

**Tuskegee Airmen Oral History Project
National Park Service**

Interview with: Mamie Best Aiken
Interviewed by: Worth Long
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[Tape 1A.]

WORTH LONG: This is April--

MAMIE B. AIKEN: Sixteenth.

LONG: Sixteenth, '01, okay? And I'm Worth Long, National Park Service, doing an interview in Walterboro, South Carolina. All right, could you tell me your name and where and when you were born, please?

AIKEN: My name is Mamie Best Aiken. I was born in Allendale, South Carolina.

LONG: Okay. What was it like growing up in Allendale?

AIKEN: Well, it was very nice for me, only when I found out that my mother and father had separated, then that was causing me trouble. That upset me.

LONG: Tell me about it.

AIKEN: Well, they told me that they separated when I was two years old, and I didn't know anything about that. Then I moved--no, my father moved me to my grandmother's house, and she kept us until it was time for us to go to school. And after that, we moved back with my father because we were growing up then. But they told me--I was a little tomboy when I was growing up, and I would be climbing trees, playing ball, finding anything a boy would do, I would try to do it. He was wondering what schools he could send me to. He decided to send me to Mather School.

LONG: How do you spell that, M-a-?

AIKEN: M-a-t-h-e-r.

LONG: Mather School. And where was that located?

AIKEN: In Beaufort, South Carolina. I don't know--you know, not the island but it is an island.

LONG: And what grades did you enter at Mather?

AIKEN: I entered at [eleventh] grade, and then I finished twelfth grade. Then I came back home, and I started going to South Carolina State. I stayed over there only during the summer because my father was ill, and I thought I should be home with him, so I would go and come every day. And that was kind of rough on me.

LONG: How did you get from one place to the other?

AIKEN: I drove to South Carolina State and then back home.

LONG: Back home to?

AIKEN: Here. From Allendale to Walterboro, because my father opened up a funeral home here, and he was a funeral home--he was an undertaker, rather, until he passed, which was in 1940. He and my mother came back together because he didn't want me being there alone. He wanted a lady to be there with me. And then I started teaching, and I taught first grade, and those are my little darlings. They were very nice. It was in Hendersonville, South Carolina, that I started. Then I had to go to summer school, and that was the best subjects I had, going to summer school. I met quite a few people and I enjoyed them, but in the beginning I had to live with a lady. Her name was **Mrs. James**, in Orangeburg, because I couldn't afford the expensive college. So I started teaching. **Thelma Ordem** was the supervisor here [in Colleton County].

LONG: Of the school system?

AIKEN: Yes.

LONG: Was that a segregated or integrated system then?

AIKEN: It was integrated.

LONG: That's in what years?

AIKEN: In 1944, I think.

LONG: My question had to do with--of what race was your supervisor?

AIKEN: She was black, but she gave it up a few years afterward, and a white lady took it over, and her name was Mrs. **Murray**, and **Thelma Ordem** was our supervisor at first.

LONG: Can you remember when there were no white teachers and pupils here, and where there were just black schools?

AIKEN: The blacks had their school, and the whites had their school.

LONG: I see. Okay.

AIKEN: And teachers. They had their own teachers. They didn't mingle at all.

LONG: On up until about what time did they start to mingle?

AIKEN: I wasn't here then. I was in New York.

LONG: Okay.

AIKEN: It was in 1960?

LONG: In the 1960s. All right. Have you taught since the 1960s?

AIKEN: Yes.

LONG: Okay. And where was that?

AIKEN: Well, I taught a little down here, and then I went to New York, and I had a little course at Cornell University. Then after the course, I started working up there as a director in a child care center.

LONG: Do you remember what the course was that you took?

AIKEN: Education.

LONG: In education? Also in education. So has education been your main--

AIKEN: The main--yes.

LONG: Now, for a woman who grew up over the time that you did, what choices did you have other than education?

AIKEN: Well, I guess--I don't know what they had, but I can tell you what I had, because so many of them, when they finished high school, they went to work for the white man, but my father didn't like that. And then in later years my sister went to embalming school in Cincinnati, Ohio, and she took up embalming, but she didn't like it.

LONG: How many children in your family did your father have?

AIKEN: They had three, but the boy died before I was born, so it left the two girls.

LONG: I see. And did your sister go to school in places like you did before embalming school?

AIKEN: No, she just went to high school, and then she went to embalming school.

LONG: I see. Did she work for a while in the funeral home?

AIKEN: She worked until this lady was letting gas off. She was embalming her, and letting the gas off, from the mouth, and she gave it up. She said she couldn't stand that. So my father--no, I told her that my father put out all that money for her to go to embalming school, and if I were going to embalming school I would continue, I said, because that's where the money was.

LONG: So your family was fairly comfortable during that time.

AIKEN: Yes. In fact, he was an undertaker then.

LONG: What else did he do in the community? Could you tell me his name?

AIKEN: My father's name was Angus Gerard Best, B-e-s-t. He was an undertaker first, and then he became a carpenter, just enough to get by with because, see, people weren't dying that much then.

LONG: They weren't--

AIKEN: Dying that much then.

LONG: What do you mean when you say they weren't dying?

AIKEN: It wasn't no death. You know, people during that time took care of themselves, and quite naturally if you take care of yourself, you're going to live a longer time.

LONG: Are you saying that people were healthy during that era?

AIKEN: Right.

LONG: What did they do that made them healthy during that time and not die off so quickly?

AIKEN: They worked. They worked in the fields, in homes, and quite natural--that's exercise, right?

LONG: Yes.

AIKEN: And if you're working and busy, you can survive.

LONG: Okay. Tell me briefly about when you first realized in Walterboro that there was an air base.

AIKEN: Let me see now. That was--let me see, was it 1940 or '46? In 1946.

LONG: Right, in 1946, okay. Let's see, can we establish when World War II--was this toward the end of the war or at the end of the war? Had the war ended when you realized that the air base was out there, or was it during the war?

AIKEN: It was during the war.

LONG: It was during the war.

AIKEN: Yes.

LONG: I see, okay. Could you tell me what you saw during that time?

AIKEN: Well, what I saw, there were the whites. They had their quarters. When it was time to eat, they had tables set up for them, and they had black girls as waitresses. So that's it.

LONG: So who were they serving at that time?

AIKEN: The lieutenants. They were serving the lieutenants.

LONG: And who were these lieutenants? Why were they there at Walterboro, as far as you know?

AIKEN: Because that was set up for them to come there. Those are soldiers that were set up for them to come there.

LONG: Now, were any of them pilots? Were they aviators?

AIKEN: Yes, they were. Let me see, I was going with one, and he gave me his wing.

LONG: How old were you then?

AIKEN: I was maybe about twenty-something.

LONG: And who was this person, this pilot who had the nerve to give his wings away there in Walterboro?

AIKEN: Who was he?

LONG: Yes.

AIKEN: I should have written this down. I brought them down for you to see, the small wings.

LONG: Okay. Did they have the name of the pilot written behind the wings?

AIKEN: No.

LONG: No, they were small wings. [...] this was Mr. Snell? What name? Lieutenant.

AIKEN: He was a lieutenant.

LONG: He was a lieutenant, yes. Okay. Now, what I'm mostly trying to understand is--and it's very important to us in doing the history, and you've done part of it. You said that it was segregated, that there were white flyers and white officers, and black officers and that African-American women served. At both places? That they served the blacks and the whites in their separate places?

AIKEN: Separate. They were separate.

LONG: I see. Were they in the same building, though?

AIKEN: No, they had their building, and the blacks had--

LONG: Their building.

AIKEN: --their building.

LONG: I see. Okay. Have you ever eaten at one of those places, or did you ever get a chance to attend?

AIKEN: To eat?

LONG: Yes, to actually go to any of those places?

AIKEN: Yes. In fact, I worked in the summer as a waitress.

LONG: Tell me about that.

AIKEN: We would get up and go out there. They would come and pick us up, as waitresses, and take us out there, and we were wearing white, just like they wear white now. We would

have to set the tables up, and then we would get a little change from the soldiers--you know, the lieutenants.

LONG: So we're talking about tips?

AIKEN: Yeah. There wasn't that much change. [laughter]

LONG: For those times, I guess. Were you also paid by the--

AIKEN: Yes, we had a few dollars, but we got more with the tips. And then the bus would come and pick us up sometimes.

LONG: So describe just one day in the life of a person who is serving--is it as a waitress?

AIKEN: Yes.

LONG: Who was working as a waitress out at Walterboro Field. What did they call the field during the time that you were there?

AIKEN: Just air base.

LONG: The air base. And then what did they call the place where you actually worked?

AIKEN: The restaurant.

LONG: It was a restaurant.

AIKEN: And a dining room.

LONG: And a dining room. Okay. What meals were you actually present for?

AIKEN: It depends on what shift we would have had. See, you have different shifts, and sometimes we would go in for breakfast, and we had to set up tables, and then we set the tables up and then the cook would be there, too. And they would have the food ready, and we would take it out after we take their orders for what they want.

LONG: Wasn't this kind of highfalutin, the whole idea of ordering? Would a private be able to do that, a person who just had one stripe?

AIKEN: I don't remember that now.

LONG: So these were officers. Almost like an officers' club.

AIKEN: That's what it was.

LONG: Aha.

AIKEN: You brought it out. [laughter]

LONG: All right, so you worked at--

AIKEN: The officers' club. Until school started, and then I would stop. Only in the summer that I would work out there.

LONG: Now, compare the wages that you got from tips to some of the work that other people did. Did you do pretty good?

AIKEN: Very good, because it was a group of lieutenants there. See, I was young then, and I would make it in there, set the tables up, have water on the table and everything, and they didn't have to wait for those things, so we got along good, and I made very good tips.

LONG: Okay. Doing what you were doing at the officers' club, had you done that anywhere else?

AIKEN: I worked in my father's restaurant.

LONG: Okay, tell me about that. And after you talk about that, compare the two places: working in your father's restaurant and then working out at the officers' club. And do this for

me: tell me what was the name of the restaurant and just what an ordinary day was, compared to-

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AIKEN: The name of the restaurant was Best Café, because his last name was Best, B-e-s-t. That's why they named it Best Café. We would have, oh, quite a few dishes, but they ate mostly like stew beef and rice, and that's what they would get, and a vegetable. Now, fish was on Friday.

LONG: At what restaurant?

AIKEN: Best, B-e-s-t.

LONG: Who else worked along with you at that restaurant?

AIKEN: My father and my sister, and a girl named Pinky, from Ehrhardt.

LONG: Is Ehrhardt close to Walterboro?

AIKEN: Yes, it's about--I think about maybe thirty-something miles.

LONG: Okay. And tell me about what did you have to do, other than serve people? Can you tell me? Other than wait the tables. Tell me.

AIKEN: Other than that?

LONG: Yes.

AIKEN: We had to wash dishes, too. [laughs] We had to wash the dishes, and then plan the meals for the next day.

LONG: Who worked the cash register, or who collected the money for the meals?

AIKEN: We did, the waitresses, because they knew what the people were getting and how much it would cost.

LONG: I see.

AIKEN: So the waitresses collect the money.

LONG: I see. Okay. Now, I asked you if you would please compare the two things: the Best Restaurant that your father owned, and the officers' club. Tell me about the officers' club. What was different about it from the other place?

AIKEN: First of all it was a better building and quite natural. The food--you know, they had a variety of foods out there because my father couldn't afford all those dainty dishes that they would want.

LONG: Tell me, what dainty dishes did they want? Can you name some.

AIKEN: I guess so. They would want chicken most of the time. You can't afford--couldn't then.

LONG: Was this fried? How did you cook it?

AIKEN: They fried it. And some wanted stew, and they would have the two. And then they wanted fish, and fried it.

LONG: When you say stew, what is the stew placed on?

AIKEN: It's chicken cut up, and it has onions, celery, green pepper, and just a little water to start it off, and then when the juice comes in, you'll have a little more. That would be for the rice.

LONG: So we're describing a dish that has a bed of rice first, and then what do you put over it?

AIKEN: The gravy. The gravy from the chicken. And then you get your vegetable.

LONG: Okay. And they call this a stew.

AIKEN: Stew.

LONG: Did they have any other name for it?

AIKEN: Not then. I don't know what they have for it now. But we still say stew.

LONG: Now, could you have any other meat other than chicken?

AIKEN: Sure, they had steaks, but we didn't want that. We would much rather have the chicken.

LONG: And that's at the air base.

AIKEN: Right.

LONG: So they had steak and stew. What did they drink?

AIKEN: Fish.

LONG: They had fish, you say? What did they drink?

AIKEN: They drank beer and water, tea, coffee.

LONG: Now, what was their attitude, most of them? You know what I mean when I'm saying attitude. What was their demeanor? What kind of relations did they--well, let me do it this way: How did they treat the waitresses? I should do it that way.

AIKEN: Now, they treated some of us, those that would go and rush and get the food--they would tip us very well, and those that just lag around, they didn't get it. But some of the girls would get angry with the ones that rushed to get the food to put on the table, see? Like, I told one--I said, "You got to rush it up. You can't be so slow." Yeah.

LONG: So you're saying there was almost competition among the waitresses.

AIKEN: Oh, it was.

LONG: Are there any other activities that you could--

[End Tape 1A. Begin Tape 1B.]

AIKEN: No, because I couldn't go out there at night.

LONG: Oh, I see. I'm asking about the movie theater. Did they have a movie theater?

AIKEN: I really don't know. Maybe Johnny [Thompson] knows.

J. THOMPSON: Down here?

AIKEN: Yes.

J. THOMPSON: They had a movie theater.

AIKEN: Out to the base?

J. THOMPSON: No. I don't know about the base.

LONG: Yes, I was trying to--you had a movie theater in town. You can tell me about that, about the movie theater in town.

AIKEN: Oh, it was--we called it a little coop. We have to go upstairs--the blacks had to go upstairs.

LONG: The coop, c-o-o-p? Like a what kind of coop.

AIKEN: A little building.

LONG: A coop.

AIKEN: Yes.

LONG: Okay.

AIKEN: We would have to go upstairs. We paid our money, but we would have to go upstairs and sit and look down on the whites, because they had better seats, too.

LONG: Do you remember the first time you went to the coop?

AIKEN: [laughs] Yes, I remember.

LONG: What did you think? Tell me about that.

AIKEN: I can't tell you about that. All I can say, we didn't like it, but that's the only movie we could go to, unless you go to Charleston, and you didn't have the money all the time to go down there.

LONG: We're talking about what years, maybe? The first time you went to a theater here in Walterboro.

AIKEN: Let me see now. I think it was 1933, I think. Don't quote me.

LONG: No, no, that's all right. I wonder, what kind of movie did they have that you could go to at that time? Do you remember any of the movies that you really liked?

AIKEN: Let me see. I liked all of them. I couldn't go to all of them.

LONG: What do you mean?

AIKEN: Sometimes I didn't have the money. My father wouldn't give me the money.

LONG: It cost how much?

AIKEN: Sometimes it cost fifty cents, and he said no.

LONG: I wonder why. This is a man who was making--restaurant--tell me about the businesses.

AIKEN: He had the funeral home, the restaurant; he was a carpenter, and that's all I remember.

LONG: But was he able to live well with that amount of work?

AIKEN: He could live well, but he was tight with his money, see? That's what I call it, tight, being tight. No, he didn't believe in just gallivanting with the money. You had to put it up.

LONG: What denomination--what church did he go to?

AIKEN: Rock of Ages Church, a Methodist, C.M.E.

LONG: C.M.E. Church. Okay.

AIKEN: And I'm still going there.

LONG: Wonderful. Now, as we summarize, I wanted to get your view of how local people--of what they thought of the air base and of the airmen, and those who knew that there were black airmen out there at Walterboro Base. Tell me what they would be saying.

AIKEN: Well, I don't know if all of them would be saying, but some of them would be saying some things.

LONG: Like?

AIKEN: Curse words and all that.

LONG: Really?

AIKEN: Sure.

LONG: Of the air base?

AIKEN: Out there?

LONG: Yes.

AIKEN: That's where you get most of it. And then the soldiers brought their wives down, too.

LONG: I see. So you observed the attitude of people toward the base, and what was the attitude toward the airmen and their wives?

AIKEN: To me, what I saw--because, see, I wasn't out there--they were very nice. And then, too, some of them--some of the blacks had white wives, and the white people really didn't like it.

LONG: So, again, we're talking about 19--what years?

AIKEN: Nineteen forty-six. I think so.

LONG: So discuss that. You said that some people didn't like it.

AIKEN: The whites didn't like the blacks having the authority that they had. See, the black soldiers--if they didn't stay on the base, they would rent rooms for the whites to come down. I had several of them staying up there with me. But they were a beautiful couple. No noise. Just like we would come in and discuss right here.

LONG: These are both black and white staying with you.

AIKEN: No, no whites. You know, whites couldn't stay with blacks. [laughs]

LONG: But you said some airmen, if I remember, had white wives. Where did they stay?

AIKEN: I guess they stayed in hotels.

LONG: I see. But rooming with you--where were you living, first of all?

AIKEN: Right up the street.

LONG: What kind of place was it?

AIKEN: It was a board building.

LONG: Two-story building?

AIKEN: Oh, no.

LONG: One story?

AIKEN: Yes. But after we got up and had a little change, then I decided to go to New York and stay.

LONG: We'll talk about that, but you said you got a little change.

AIKEN: Money. [laughs] Money.

LONG: And where did that money come from?

AIKEN: From working, right?

LONG: Yes, okay. And you had what appears to be a rooming house. You had boarders, right?

AIKEN: Just two, the husband and wife. I would select who I wanted to come in my house, and the same way now.

LONG: Now, why did you select an airman and his wife?

AIKEN: Because he was an airman. And he and I--I don't know, we just hit it off as soon as we met, and I told him--I said, "Don't you have a wife?" So he said, "Yes, and I'm gonna send for her. Will you let her stay with you?" And I said, "Sure." I said, "We'll be friends." And we were friends until, oh, it was after the war.

LONG: Do you remember where they were from?

AIKEN: Chicago.

LONG: This was a beautiful couple.

AIKEN: They were.

LONG: And you called them beautiful because they were?

AIKEN: Were kind to everyone, had nice disposition, no fault character.

LONG: And with this little bit of money--

AIKEN: [laughs]

LONG: --little bit of change.

AIKEN: Change.

LONG: I understand. You were able to go to New York.

AIKEN: Yes.

LONG: Now, tell me about your experience in New York. How did you get there, first of all?

AIKEN: By bus.

LONG: You took a bus.

AIKEN: And then my mother was living up there, so I stayed with her. And then I found out I could get a job out on the island, and I went out there, and I worked with some people.

LONG: This is on what island?

AIKEN: Don't ask.

LONG: Was it near Long Island, New York?

AIKEN: Yes.

LONG: And what did duties did they require of you?

AIKEN: Cook. I was a cook. And one day we had candied yam, and I knocked one on the floor, so the lady asked me, "Now, what are we gonna eat now?" I said, "Yams." So she said, "Where you going to get them?" I said, "Off of the floor." I said, "They don't know it." [laughs]

LONG: You said who didn't know it?

AIKEN: The visitors that were coming in to eat.

LONG: Oh, my! You mean--

AIKEN: I told her--I said, "I mop the floor every day, so it's clean." [laughs]

LONG: All right. Well, let's get you back to Walterboro. How did you end up coming back?

AIKEN: To Walterboro?

LONG: To Walterboro, yes.

AIKEN: Came back on the train, because I brought my mother back. Our mother. I always say Mama. That's our mother.

LONG: And where did you get off the train?

AIKEN: Charleston.

LONG: At Charleston.

AIKEN: Yes, and then I took the bus from Charleston up to Walterboro.

LONG: Now, could you get up at Yemassee [pronounces it YAH-muh-see] at that time?

AIKEN: Yemassee [YEM-uh-see].

LONG: You could get off at Yemassee?

AIKEN: Yes, we could, but I wanted to get off at Charleston.

LONG: Because?

AIKEN: See, the time that the train is going to Yemassee, I could be just about in Walterboro.

That's why.

LONG: Okay. Now, I'm enjoying this interview, and I appreciate your taking the time out to do it. You do understand that I'm trying as best I can to get your story of how you experienced the times during which Walterboro had black airmen, African-American and black airmen. Can you tell us anything about what some of--you were serving out at the air base, at what you describe as

the officers' club--can you tell me about any conversation you may have had about the lives of those airmen that would let us know what *they* were thinking, what their attitudes were during this time?

AIKEN: Well, they had very nice attitudes toward the waitresses, now.

LONG: Yes.

AIKEN: So that's all. We had conversations also, and it was a group that when they would see me coming, they would raise their hand and say, "Come on. Come on over here." Because I would rush and get their orders out.

LONG: They really respected you as a waitress.

AIKEN: Right.

LONG: Now, did you meet anybody who was not happy about the way they were treated? Any airmen, black airman who was not happy about the way--

AIKEN: I know they had a fight up there the little place is torn down now. I think the mayor had a way of kicking the blacks, but he kicked the wrong black that time.

LONG: You mean the mayor of what town?

AIKEN: Walterboro, of Walterboro. He kicked him, and they would say a wasps nest, when all those soldiers finished with him.

LONG: What did they do?

AIKEN: They tore him up. They beat him. See, he had a way of kicking blacks, and I guess the soldiers said once they kick one of us, we'll get him, so that's what happened.

LONG: Who do you know who actually witnessed that?

AIKEN: They're gone.

LONG: How did you hear about it?

AIKEN: In the air. [laughs] Yeah.

LONG: And what resulted? Did you read the newspapers during that time?

AIKEN: I didn't have time.

LONG: Okay. Well, "in the air," on the grapevine, did you hear what resulted from that?

AIKEN: No, but they said he didn't kick nobody else. He stayed where he was supposed to stay, on his job, because even--I was told that some of the civilians would come up to the restaurant, and he would kick them, and so he kicked the wrong one.

LONG: And the restaurant was where? Where was that restaurant?

AIKEN: Up on Walter Street.

LONG: Do you remember, who owned it?

AIKEN: Mrs.--let's see-- [addresses Johnny Thompson]: Were you here when we had the restaurant?

Rebecca Brooks.

LONG: It was her restaurant.

AIKEN: No, the building was hers.

LONG: I see. And the restaurant was owned by?

AIKEN: My father.

LONG: Now, wait a minute. You're saying the mayor came to that restaurant?

AIKEN: It was down in a little alley, and he came down there looking for his workers, and when he found them, he kicked them. Told them to get back up there and go to work.

LONG: How did the airmen get involved with that?

AIKEN: Because they didn't want to see that happen.

LONG: And as a result of that, they did what?

AIKEN: They tore him up. They beat him.

LONG: And this was--what position did he hold?

AIKEN: He was the mayor, but he was ashamed to tell it what happened.

LONG: I see, okay. I just needed to know this, then: Can you remember who you heard it from, first? Other than "in the air"?

AIKEN: No.

LONG: Did your father talk about it? Do you remember him saying something about the incident? Was that in his place?

AIKEN: No, it was down the street, down the street, on--what's the name--Whitman.

LONG: On Whitman. Do you remember anybody telling you about that that actually saw it?

AIKEN: No.

LONG: It was "in the air."

AIKEN: In the air.

LONG: Okay, all right. That's fine. Finally, I just want to ask you, please, if there's anything about the Tuskegee Airmen--when did you know that these airmen--many of them had been trained--where were most of the airmen that you saw, or where did they say they had been trained?

AIKEN: Tuskegee. They were trained in Tuskegee, and then they were sent different places.

LONG: Did anybody say why they were sent to Walterboro?

AIKEN: For their training.

LONG: For further training.

AIKEN: Right.

LONG: I see. And finally, if you would just tell me, please, why do you think someone would select a place like your hometown to put an air base?

AIKEN: Because it was a forest out there, and it's stands today, right there.

LONG: So they had the land. They had plenty of land.

AIKEN: Right.

LONG: Okay. I understand there was enough land where they could actually do bombing runs and things. Did you hear about that?

AIKEN: I heard about it. Heard about the planes, too.

LONG: What about the planes?

AIKEN: No, I heard the noise from the planes.

LONG: Oh, I see. And you were about how old at that time, again? I'm not trying to--

AIKEN: I must have been about thirty-something.

LONG: Thirty-something, okay. Were you proud, or how was your feeling as it related to these men who were officers? Did you have any particular feeling in terms of the fact that they were officers during that time?

AIKEN: I was proud of them, very proud, because really I think they gave--the officers gave our men enlightenment.

LONG: Yes. And the last, if there's any lesson to be learned from what they did, the enlightenment that you talked about that these officers passed down, what is the lesson of that time, that you would think?

AIKEN: About what I would think? We should all think as one. No you and then over here someone else. God made all of us in whose image? His image, right? So he wants it to be like that.

LONG: Okay. Is there something that you want to add to this that will help us understand the history of these airmen that you said you were proud of? Is there something--

AIKEN: I mean, one was liking me, and he gave me his wing, and he was supposed to come back, and we were supposed to get married, but he died before he could get back.

LONG: Where was he when he died, do you know?

AIKEN: I think he was in Boston.

LONG: Do you remember--did they tell you the circumstances of his death?

AIKEN: No, they just told me that he had passed.

LONG: And he was a pilot.

AIKEN: Right. I have the strength.

LONG: Okay, all right. Well, I'm proud of this interview, and of you. You've touched on some things that certainly I didn't know, and you witnessed history in a very special way, it seems to me, and I just wanted to thank you for giving me this time to talk with you. If you can think of anything else that helps us understand the meaning of the Tuskegee Airmen being in Walterboro, then feel free to do that.

AIKEN: Okay. The only thing: they built the base for the airmen, right?

LONG: You mean the Air Force built a base so that airmen could train and fly?

AIKEN: Right.

LONG: Yes.

AIKEN: That's why it was built here. And then they had the land, too.

LONG: And they had the land. But they had black and white airmen, you were saying.

AIKEN: Yes. Some of them, that is. My husband, when he was living--he said they were coming from overseas, and they were talking among themselves, and as soon as they got in South Carolina, they were segregated. But now you can find some that, regardless of race, creed, or color.

LONG: Okay. Thank you very much.

AIKEN: You're welcome.

[End of Interview]

