottawa Ontario at 1pm on 17 May 2010. We have both signed the legal release, is that correct?

ASHBAUGH: Yes.

INTERVIEWER: Would you please spell your name?

ASHBAUGH: Patricia P-A-T-R-I-C-I-A. Ashbaugh. A-S-H-B-A-U-G-H.

INTERVIEWER: Would you please present some basic standard biographical data?

ASHBAUGH: I was born in London, in the United Kingdom. I left at age five from London because of the world wide depression hit my father lost his business and we went to Reading, which is forty miles northwest on the river Thames. He found work as a lorry driver, although he really was a mechanic. I went to school, in Reading, and passed all the exams into higher education.

I was in one of the higher grades and the government, we were into the war by now, the government was recruiting bright young schoolgirls to be live-in nurses for war factory worker's babies. This would lead to a condensed course for registered nurses needed so badly. I jumped at what I thought would be my career. I became very ill with diphtheria after my second year and would have to repeat the course, which had passed me by.

On hearing this, I went down to the recruiting office and joined the WAF as a specially duties clerk plotter and did my life, as did my lifelong friends Margo Shroud, Gene Dent, and Christine Benevitz.

[My] older brothers Cecil and Richard Phillips were bombed and killed by the Germans while in the UK Merchant Navy, in 1941 and in 1942.

And so I thought I should step up, my father was also in the army.

INTERVIEWER: How did you learn of opportunities to work for the government as a nursery nurse?

ASHBAUGH: Well the government was going, was sending agents high school to high school recruiting bright young schoolgirls to be live-in nurses for war factory worker's babies because they knew their other nurses, registered nurses, would be needed in the war effort, and they needed nurses so this was an accelerated course. So this would lead to a condensed course for registered nurses, and instead of graduating at 21 you would graduate at 19. So you did a little bit

in the nursery, did your pharmaceuticals at the hospital and then you would go back to the hospital, later and learn to work on the wards and then back to the nursery school. I did very very well there, the children were live in, and I was given a whole age group and I was only 16½, 17, and I was put in charge of children two to five who slept in there.

INTERVIEWER: How did your family react to your decision?

ASHBAUGH: Well my mother was still at home looking after my younger brothers, and my father was in the British Army, and when the boys were killed it was a terrible shock to him, a dreadful shock, I don't think he ever got over he later died at 62 still breathing, so I felt I should step up, and I was disappointed at having to do the course over again which would put me way behind as a nursery nurse and getting on to be a registered nurse so I went down to the recruiting office to join the air force, well I originally wanted to join the navy as a WREN because my brothers had been at sea, but they were full, and an extremely fine, kind recruiting officer said "I've looked at your papers, you are excellent for what we need, it's a secret course and very rewarding." And when she said clerk I thought oh gosh I'm going to be sitting behind a type writer, and she said "No it has nothing to do with that I'm quite sure you'll pass the course." Incidentally there were thirty girls taking the course and three of us passed the intelligence test so it turned out to be very good.

INTERVIEWER: How did you go from the nursery course to the plotter course Mrs. Ashbaugh?

ASHBAUGH: I was almost finished the nursery's nurses course and came down very ill with diphtheria, very very ill. Ended up in a convalescent home and when I got back, I was told by Matron that I would have to re-do the course with new young entrants and I was so disappointed I went and had lost my brothers in the navy in the war so I went down to the recruiting office, expecting to join the WRCN's, and they were full, so my next choice was the air force.

INTERVIEWER: How did your family react to your decision?

ASHBAUGH: Well my mother was fine but my father, being in the army, and in those days I'm afraid men were a bit misogynist about females in the services, and he wasn't too pleased. It was just a male thing, and us girls in all three services encountered a lot of it until they realized well into the war how useful and how brave we all were and it worked out well in the end, mostly we were good friends and buddies and colleagues.

INTERVIEWER: What qualifications did you have?

ASHBAUGH: Well the recruitment officer went over my high school and the papers from where I'd been nursing and so I had said if I can't join the navy I wouldn't mind being a transport transfer in the WAF because I had to learn to drive and arrange and at the same time her majesty, same age, seventeen, was learning how to drive a lorry or truck and how to fix the engine and what was good for her majesty was good for me, we were the same age we still are. And so she said "I'm sorry that's full." And she said "But I've looked at your papers here, your qualifications and you'd be excellent for something I have in mind." And I said "What's that?" and she said "Clerk special duties." And I said "But really I don't want to sit behind a typewriter, in fact I don't even know how to type." and she said "No it's nothing to do with that. It's quite secret. You are [sic] would be going for a pig in a poke. She said "I'm quite sure you'll be fine."

And I thought well, here goes, so I did, and after doing basic training at Wenslow and we took a lot of intelligence tests, a tremendous amount, three days, and out of the thirty women there were four of us that qualified, and they're still my dearest friends. We all went together down to Bentley-Priory.

INTERVIEWER: Could you please speak about your training?

ASHBAUGH: After the basic training, the other three women and myself loaded up with all our gear, kit bags, tin hats, gas masks, the whole works, onto the train for Bentley-priory. When we got there, we knew we had to do training for the task at hand, and there was quarters set aside and we went over there and started to learn how to be plotters which was a very difficult course, being run by a very tough male flight sergeant, and we all thought we'd never master this, it's too difficult, the brain can't do this, but it's amazing what the brain will do and eventually we were all able to plot. It's a very complicated course and a very complicated, situation.

INTERVIEWER: How long did your training take?

ASHBAUGH: I believe it was ten days to two weeks. At first it seemed impossible, but at one point the brain clicks in and you have it, it goes, it can do it, and I was just so pleased that I was able to do this complicated manoeuvre so fast and so accurately, so as soon as we passed that course the beaming smile of the flight sergeant we went across the road and readied to go down the ramp into the Ops room at Bentley-Priory.

INTERVIEWER: Where did you serve?

ASHBAUGH: I served at Bentley-Priory, which is a large, old, former girl's private school, which was excavated down 60 feet below the ground to the Ops room and the filter room and we were quartered, my three friends now and I, in another former girl's private school, and it's near Stanmore, in fact there is an air force permanently at Stanmore and Bentley-Priory was a few miles down the road from the permanent air force base. Later us four were moved from our private girls school quarters to the main base at Stanmore and would go by truck, sitting in the back of an open truck, to go on watch at Bentley-and-Priory. Now this all happened between August 1943, till, late 1944. No wrong, till the middle of 45.

INTERVIEWER: Could you please describe a typical day?

ASHBAUGH: Well, plotters were divided up into four watchers, A, B, C, and D watch. [It] depended which watch you were on, either eight in the morning until four in the afternoon, four till midnight, or midnight through till eight in the morning. And, you always hoped that you wouldn't get the night watch because you would be so tired the next day you couldn't go up to London and kick up your heels. So a typical day on day watch, eight till four, you would go by truck from Stanmore when we were stationed there, to Bentley-Priory. You went in the main door through and then you had to go down a long slope because the Ops room and filter room were down sixty feet below the ground, and we went down the slope and at the foot of the slope was a desk with an officer, a female officer, with a bible, you put your hand on the bible and you swore you would not reveal anything you saw or heard in the Ops room, ever. And in we went, plugged into the table next to who was ready to come off duty and took over the plots where she had left off, and plotted all day, some days were a little quieter than others, but by the time I

started to plot the main action over great Britain was during the Battle of Britain but I was too young in those days, most of the girls who plotted then in the Battle of Britain got their commissions and a lot of them then ended up at Bletchley Park which was where the codes were broken and did a lot of work there. I've met one of them the other day in her nineties and she said a lot of us had nervous break downs at Bletchley Park it was so intense, 12 hour watches. So anyway a typical day was to plot, you took turns at which part of the table because some were more intense than others. I was usually down around the mouth of the river Thames, a lot of action going on there. By this time Canada had six crew over formed in Great Britain and a lot of the bombers that flew out of Great Britain over Europe we plotted. We plotted V1s which were buzz bombs, but then when the V2s came in, the missiles, we were all taken down into the social room and our CO with a very white face said "There is something new ladies and it can't be plotted it's too fast." And one hit about three hundred yards from us and buried itself in the ground, and we don't think it would have penetrated sixty feet had been closer. One of the terrifying things were if you plotting and the last plot was near where you were on the map, you waited for the next plot, or a, or a loud noise outside. I got mixed up with a lot of V1s one time, it got very very hectic, and the big buzz bombs were going over further up in England. They'd changed course and were going right across the whole country into Northern Ireland and we're all plotting like mad trying to keep up with them, and after it was all over we all sat down and took a big breath, and all the brass up in the balcony were watching and I had been knitting a sock on steel needles in the pauses and breaks, we all did something, read letters from boyfriends overseas that sort of thing, and I sat on the steel needles and screamed and jumped up and all the brass back on their feet thinking something ghastly was happening, and I very ashamed facedly sat down, held up the knitting to show them what had happened and they gave me a dirty look. So that's a typical day down in the Ops room. We got our plots of course, from the filter room who worked terribly hard, and most of the all black and white movies you've seen like the Battle of Britain movie and that sort of thing, the girls you are looking at who are pushing things out onto the table are in the filter room. There were never any photographs, movies, or anything like that taken of the Ops room. It was very secret, we were not allowed to have a diary, not allowed to photograph, not allowed to make notes, or every talk about it. So there were a lot of young girls, 17 to 21, walking around London with all these secrets in their heads, and you know it's amazing when look back and think about how much we knew and how much we just did not talk about.

INTERVIEWER: What were you told about your work and how it fit into the larger war effort?

ASHBAUGH: Well a lot of people knew nothing about the plotters until the movie Battle of Britain came out and they observed the girls working at the table and realized they were a great part of the fighter command and the original first girls at the Battle of Britain were tuned in to the airmen and the aircraft and heard the screams and cries of the burning airmen and that sort of thing. I wasn't involved in that that was before my time, but all of that came out in that movie and people, a few people realized that we were, we were important. Most of aircrew knew about us because if they went down into the ocean we were able to pinpoint where they were, and we sent girls out in boats to pick them up. Aircraft went out and spotted where they were and the girls went out and picked them up. Women were very active in several branches of the air force that aren't well known. In fact women in the Second World War in Great Britain were very involved in everything and a lot of the men that have been leery about women being in the forces changed their minds. In fact to deviate a little, they I must say this, the women in the army my

age were over in Hyde park handling, with no men there, the Ack-Ack guns that shooting down the bus bombs, and the women on the barrage balloons were being shot at by intruder German planes coming in underneath our bombers, they were painted black and couldn't be seen and they would aim down the guy wirers of the barrage balloons and shoot the girls on the barrage balloons. A lot of this was kept secret during the war for morale. It wasn't in the newspapers, very little has ever come out about the women in the war. Of course female troops now in the Canadian Army are right up front and we are losing those women too, and I'm very proud of them.

INTERVIEWER: Can you tell me about your rank?

ASHBAUGH: Well, in the air force one started off as aircraft woman two and then one and then leading aircraft woman and then sergeant and flight sergeant and warrant officer. And one could take a course if one was suitable and get their commission. I was very young and we were kept down as aircraft women one and two, so that was my rank.

INTERVIEWER: What was the reporting structure?

ASHBAUGH: Well, we had two female corporals on the floor, who in between breaks gave us exercises and that sort of thing and then up in the second balcony we had a female and a male who was a Canadian, warrant officers who oversaw what we were doing and would occasionally plug in to various members' of the plotters, the clerks, and double check that they were getting their plots accurately. And I never had a problem, ever, and the female warrant officer had originally been the head of wayward girls in the Midlands, and was very tough. The WAF, the plotters at Bentley-Priory were very laid back, they were very special in regarded as being very special, so they were very *laissez-fair* about their outfits. They would wear great big scarves in the back of the truck, they would wear maybe their tunics around the table, all they would wear in hot weather their sleeves rolled up. This woman felt that we should all be covered up in overalls that were issued but that were never worn by plotters but they were worn in other trades, baby blue overalls, to keep our uniforms clean. And there were a lot of run-ins with this female, but one of the plotter's fathers was very high ranking in the air force and I think he told her to put a cork in it, and she shut up. So they were a very happy, very very collegiate bunch of women.

INTERVIEWER: What opportunities for recreation did you have?

ASHBAUGH: Well when you were on day watch, 8 till 4, you hurried back, got changed into a clean shirt, quickly rubbed up your shoes, fussed around your hair, most of us wore our hair, sort of shoulder length, but of course you weren't allowed to do that so you put a chiffon scarf around your head, on top of your head, tied a knot in it and then tucked all your hair in so you had a roll, so it'd be off your collar and then you put your hat on. And so most WAF that you saw would have a roll of hair around the rim of their hat and their neck would show, quite attractive and then you could let your hair down when you were in mufty, mufty being civilian clothes, which none of us had because we weren't issued with any clothing coupons unless you came from a big family and your mum and dad would give you some of their coupons for civilian clothes, I didn't have any. So we would head up to London in uniform, and head for, usually we liked to go dancing, or there were free dances and free shows, or to a pub, now that doesn't sound very good

because we were all under age, but once you were in uniform nobody knew how old you were and the pubs weren't just to get drunk or to drink they were to meet people and they were packed solid, and we had men, young men, especially in London wherever they were stationed within, you know, train distance of London, would come into what they called the Big Smoke and head for the pubs and head for the dances and the free shows for service people. Lord Nuffield, wonderful man, original maker of Morris cars, very wealthy, wanted to do his bit for the war, so we went to the Nuffield club and there would be dancing there, wonderful shows, Major Glen Miller and his band were there, you never knew who it was going to be. Christine and I went there one night not knowing what was going to be on, sat in the front row, the curtains opened and there was Major Glen Miller with his full orchestra with Johnny Desmond singing on the microphone, hanging over singing to two little WAFS sitting there with their eyes as big as saucers. It was all very wonderful. Then you could go to the Rainbow Club which was American and you could get a waffle with ice cream on it and strawberries. Nothing was too good for the Americans, and you could go to the donut dugout which was also American and you could chit about all kinds of places to go a lot of them free for all the forces, and there was the free French, the free Dutch, the free Poles, Australians, New Zealanders, Americans, Canadians, everything, and not to many women, so we had a good time.

INTERVIEWER: How did you meet your future husband?

ASHBAUGH: In a pub, where else? That was where you met people during the war. And, I was with some girlfriends, we were all, you know we didn't have much money, so we were all drinking half a pint of beer, and he said, he came up behind my chair and I was looking toward my friend who was sitting on the padded bench on the other side of the table and he said "Well hello girls where have I met you before?" You know a very corny line, and all I could see was two hands on either side of the back of my chair, and they all switched to gin and it, which is gin and tonic, and I stayed with my half a pint of beer, so he calls me his cheap date, and then they wanted him to take them to a dance, and he didn't want to dance, he said "I'm wearing my rubber soled shoes I don't dance when I'm wearing rubber soled shoes." [He] came around and sat down, they all bogged off to the dance and I was left alone with him, and we went out for dinner, and he had to catch a train at ten o'clock back to his base. And he wrote my telephone number on a ten pound note which we spent at the bar in his officer's mess and had to get it back, that's how I met him. Now that we just saw each other infrequently and eventually he was posted over to Italy where he did his second tour of Ops. And he was a flying officer then, and became a flight lieutenant, distinguished flying course. And we were married in 1945, June the 22nd, and we will be having our sixty-fifth wedding anniversary this June the 22nd here in Victoria.

INTERVIEWER: Can you speak about your demobilization?

ASHBAUGH: Well I was, getting ready to call it quits and just be a civilian married woman, and the end of the war came, and on V-E Day, well the day before V-E Day all of us WAF were gathered together that weren't busy because traffic was slow, not much going on in the air, put on a bus not told where we were going, taken to this airport, airdrome, the name of which I can't come up with, it's somewhere in records I guess, where all the returning prisoners of war, British and Allies were coming back to. And we were told to sit down and be ready to start sowing, sowing on wings, ribbons, ranks, sergeants stripes that sort of things onto uniforms for these ex-

prisoners of war and, on V-E Day they threw this huge party in the hanger, so that's where I was on V-E Day, in the hanger with little tables all around, they'd come up with some bunting from somewhere, they came up with a store of alcohol which they'd kept hiding, they had hidden away for this particular day, because they knew we were going to win how I don't know but they knew, and we had to go around to the different tables and sit down and talk to these chaps, the ones who were able to attend a lot of them were still in sick bay, terribly thin, terribly emaciated had to be fed gruel, stomachs were so small, and couldn't have regular food, and we didn't dare let them have the roast beef and Yorkshire pudding they'd all been dreaming about until they were better, but the ones who were captured later during the war were still ambulatory and ok, and that's what I did on V-E- Day and I was de-mobbed after that, but I did want to talk about that and how awful so many of our kids looked when they came back from the German prison camps. I have a picture taken by a little camera in a button, on a uniform of an air force chap, of some, some prisoners receiving their Red Cross parcels, in Germany in a prison camp, with a chain from their belt to their wrists, gosh knows how they handled it in the bathroom, receiving their Red Cross parcels. I've got this tattered old picture that I keep, which reminds me, that at least when we took prisoners of war they were taken to Canada and fed and housed properly and also in Great Britain as short as we were of food they were not mistreated, but our prisoners were very badly treated in Germany, very badly.

INTERVIEWER: Could you just address your demobilization please?

ASHBAUGH: Yes, I was now a married woman and decided my time was up, and they asked me if I would like to keep my grey coat or have five pounds for it, so I took the five pounds and bought myself a nice overcoat, a civilian overcoat. And my husband now had done two tours of Ops and was now on transport command 168 Squadron, flying, to Europe delivering parcels and mail to our troops, our allied troops in Germany and in Holland, and they were stationed at Biggin, not Biggin Hill, yes Biggin Hill in Kent, right, former RAF fighter station, and, so I moved to Biggin Hill right after I was de-mobbed, and frequented the pub that the fighter pilots in the Battle of Britain used to go to called the Goal, spelt G-O-A-L, had a wonderful time there, and when Fred finally got on transport command from, Lossiemouth in Scotland to Ottawa, transatlantic, he would bring back things and I would distribute some of the things like bananas to children who had never seen them before, in Biggin Hill in the village, and the first little boy was terrified of them and screamed and wouldn't touch them. That's how short they were of food to eat and it went on a long time after the war was over in Great Britain they were still short of food, still rationed, so we used to send parcels from Canada to Great Britain.

INTERVIEWER: How did you feel about your service then and from the vantage point of today?

ASHBAUGH: Well I knew what I was doing then was very important, although I feel that it was more important now, I see now that it was, but then I was just a young girl and it was an important job, I was very focused, very serious, but busy having a good time when I was off watch. I've always been very proud of what I did, very proud, and anybody who was in the air force and knew anything about it always said "Oh you were a plotter." So I knew it was an important job, we had to plot the aircraft, everybody needed to know where they were, what was going on, intelligence desperately needed to know what was going on, what was happening, and I look back now and, I realize it was such a part of my young life, the friendships, and the

comradeship, and my whole doing something for the war to make up for losing Ernie and Cecil. And that I did my bit, and so did my father.

INTERVIEWER: How did your husband court you Mrs. Ashbaugh, and how did you know he was the one?

ASHBAUGH: There wasn't amongst aircrew, usually the regular courting as one knows it today, it was a come and go sort of thing, he would come in on the odd weekend, he phoned and sometimes he'd arrive and sometimes he wouldn't. And one never asked because people were doing important things and it was a very semi-casual sort of thing. A lot of Fred's friends who married before the war, were under a lot of stress you know, Fred and I now today are surprised at how many men are going to Afghanistan and leaving three little kids behind and a wife and that sort of thing. Back then, they tried not to get involved, not to get married if they could, once they were overseas. There were some weddings, but not usually until the war was almost over a lot of people got married in 45 when the war was coming to an end and when it was over. But, he and a lot of his friends felt you didn't want to have that sort of pressure that your mind was on getting the job done, staying focused, because you had a big crew that were depending on you that you had to come back, seven in his crew. So, it was a very casual, fun loving, good time, and I wouldn't call it a courtship, not until he was on transport command and he found out where I was, that's how casual it was, through going to air ministry in London, finding out where I was, phoning my CO, I'd just come back of leave, and she called me into the office and I came to attention and saluted and said "Yes Mam." And she said "There is a very impertinent young Canadian officer pulling rank on me and telling me that you are to have more leave." And I said "Really?" and she said "Yes, it's flight lieutenant Ashbaugh." "Oh" I said "Ash." 'Cause that's what I called him in those days, his mother put a stop to that, she said "My son's name is Fred." And that's what he's been ever since, but I digress. So, I knew I'd been crazy about him ever since I'd met him but I wasn't one of those girls that was, you know, going to say "Oh I'm in love with you, how could you leave me." And all that stuff because I was made of different stuff than that. And, so, he phoned me and he said "Will you marry me?" and I said "Of course." So he said "Well come on down to London, and we'll tie the knot." And that was it. So I came down to London, he put me up in a lovely hotel, stayed on his base, and then I went down to see my father who was now out of the army, got his permission, and signed all the papers, I was still underage you had to be twenty-one, and we went to Burnt Oak, which was the closest to Stanmore, and were married there on June the 22nd 1945.

INTERVIEWER: Now.

ASHBAUGH: Well when I knew I was getting married I found out that L-Street studies which was near Bentley-Priory were offering any of the girls that wanted period wedding gowns from any of their movies they could have it, but I didn't want that. My husband thought that I was going to be married in uniform, I didn't want that either, but I managed to get a couple of coupons off my sister, and bought myself a little two piece blue outfit, whole outfit top and skirt, and Margo, my best friend still is, and I, went to the service women's outfit next door to Madame Tussaud's in London and stayed there overnight, and went to Woolworth the next day, and for one six pence each I bought some blue and white feathers, curly feathers, and some blue netting. Margo had a red silk dress she was from a very wealthy family in Scotland, and she still had this red silk dress that she had bought in Paris before the war, and she bought some red cloth,

red and white cloth carnations and some red veiling and we stitched together two wee little hat things for the top of our hair, I was no longer blonde in front, and I wore this blue two piece outfit and Fred had bought me, I told him he said "What kind of flowers do you want?" Because everybody wore corsages and I said "Gardenias, I love them." And he didn't know what a gardenia was, told the woman in the florist "They're round white flowers." And she made up a corsage of three white carnations, which I was not happy about but I didn't say anything. And I forget, oh red and white carnations for Margo which matched her hat. And we got in this taxi, outside Madame Tussaud's, and went all the way to Burnt Oak which was the nearest registry office, you had to go to the nearest registry office to where you were stationed, and there was Ash and his friend Freddy T, standing outside and Margo said "Now Pat, I will get out first and I will help you out." Oh she was very hoity-toity was Margo "And I will hold out my hand and you will step like a lady out of the taxi." One of those big black London taxis, the driver was taking this all in, and she said "My good man you will wait here until after the ceremony and you will drive us back to London." So we got there, I saw them and I leaped right over her. And his famous words were "Well you were here on time, it was almost time for the pub next door to open." He was being funny. "I had to decide whether to go in and get married or to go and have a pint of beer." There was a lovely smell of old tobacco and beer coming, wafting out, and Freddy and I said "How about a beer first?" But they didn't get one. We went in, where Daisy Flack, who Fred swears was ninety-one, which he is now by the way, used a quill pen which she didn't she used a straight pen to sign this very long long official form that we were now going to be married, and we were married by the justice of the piece and Daisy Flack and Freddy were the witnesses.

INTERVIEWER: Interview with Pat Ashbaugh end of side one.

INTERVIEWER: Canadian War Museum 17 May 2010. Side two. Could you please tell me about your reception?

ASHBAUGH: Well my father couldn't get away, so here was myself and Ash and Margo and Freddy T., and Ash said "Let's all go up to the Haymarket Club where I'm a member." Because every time he came to the Big Smoke he would go up there to have a drink and they kept some whisky under the bar for special people. And so off we went in the same taxi that had been sitting there all this time and, oh Margo ran across the street that was it, she ran across the street, she noticed a photographer there I guess that's why they had a photography store there for people coming out of Burnt Oak and grabbed the guy and brought him over with his cameras so we have some nice wedding pictures of us all standing in a row and then just the two of us, and got our name and address and that sort of thing which we got them later. Anyway off we go to the Haymarket Club, and it was a lovely place inside it was on top of a pub called the Captain's Cabin, lot of Canadian's would go there during the war, and it is now called the Maple Leaf Club, and a lot of Canadian's go back and go into the bar, and Fred and I went back years and years later and went into the bar and Fred said to the girl, "Is Alice still here?" He used to bring her nail varnish and stuff and get whisky under the counter and this young chap said "Dad!" Anyway that's a little aside. We got to the Haymarket Club upstairs it was very ritzy, very nice up there and the hostess came forward, she ran the place – I think she owned it, in her long gown, and it was noon by now and we were sitting on a big coach and I guess we were a little lovey dovey and one does not do that in England, and she came over and said "I'm sorry, I don't allow that sort of thing in here." And then she noticed the confetti stuck in my hair 'cause Margo

had bough confetti and thrown it everywhere, and she said "Did you just get married?" And I said "Yes." And she said "Oh my goodness, I am so thrilled. I will give you a wedding breakfast." Now a wedding breakfast isn't a breakfast it's a main wedding meal, used to be in England. By golly she had the chef cook up this gorgeous meal, I can' remember what was in it, everything under the sun that you could still get, I think a lot of the stuff could be got on the black market during the war, and we had this fabulous meal, a lot of fun, went off to the Piccadilly hotel, by this time it's late afternoon around four o'clock they had a tea dance there, so we, you get up and you'd dance and you'd come back and there's a pot of tea and little cakes, and you'd get up and dance some more. That's where we used to meet a lot of guys as a matter of fact because they'd come over to your table and join you for tea. And then after that we wandered around London and then we went for dinner to, to, oh what was the name of that place, and it had a big whole right down through the middle of the four floors and the top floor was Chinese food, which I just learned about and loved, so we had Chinese food, and then went off to Fred's favourite hotel which he knew the woman on the desk, the Imperial Hotel. And, I forget the name of the square, but I know every time I hear them sing Barclay's Square that song, Nightingale sang in Berkeley Square on our honeymoon and that's where we stayed. And I put my corsage on the little glass shelf in the bathroom, and in the morning it had disappeared I think the maid stole it, I was very angry about that and everybody looked blank when I asked about it. But it didn't matter I had my wedding ring and my husband and everything was wonderful. And we toured London and then went down to Kent to visit with a very special lady, who had a huge home down there that'd we'd gone to during the war, Margo's friends, and we spent a week's honey moon there, at Mimi Pal's beautiful estate. She was an American that had gone to England in the 30s with her husband who was the head of Standard Oil of America, a lot of Americans had summer homes in England in the country and she'd bought a squireage and her husband who she lovingly called Bubbles had died, so she entertained down there and she had all people from Ambassadors, everybody. Fred was out in the garden one time on a subsequent visit and there was a chap in sort of grubby clothes pruning the roses, and Fred said to him "You know my mother has roses back in Canada, she just loves them." And they got chatting and the chap said to him "Do you like to play billiards?" and Fred said "Yes, well pool I can do pool." So he said "We'll have a game before dinner." And Fred thought the gardener is coming in? So Fred went in to play billiards with the chap and the chap was the admiral of the New Zealand navy. People did that around Mimi Pal's place, you just pitched in, we all went out on our honeymoon and picked blackberries for the cook to make blackberry pie. And the dinners there were all so elegant and fabulous, and the breakfasts all laid out on the side table all in warming pans, everything you could imagine because she could use the stuff off the farm, and it was a wonderful honeymoon, we had a wonderful time.

INTERVIEWER: How long were you in England before going to Canada after your marriage?

ASHBAUGH: Well I finished up my time in the air force and went to Biggin Hill as a civilian, and Fred went to, back to Canada to fly between Ottawa and Lossiemouth in Scotland. And he had gone to London to see about getting me onto a ship to Canada because they war had come to an end by now, and I was, I'd now become pregnant and they would only let women leave if they weren't six months pregnant otherwise they had to stay until the baby was a toddler and we didn't want that, so they said "Sorry, everything's full." And the *Queen Mary* was taking a huge amount of war brides over there, down to New York and then by train and up to Canada, American servicemen and there was nothing left. And I don't know, he was pretty good at

arguing, and he said a bottle of scotch didn't hurt to the guy, and got me a berth on the *Stavangerfjord*, which was a Norwegian passenger ship, medium sized, for January 1946, I was under six months pregnant, so I could go, and there were five hundred pregnant war brides leaving on it, and it had been commandeered by the Germans during the war and had never been refurbished. And the signs were still up on the wall saying "Achtung! Achtung!" And a whole bunch of stuff in German, and the floors were so gauged up by German boots, from they used it as a troop ship. So I was, had to take bus, Fred was now in Canada, I had to take a bus on my own with my suitcases and my little black fez hat on my head and my black suit, tightly buttoned you couldn't tell I was pregnant, on a bus on a bus up to London to find a train for the war brides and I kept asking questions around, I think I left from, it was the train that went I think from Paddington, I'm not sure, up to Liverpool where they ship was departing. It could have been Paddington but I'm not positive. Anyways I go up the escalator to the platform lugging my two suitcases and here's this train and it's chalked along the side, British war brides, and just as I got to the platform there's all these young girls, milling around, weeping mothers crying their daughters were leaving, toddlers, a whole cacophony of sound, up the escalator came up a lot of tired dusty British troops, and they called us a lot of bad names, because we'd married Canadians while they were off fighting on the dessert and in Europe and that sort of thing. So we got onto the train, I put my little black fez, you know what a fez is a, Egyptian wear them, a black fez with a tassel on the top, loved that hat, we wore funny hats during the war, and we, I set it on the seat and darn it I left it there I'm so unhappy about that I would have loved have kept that hat. Never mind, got to Liverpool, nothing ready for us, no hotels, nothing, the ship wasn't leaving till the next day, so they laid straw all over the floor of the place where they kept parcels and machinery and stuff and we could sleep on that they said or sit around on a bench all night. And we got a little wee saucer with two tablespoons of cold pork and beans and that was it. And babies crying, women, a lot of people had taken sandwiches and stuff like that that their parents had given them thank heaven, I didn't have anything. So when we boarded the ship the next day, a big rush for the dining room, and there was all this Norwegian food laid out, hams and cheeses and all this stuff, and everybody devouring like wolves until we got out into the Irish sea and the waves started to get big and rolling and everybody was very sea sick especially me. So I went down, crawled down to the cabin, and it was a cabin for two but it had to hold four and I got into my lower bunk and there I stayed, and the very irate crabby Norwegian stewardess handed me a cardboard thing to vomit in and finally after a couple of days at sea, very ill, I said "I can't stay here I've got to get out, got to get some air." And I got out, crawled up these huge stairs, onto the dining deck and the ship was pitching around it was January 1946. The worst storm they'd had in the Atlantic in ten years I'm informed. Fred is now flying over the ship and he recorded the waves at thirty feet on his altimeter, and he was to meet me in Montreal. And it was a terrible trip, everybody very ill we lost some babies, I mean they aborted, and miscarried, we used to call it aborted in England, miscarried now, babies were born, you know before their time, and when we got to Halifax it was bitterly cold, came up on deck and even the seagulls were walking around with his wings down, ice on the rigging, oh it was a mess, and who should we be met by but a snarky little ex-English immigration officer who treated us like a herd of cattle, that we shouldn't be there, and he said "Your train, your train isn't here, it's down in New York bringing Canadian servicemen home, they're more important than you girls, and we're getting some old trains off the siding and they'll be ready soon we hope." This is that famous port that they showed on TV a while back, with all these happy girls arriving, well we weren't happy. Five hundred pregnant war brides and toddlers and they put us aboard the train. When it finally came

in, and if you banged the seat the dust came up, you couldn't see through the windows because they were all filthy and dirty and fogged over, and it was a big mess and they thought to cheer us up they'd bring a Mountie on board in his scarlet tunic to show us a Mountie and we all went ho hum we'd seen Nelson Eddie and Janet McDonald, but what we didn't know that they had been in khaki during the war and this was a big treat to see them in red serge but we didn't care. I was in an upper bunk which was hard to climb up and down. And then all the lights went out before we got in to Montreal and stopped in Montreal in the dark in a dirty train and I heard a voice say "Patty, Patty are you there?" And there he was. And he came on board and as he came through the door this Canadian army officer said "You're an officer aren't you?" And he said "Yes, why?" And he said, handed him a big sheet of paper, he said "I can get the hell off of here, you're in charge of the five hundred pregnant war brides, but you can have a compartment." So Fred was in charge of all these pregnant war brides all the way through to Vancouver and various things that happened on that trip were something else. We got one woman, who was way over six months pregnant but had hidden it, and had to be taken off in Sault Ste. Marie screaming "I want my Mum." On a sleigh. And then we got to Winnipeg, and at each stop there would be parents meeting their new daughters-in-law and husbands who were no longer handsome in uniform but wearing civi suits and fedoras, and the women said "Oh he don't look as nice in his civi clothes as he does in uniform." Red Cross girls with cigarettes and candy. And in Winnipeg there was this lady and gentlemen, she had a full length mink with lovely white hair with a blue rinse in it waiting for her daughter-in-law, the husband had been killed, and this big, very blonde, very over made up girl from the East End of London with a toddler and a new baby, got off the train handed the baby to the lady and we heard her say "Well he's pissed on me all across the Atlantic now he can piss on you." In a cockney accent. And that poor woman's face, and off went the train. And there was another girl, she got to a space, I don't know where it was somewhere on the prairies, and there was a horse and cart waiting full of Indians, Canadian Indians, First Nations, and she got off and the Red Cross said "Did you know you were going to a reservation?" And she said "What's that? I married a Spanish guy." And they said "No he wasn't Spanish, he's a Canadian Indian." 'Cause that's what they called them then, and the guy on the horse and cart called out "Did you bring your liquor license?" Well we didn't know what that was. So the lady said "Would you rather stay or do you want to get back on the train?" And she said "I think I'll get back on the train." So she did, and there were incidents like that all the way along until we got to Vancouver, where I was met with my mother and father-in law in a very large black car, a (*inaudible)* I think it was. And she said to me "Oh you've lost it." And I said "No, no I'm just a bit thin we didn't have much to eat in England and I couldn't eat on the ship because I was so sea sick. No the baby's fine." And I said "Ash and I are so glad to be here." And she said "My son's name is Fred." And so he's been Fred ever since. I can't bring myself to call him Ash, I don't know why, I just I can't, I'm so terrified. We saw the mountains, and I looked at them and of course we used kind of choice language during the war, that's the way it was, and I looked at the mountains and said "Oh my God. Aren't they big." And she said, poked me in the back because I was upfront with his Dad and said "We don't use that kind of language over here. We do not take the lord's name in vain." And I thought oh my, what am I in for. But we became best friends, I did everything I was told, made a pie the way a Canadian girl was supposed to make pie, because Canadian men like pies, they gave me a little book when I embarked and it said what Canadian men like to eat. So I've still got the book, and they don't want to have sausage and mash they want this and that and the other thing and be prepared to cook it for them. So my mother-in-law taught me how to make a really good pie crust. Well we

didn't have the stuff during the war you know to make all these things so we became best friends and she was a teetotaler so I didn't drink anywhere near her. And when the first baby was due, which was June the 23rd, one year and one day after we were married, we had gone out to celebrate our first anniversary and of course I didn't drink anything but then it didn't matter in those days you could drink but I didn't feel I could, so when we got home, I think Fred had drunk too much and he was throwing up in the basement suite below his mother's house, mother and father's house in Dunbar in Vancouver, and she came to the head of the stairs at two in the morning and said "What's going on down there?" and he said "Patty's having morning sickness." Everybody was a little bit in awe of Mrs. Ashbaugh the senior, as I say we became best friends and she left me all her jewellery, so that was fine. So welcome to Canada, and I decided not to join any of the war bride clubs, go to any of the English teas, I was going to be Canadian, bring my children up Canadian, and I sat down and studied everything about Canada from the time it was formed, I have a whole slew of books about it, taught my children about it and they all got A's in social studies because I helped them through it all. And that's how it's been I'm a very proud Canadian, Canada's been extremely good to me.

INTERVIEWER: What did you know of Canada before heading over?

ASHBAUGH: Well when I was in the air force and I got married our Queen B, now the Queen B is the CO, the Commanding Officer, came in and she sat on my bed, she was a large lady with a very large chest full of medals and in those days you could wear your own medals on the left and your husband's medals on the right, you can't anymore it's not allowed and he'd been killed and she was very much found of him, lovely lady, and she put her hand on my knee and she said "My dear, do you realize what you're doing? Do you realize you are going to Canada." And I said "Yes." And she said "Well it isn't England you know. They're sort of colonials over there." And I said "Well I don't mind as long as I'm with Ash, we'll make a wonderful life together." Well she said "I'm glad you feel like that and I hope it keeps on going forever. I just wanted to make sure you knew what you were doing." "Oh" I said "There's nothing left here for me." I said "My father is getting remarried, and my brothers are gone, and I just as soon as go somewhere new." And it was an adventure, so that was fine. But all I knew about Canada was that in school we'd been shown some old scratchy film of the different colonies, different parts of the Empire, incidentally the maps in English schools in those days were England Britain was pink and all of Canada was pink, and New Zealand and Australia were pink, and India was pink. So of course we were all a part of the Empire, not anymore thank heavens. But all we'd seen and all I knew about it was that there were that men that cut logs and rolled their feet on logs and rolled them down a thing into the water and wore plaid shirts and funny hats, and that way out across Canada suddenly it got very warm and they grew peaches in British Columbia, and I thought what an amazing place and I had no idea it would take seven days by train to get across it, and that most of it would be deep in snow in January and that when you looked out the window of the train there would be a little wee trough cut through for people that wore moccasins, walking down these little tracks on the prairies, regular, ordinary people not First Nations. And it was all amazing and a lot of us girls thought "Good lord, all the houses are made of wood." Where they're made of brick and stone in England. "My gosh they must freeze to death they look like cow sheds." Of course Ontario does have some brick buildings but then we got out further west and all these wooden houses. And they looked like a movie set from, the Hollywood movies we'd seen, the old western movies, wooden houses. We were quite surprised but all we knew was the odd little picture on the Gaumont British news, and in school.

INTERVIEWER: Can you remember any one unique experience?

ASHBAUGH: Well when we got off the train at Winnipeg it was sixty below, my hands froze on the rails you hold to go down the steps, my earrings froze on my ears, and at (inaudible) down the road, and Fred said "Look I'd better get a taxi right away." And we jumped off into a taxi and we needed some warmer clothes, and we didn't get any but we went into a food store I don't know why, (we didn't need any food), and I saw all this food laid out in the food department, and I was just staring at all this stuff, cheeses, and eggs, and bacon and hams and all this stuff and I broke down and wept and he said "What on earth are you crying for?" And I said "You all have so much and you haven't gone without anything, and we have no food at all over there, we're even eating canned whale me, and we line up for hours, and they'll be starving for a long time after the war, we'll have to send parcels." There was a big sign up saying parcels for England sign up here, so of course when we got to Vancouver that's the first thing we did. And another thing was my in-laws took me out for an ice cream treat, and it was a banana split with everything on it three balls of ice cream, whip cream on top, cherries and nuts you name it, and I couldn't eat it all I just couldn't get it down. And I went to the hairdressers and I don't know whether it was a usual thing but she cracked all these eggs into a basin and massaged it into my hair and I said "Why are you doing that?" And she said "Your hair is in dreadful shape. It's all dried out." And I wept again, and she said "What's the matter?" She said. "It'll all wash out and your hair will be shining and lovely." I said "They'd give anything for one egg in England. And here you are putting it all in my hair." So those were just some of the thoughts, the first thoughts that you all had so much over here and there was nothing back at home. And you see we had so many troops from all over the world that we had to feed, a lot of the ships weren't getting through with things because the German U-boats were sinking them so food became quite an issue. The Americans managed to get food to their troops, as many a American mess I'd eaten in lovely food and a big thing if you went on a date with an American he'd bring a cartoon of Camel cigarettes and a can of peaches. So we knew they were being taken care of and the Canadians weren't too bad. Fred was attached as a Canadian to the RAF and he ate RAF food, he was a good soul a good farm boy he always said, loved the carrots, loved the kidneys and gravy, nobody else did he always loved those and he got along fine and ate like a horse wherever you could and when I saw all this food in Canada I couldn't believe it and realized, you know, North America was so far away from what had been going on over in Europe and in Great Britain.

INTERVIEWER: Can you tell me about your art training?

ASHBAUGH: Well I'd always loved to draw, in England as a little girl, well all little English children in standard one which is grade one over here, you draw a snow drop, or you draw a leaf, it's part of your lesson. Art is, was, a very important part, and cooking for girls, and woodwork for boys, right from grade one up you did little things. And so I'd always drawn, loved to draw, loved to draw fairy princesses in big dresses. My mother was a very good artist, much better than I was. And my two brothers that I'd lost were so good at drawing that Ernie could actually draw the diesel engine of a ship with all the component parts. And my second brother Cecil could actually draw to scale a motorbike with all its pistons and things, get a perfect circle for a wheel and all that sort of thing. And he, when he wrote funny letters to me when he was in the merchant navy he'd finish the funny letter to his little sister with a picture of the saint, that little

stick man insignia that the saint detective used to use in his books and in the movies. And in one painting I have at home I did of the boys I have his ship going down and all the smoke and flames coming out and nobody's noticed it but in that smoke and flame where he died is a little stick man saint going up in the clouds. Anyway, I always draw and paint what is near and dear to me, I think most artists do, and when the children were all, the older ones, were all grown up and married and that sort of thing, Mimi was a teenager, and like most teenagers a bit wearing, and there were courses offered. Mr. Trudeau, wonderful Mr. Trudeau I might say, was our Prime Minister at the time, and was putting resources into people going back to school if they had grade ten and to university and to college and I thought golly I think I'll take the chance on that I'd love to learn how to do art properly and I signed up with Douglas College to learn how to do things properly. And I remember the very first class, the teacher started talking about positive and negative and it sounded like electricity to me and I didn't know what he was talking about, I was a mature student and the rest were all grade twelve graduates. And I finally sheepishly put up my hand and said "Sir, what's positive and negative?" And every head turned to see who this stupid person was and he explained to me that the subject in the painting or drawing was the positive and the space around them was the negative and that the negative was as important as the positive for shape and design and of course it clicked in and from that point I was away to the races. And I took, I kept signing on all the time, took more and more extended courses with Douglas College and finally decided this was so marvellous I took art history and took every course in art history I could. Loved everything about it, have book cases full of every kind of art book you can imagine, and devour anything on TV that is art. My teachers were very praise-worthy of me I'd always get straight A's and one day one of them said to me "You really should go to this Banff school of fine art. They have a marvellous course there. Get us three slides and we'll send it." That's required, and each teacher wrote a secret letter that I wasn't allowed to see and I put the slides in with it and it was all sent to the Banff school and I was accepted and along with more grade twelve graduates youngsters within Molly Bobak's class. And she bemoaned the fact that she was stuck with a lot of mature students when she'd rather have the grade twelve kids, which didn't make me feel to good but we became very good friends. At one point lying on the floor of an empty studio and she was sketching away at pictures for her famous book which I have of wildflowers and she used to use everything from paint brushes to twigs and bits and pieces of things to scratch in design, I thought she was marvellous and I tried to do the same but she has a wonderful gift that I don't have. I'm pretty good, but not anywhere near, anywhere near Molly, she's a genius as is her husband. And long after I had graduated, I have to keep going back for so many sessions, I was going through the Vancouver art gallery and looking through postcards by different artists and there was a postcard by some of Molly's flowers, so I bought some, and then they put out, Canada put out stamps of famous artists and there were a stamp for Molly and a stamp for Bruno Bobak, and so I bought the two stamps, put them on Molly's card, I knew where she, I had her address then I have it again but I couldn't say it off hand, and wrote to her. And she brought back and said she was tickled pink to get the card with her picture with those two stamps on it. That's the last I heard from her, I know she has a daughter out here who is a councilwoman on the Saanich Council, but she's married to someone with a long strange name and I haven't been able to locate her, but I've got some things I want to give her, for Molly or to keep for herself, and I'll have to try and find her before I get too much older. But no I thoroughly enjoyed being with Molly, she was just marvellous. She's my mentor, and I just look up to her and her work, I've seen her on TV showing some of her wartime paintings and showing some of the paintings you people have of the First World War. I love all of it, anything on TV

that's on art, and that's very little I'm afraid we get a lot on the Knowledge Network and a little bit on the PBS in the States but not much though. We're quite starved for art on TV.

INTERVIEWER: Can you talk to me a little about the painting you donated to the Canadian War Museum please?

ASHBAUGH: Right, well I usually like to paint what's near to my heart, and I don't find any point in painting aimlessly it's usually something that's very dear to me. And my time as a plotter was one of my special times in my life and Molly Bobak had said to us all you know, "Paint what you know and remember your not god you can't paint flowers and things the way god made them. You can only make a piece of art in between those four pieces of your frame." And so I decided I would paint the picture of my two brothers, it's a story picture that I have of them going off in their little car to war and it's one of those total pictures where everything in it has a meaning, and then I decided why don't I paint my Ops room but it's got four sides to it so I'll open it up like Cezanne would do to his apple paintings to show everything face on and I'll paint it that way so we can see all the balconies, everything that happened, and the only way I can show the top of the table is to have it flat to the picture plane, flat surface, that took quite a long time to do and to figure out to do it scale, and then all the WAF in uniform around the table, and then all the brass as we called it in those days, all the senior officers and important people that were observing what we were doing. So that is why it's in that open concept like that so you can see everything that is going on at once. And I have also written everything that is happening and had it plasticized so that it could maybe be put on display with the painting to explain what is going on.

INTERVIEWER: What is the title of the work?

ASHABAUGH: It's called the clock. Because the clock governed everything we did. Huge clock, up on the wall, where everyone could see it, divided into four different colours, and it was red, yellow, blue. Red, yellow, blue, we didn't use green. Red, yellow, and blue. Stop. Now the reason the painting is called the clock is because this large clock governed everything in the Ops room, it was marked into four and there were three colours, red, yellow, and blue in each quarter and we had little metal arrows that were coloured the same and when we got a plot, we would look at the clock and use the arrows of that colour and when that colour came around again we wiped the last colour off the table, scattered them off the table very fast while we were doing a myriad of other things, and go on plotting. When we had a whole squadron or several squadrons go out together bombers we called that a mass and we had four corners, grey metal corners, which we put at the leading and trailing edges of the mass, and moved the whole thing out at once. And then they would come back sometimes in twos and threes and sometimes not at all, the next day, and it was just a mass going out and then individuals coming back in the next day. And the tracers looked at the clock, the liaison looked at the clock, we all checked the clock. Now the tracers had coloured pencils that were according to the colours on the clock, watched what we did, had tracing paper and pads, sat in the first balcony and traced all the tracks corresponding to the colours and each page was taken down to the secret room, which was out of bounds to everybody except intelligence officers and top brass, where they would pour over these tracings and would make up plots, flights for bomber command for the next mission, the next day. That people like my husband would be using, but when he was assigned a trip over Germany.

INTERVIEWER: Have you exhibited these works before and how have people respond to it?

ASHABAUGH: Well I haven't exactly exhibited to them, them before, but I've sent a picture of them to my WAF magazine for all the other girls and plotters to see all over the world wherever they are. And on Remembrance Day last year I put it in the foyer, each floor of our condo here has a foyer by the elevator which is a very large area, and on Remembrance day I put that up, they wanted something significant from the war and some photographs and that sort of thing and an explanation like I've just given you of what was going on. And one of the ladies in the condo was so intrigued by it and felt unbeknownst to me that it should be seen by people on TV. And when she heard that it was to go to Ottawa, oh that really did it, so the TV cameras came in from the little local TV station, CHQ News, and with a camera man and an interviewer and Fred and I got hauled out. He'd just got come from an air crew meeting he belongs to the air crew association, and he said "What's going on?" I said "Rosemary's has some media here, we gotta go out and be interviewed." So we did. The chap wasn't happy with just that, he wanted to see how and where we lived so here we are toddling down the hallway to our apartment and I'm telling my daughter about this and she said "Were you being photographed as you went down the hall?" And I said "Ya." And she said "Mother not from behind." So he came in and spot a pot of tea, I was to be pouring a pot of tea, and all this nonsense, but then he tried on Fred's medals, I made a shadow box for Fred's medals and of course he was decorated and was in every area of the war and he's got a lot of medals. So it was very nice, all very nice, but that's the only time I've exhibited that. But when we lived in Pender Harbor after he retired, which is off the coast here, that Sechelt and Gibsons to large centers I was exhibiting other work in five galleries out there and sold some. But I didn't really paint to sell. I painted what I liked and what I loved, and if they wanted to exhibit it or rent it out so be it. We spent a lot of winters in Mexico and I did paintings and drawings of Mexico. And always something that I loved, something that really appealed to me. Nothing just for, people have asked me to do portraits but I don't care to make a business of it, never have.

INTERVIEWER: End of interview with Pat Ashbaugh 17 May 2010.