

## **Vaught, Wilma USAF**

[00:00:16.36] WILMA VAUGHT: I was born in Pontiac, Michigan, March 15, 1930, which was the beginning of the Depression. And my father decided that he wasn't going to have much of a career there with automobiles, and that they needed to move where he could work on a farm and that they would at least have food to eat. So we moved to Indiana when-- probably when I was about one. And then after a couple of years or so, he found a place in Illinois and we moved to Illinois. So we moved to what became my hometown area, which was Scotland, Illinois.

[00:01:01.51] JOE GALLOWAY: No brothers and sisters?

[00:01:03.64] WILMA VAUGHT: Later.

[00:01:04.07] JOE GALLOWAY: Later.

[00:01:04.49] WILMA VAUGHT: I was the first born.

[00:01:06.05] JOE GALLOWAY: OK.

[00:01:07.03] WILMA VAUGHT: Then I had a brother who only lived to be about a year-and-a-half old, and then I had a-- after 11 years, I had a sister who was born who is still living. I had graduated from the University of Illinois and found that I had majored in the wrong things, that I majored in business hoping to get a job with a company and be in management. And I finally got a job in the accounting department of one of the places that the government had near my home that the Pontiac-- or that DuPont was running, where we made heavy water.

[00:01:59.29] So this was in 1952 that I finally got a job there. And after working for five years there, I concluded that the DuPont Company being the way most big companies were at that time, there was very little opportunity for women. There was opportunity for jobs, but you couldn't advance into the management arena and that's where I wanted to be. So I decided that I should leave or I would spend my whole career and never fulfill my real ambition.

[00:02:37.08] JOE GALLOWAY: Bouncing off the glass ceiling.

[00:02:38.70] WILMA VAUGHT: And at that time, lo and behold, I received a recruiting letter from an Army female major who was recruiting and she told me that I could-- they had a special drive to get women as officers and that I was eligible to go into the Army Reserve and-- if I chose to apply. And if I did, I could manage and supervise. And that's what I wanted to do.

[00:03:13.30] So I started checking to see if-- what I should do. Should I go in the Army? Should I find out if one of the other services had a similar program? And I decided that I would go check at Rantoul, which was close to the University of Illinois, where I had graduated. And I would check with the Air Force and see if it had a similar program. It did. And that day, I took the test for intelligence, passed it.

[00:03:45.09] They gave me a waiver for my eyesight because I was very nearsighted. And I talked to my boss at the DuPont Company who had been in the Navy in World War II, if I should do this. And he felt this would be a good move for me. So I decided I would go in and I'd stay four years. If I liked it, I would stay and if I didn't like it, I would go look for something else. WILMA VAUGHT: We went as all Air Force-- good Air Force people should. We went to Lackland Air Force Base.

[00:04:20.03] JOE GALLOWAY: Of course, you did.

[00:04:20.98] WILMA VAUGHT: And went to Basic Officer Military Course, BOMC. And there were about 32 as I recall members in our class and we were there for-- I went in January, I think, and we were there for six months for that training. And then from there, I went to another base there in Texas. And that's where I studied management analysis, computers such as they were at that time, which wasn't much of anything.

[00:05:04.12] JOE GALLOWAY: Not much of anything or filled a whole room.

[00:05:06.91] WILMA VAUGHT: That's right. And I was there for three months. And from there I went to my first base, which was Barksdale Air Force Base. WILMA VAUGHT: I was very fortunate that a woman lieutenant colonel who had served in the Women's Army Corps in World War II was there and took me under her wing. Taught me things I needed to know, that she thought a lieutenant needed to know.

[00:05:39.17] And there was a big surprise when I got there because when I reported in the young enlisted woman who was there said, oh, you're going to be our new squadron commander. And I said, no, I'm not going to be your squadron commander, I'm here on directed duty assignment. I'm going to be in the data automation branch. She said, well, I'm just sure you're going to be my squadron commander. And I checked in and that's how I found out how little some of the words on orders mean.

[00:06:14.99] So when they told me I was going to do that I said, it says right here that I'm on a directed duty assignment. So they told me, you will be directed to that job and your additional duty will be to be the commander of the WAF squadron until we get somebody else. And I said, well, do I get to do anything on my directed duty? And they said, oh, you can go over and visit the people from time to time.

[00:06:45.11] And eventually, that's where I ended up. My advisor there, the lieutenant colonel, told me that there was an opportunity to apply to get a regular commission. And she recommended that I do that. And I said, well, I haven't even made up my mind to stay in the Air Force. She said, go take that test. So I took the test and I was selected for a regular commission. And so that caused the Air Force to terminate my assignment at Barksdale Air Force Base and send me overseas to Spain.

[00:07:25.26] WILMA VAUGHT: And so I went over there, and after a year, I received notification from the Air Force said it was going to discharge me because they were not going to give me a waiver for my eyesight on the regular commission. And this just irritated me no end,

so I decided to go back and fight this and I flew back to Washington and went to see the Air Force WAF squadron commander. And she said she couldn't do anything for me.

[00:08:03.70] So then I went that this was a medical thing that the surgeon general had made a ruling that everybody had to meet the minimum standards for a pilot on eyesight.

[00:08:16.26] JOE GALLOWAY: That's crazy.

[00:08:16.92] WILMA VAUGHT: Whether we were ever going to fly or not.

[00:08:19.11] JOE GALLOWAY: That's crazy.

[00:08:20.25] WILMA VAUGHT: And it was absolutely crazy. So anyway, I went to see my senator, Senator Douglas, who was very famed from Illinois, been there for many years. And his office chief was a female and she decided to take on my case because I had letters from people there in Spain that I have done a superior job and I had a very outstanding record. So then it started a really funny thing. Every 30 days in would come an email from the Air Force saying, well, I was going to be discharged in 30 more days. And I would write to the congressman-- to the senator--

[00:09:03.43] JOE GALLOWAY: And say, they're at it again.

[00:09:04.08] WILMA VAUGHT: --and it would be extended. And it ended up it took a year. It finally went to the Board for Correction of Military Records. This was very amusing because the senator's office wrote and said, go ahead and apply for that. We understand it will be approved.

[00:09:23.71] So I applied and it was approved. And I didn't get my regular commission, but I did get entered into the Reserve. And the reason was if they had notified me in a reasonable period of time, the first six months of that year that they waited to tell me that I had failed the physical test, they changed the rule. And up to that-- for the first six months, I could have simply said, well, then put me into the--

[00:09:56.54] JOE GALLOWAY: In the Reserves.

[00:09:57.82] WILMA VAUGHT: --Reserve. And I missed that chance, So based on that, they put me in the Reserve. So I decided, well, I guess, I'll stay. And I stayed. WILMA VAUGHT: I stayed for four years. And needless to say, I was one of the few officers besides nurses, female, in Spain. So that was a great attraction to the Spanish people that, oh, my goodness, she is a lieutenant, a teniente.

[00:10:33.08] JOE GALLOWAY: This was-- what base, Turmalina?

[00:10:36.17] WILMA VAUGHT: No, I was at Zaragoza Air Base.

[00:10:39.39] JOE GALLOWAY: Zaragoza.

[00:10:41.03] WILMA VAUGHT: So it was a wonderful opportunity for me. WILMA VAUGHT: So then I was assigned from there to McCoy Air Force Base in Orlando, Florida, a bomb wing, because I was in Strategic Air Command through this period of time. And I was assigned to data automation at McCoy. But then somehow-- and I don't remember exactly how this happened-- I got picked up to work-- and do some work in management analysis.

[00:11:20.83] And the end result was that the wing commander kept me there and the comptroller didn't have much choice about the matter, and they had to get somebody else for data automation. And that led to my close involvement with the bomb wing because I was giving briefings to the pilots that were the ones flying the bombers and the KC-135s because there was a ratings system, and I was responsible for this rating system, and for reporting to them as to how we were doing.

[00:12:04.00] And that was the beginning of the Vietnam War. And the next thing we found was that our bomb wing was selected to go to Guam to be in charge of the B-52 bombing of Vietnam.

[00:12:20.81] JOE GALLOWAY: Vietnam.

[00:12:22.75] WILMA VAUGHT: That was in 1966. A woman had never deployed with a SAC bomb wing at that point. And my commander told me he wanted me to go. And I had applied to go to get my master's degree. And I'd been selected to go to the University of Alabama. And I said, I can't go, I'm supposed to go to get my master's degree. And he said, well, see if they can't defer it or something. So I checked and they said, well, yes, you won't lose it since it's a six-month tour and you can go. So I was the first woman ever to deploy with a SAC bomb wing.

[00:13:09.97] JOE GALLOWAY: You were breaking a lot of ground.

[00:13:12.53] WILMA VAUGHT: And I went to Guam with them. And in our bomb wing, there were 3,000 men and me. That's pretty interesting odds.

[00:13:24.38] JOE GALLOWAY: It is indeed.

[00:13:29.41] WILMA VAUGHT: When I came back from Guam I went to the University of Alabama. And while I was there, the commander in Vietnam decided he needed some women, he needed some clerks. Of course, he was Army so they sent some WACs in. And this gave the director of the WAF squadrons and the WAF the opportunity to say, if those women can go, why can't our Air Force women, any of them, go?

[00:14:04.01] And so she was very persuasive. She retired as Major General Jeanne Holm. And the net result was that my assignment from the University of Alabama when I graduated was to Vietnam. And that was in October of 1968.

[00:14:28.03] WILMA VAUGHT: They taught me absolutely nothing. Of course, I was at-- in school. And so I said-- I immediately called when I found out I was going to be going, and I said, I'm not weapon qualified. Do I need to go check and get checked out? And they said, oh, no, you don't need to do that. And I thought, well, I'm not going to some country that-- it's a combat--

[00:14:53.41] JOE GALLOWAY: A war zone.

[00:14:54.31] WILMA VAUGHT: --a war zone. So I got in touch with my brother-in-law who was very skilled with weapons and I went home on leave. And he taught me to fire a rifle and he taught me to fire a handgun. And so then I got in touch with the Air Force and I told them that I wanted to take the test to see if I qualified. And so on a very hot day that fall, I went down to the nearest base and lo and behold, the only person doing something like that was me, but there were other people there.

[00:15:32.20] And the other people were all young men who were on the Air Force crack firing team and they were preparing for the annual competition. So they were there and me. So the sergeant told me, you know, what I had to do. And this cardboard figure was down there and so I fired a rifle, I fired the handgun. And so I did it lying down, standing up, and everything he told me to do.

[00:16:07.57] So then he said, OK, you can quit, you qualified expert. And I said, you've got to be kidding. He said, no. He said, we'll prove it. So we walked down there and got the cardboard thing and here it is--

[00:16:24.64] JOE GALLOWAY: Shot full of holes.

[00:16:25.71] WILMA VAUGHT: --shot full of holes. In fact, I still have it. You know, to this day, I've never been quite sure who was firing, if it was me or the--

[00:16:35.65] JOE GALLOWAY: Or the team next door.

[00:16:36.79] WILMA VAUGHT: --or it was the team. I didn't think I heard anybody firing other than me, but I still to this day, it amazes me that I hit all of those. So I now have the--

[00:16:50.08] JOE GALLOWAY: Expert--

[00:16:50.34] WILMA VAUGHT: --little ribbon. Expert marksman.

[00:16:51.30] JOE GALLOWAY: Excellent.

[00:16:55.44] WILMA VAUGHT: Well, I went to March Air Force Base. And from there, I went by plane. It was a charter plane. Of course, Saigon was right there at the edge of MACV, which was where I was being assigned.

[00:17:16.98] JOE GALLOWAY: It's where you were going, so you landed in Tan Son Nhut.

[00:17:20.40] WILMA VAUGHT: I landed at Tan Son Nhut. Oh, so when I got there and I was staying there in the hotel, and there was another woman there and she said, I'm going to be leaving shortly and I've got a better room than what you've got. So you tell them you want this room, because this room is on the second floor on the balcony, has a balcony. So I said, great. So I went down and arranged to do that.

[00:17:53.53] So the day she was leaving, she told me to come down, and I did. And she said, well, she was in the intelligence. Some branch of the intelligence thing. And she had been there through Tet. And so the enemy got fairly close to the hotel there. And so she acquired an AK-47 and a pistol--

[00:18:22.26] JOE GALLOWAY: Very good.

[00:18:23.22] WILMA VAUGHT: --which she had in the bottom drawer of the bureau and with ammunition. And she said, you can't tell what may happen and you may need a weapon.

[00:18:34.28] JOE GALLOWAY: Protection.

[00:18:35.29] WILMA VAUGHT: So I'll leave these here for you. So I had my own weapons all through the period of time. When my term ended, I went over to the place where you turned in weapons and I said, can you turn in weapons you were never issued? And the guy laughed at me. He said, yes. So one of the guys in my office went with me. We went to the hotel and got my weapons and I turned them in.

[00:19:07.30] WILMA VAUGHT: That it was hot. And I was very fortunate because one of the transportation officers was a female major as I recall. I was a major at this point. And she met me and took me over to Tan Son Nhut to meet some of the women officers who were there. One in particular, I remember, I had known for some years was a former WASP lieutenant colonel who was stationed there.

[00:19:40.87] And so I chatted with them and then finally went to the hotel where I was assigned to stay and where I did stay for the year that I was there. It was the hotel where all of the Red Cross people and any visitors stayed at, and whose name I can't remember. We were about a block and a half from the center for all of the groceries and the food like that were sold. So that was a sort of a target for the enemy. So that made it kind of interesting. And the one time that we were rocketed, they were really targeting that place.

[00:20:36.47] WILMA VAUGHT: Well, that proved to be very interesting, because when I got there I was replacing a male major. That was the only thing that saved me from just completely losing my temper because I found that my duty was to prepare the quarterly cost saving report. And so they brought me in so that I would go through the reporting period, so I'd know what I was supposed to do. Well, that was an interesting concept to me that in the midst of a war that you were busy saving money.

[00:21:11.06] So it seems that the secretary of defense and the president had become concerned about the amount of money that was being spent. And the secretary of defense decided that they were spending too much money and that they should have this savings program. Well, so you did this quarterly report and I said, well, what do you do before the next quarterly report? He said, you just-- nothing. You just wait till the next quarterly report.

[00:21:42.08] And that's what I was so upset about because I did not plan-- had not planned to come to Vietnam-- that I would work four weeks or something like that during the entire year. So

I was in the management analysis section of the comptroller office there at the headquarters. So I started reading all the files in the office and I was the only one who knew what was in the files and that directly I was assigned to handle the audit reports.

[00:22:18.80] The GAO could audit the headquarters there and the Defense Audit Agency could also audit. So they made me the point of contact. So when those people wanted to do an audit, they had to come and see me and make arrangements with me. And then when they wrote the report, they brought the report to me. And then I coordinated it with the various officers that it might involve. And so that became a fairly busy job for me--

[00:22:50.54] JOE GALLOWAY: I'd think.

[00:22:51.26] WILMA VAUGHT: --when I did that. I would have gone crazy if I'd been just sitting there. WILMA VAUGHT: They were very good and there was a-- within about a block or two was a place that we could go eat or we could walk downtown and eat. So it was a very relaxed thing. And it was interesting to walk around about a half a block from our hotel. When we first got there, there was a family, a man and his wife and I think one or two children. And the next thing we knew she was pregnant again. And so we went through the pregnancy.

[00:23:33.56] JOE GALLOWAY: They were working at the hotel? WILMA VAUGHT: Lived on the street, on the sidewalk. JOE GALLOWAY: Just living on the sidewalk.

[00:23:38.78] WILMA VAUGHT: Just living on the sidewalk, through the birth of the child and everything.

[00:23:42.89] JOE GALLOWAY: Wow.

[00:23:43.40] WILMA VAUGHT: And those of us who lived in the hotel that walked along that street, not just me but several people, as they would walk by would manage to drop things because we weren't supposed to give anybody anything. So we would just drop--

[00:24:01.19] JOE GALLOWAY: Have an accident there.

[00:24:01.52] WILMA VAUGHT: --and particularly when somebody was going back, PCS, they would drop a few things. I've often wondered whatever happened to that family.

[00:24:12.29] JOE GALLOWAY: Oh, Lord.

[00:24:14.63] WILMA VAUGHT: Central market, that's the name of the--

[00:24:15.92] JOE GALLOWAY: Central market, yeah.

[00:24:17.66] WILMA VAUGHT: I was a block and a half from the central market.

[00:24:19.78] JOE GALLOWAY: Central market.

[00:24:24.87] WILMA VAUGHT: It was basically all men at MACV. There were four women assigned-- or five, I guess-- assigned to MACV. One of them was a secretary who was a civilian who worked for the commander. And there was one lieutenant colonel, Lorraine Rossi, Army. And she was the person who worked with the women in the Vietnam army. They did have women similar to our WAC, and she was the one who worked with them.

[00:25:06.99] And then there was another Army major who worked with the J4, the logistics person. And she lived in the same hotel I did, so we became very close friends.

[00:25:21.60] JOE GALLOWAY: And that was it, four women in all of MACV.

[00:25:24.84] WILMA VAUGHT: In all of MACV. And there was one enlisted woman. I never quite figured out why she was there, but she was. So there were four of us at MACV. And associating with the military women who are at Tan Son Nhut was just almost impossible because they lived there day and night, I lived downtown. And we went back and forth by bus seven days a week. And even though it was just across the fence, it was not easy to get from MACV over to--

[00:26:03.33] JOE GALLOWAY: Point A to point B. Yeah.

[00:26:06.14] WILMA VAUGHT: So I just never bothered to do that.

[00:26:08.31] JOE GALLOWAY: Yeah. How were you treated?

[00:26:11.61] WILMA VAUGHT: I was treated very well. I worked with-- there were about 30-some people in the comptroller office. And our boss, the comptroller, it was General Fazakerley. He was a wonderful guy. And he had an unusual thing happen to him. He had gone on a visit to one of the places. And he was getting out of the helicopter and there was a pool of water and he was a tall thin guy, and he kind of jumped up, and the helicopter--

[00:26:48.10] JOE GALLOWAY: Oh, no.

[00:26:48.84] WILMA VAUGHT: --caught him and peeled back his skull-- scalp. And I think they did 142 stitches or something like that.

[00:26:58.68] JOE GALLOWAY: Whoa. Did not impact the skull?

[00:27:01.10] WILMA VAUGHT: And they caught him. One of the guys caught him. The guy, I think the gunner caught him as he fell back, pulled him in, and three minutes later they had him at the hospital. And I think it was about two days, he was back at work.

[00:27:14.55] JOE GALLOWAY: Wow.

[00:27:16.05] WILMA VAUGHT: Terrific guy. But it was a great bunch of guys to work with.  
WILMA VAUGHT: We followed the news.



[00:27:29.84] JOE GALLOWAY: You knew what was happening.

[00:27:30.90] WILMA VAUGHT: I think one of the most exciting news things that happened while I was there was the man who walked-- the walk on the moon. And the unforgettable thing to me was a little article that was in the Stars and Stripes. And they had interviewed some Army troop down on the street of Saigon and they said, have you been following that story about the man on the moon? Oh, yes. They said, well, what do you think of that?

[00:27:58.00] And he said, well, I am so impressed with the communications because here we are communicating with this man on the moon and I can't make a phone call from downtown Saigon to MACV. We followed the stories of all of the people that were against the war and the things they were doing in protest to the war. And I had read the stories before I came back about some of the people who were challenged when they got back in their communities or wherever they happened to go. WILMA VAUGHT: Oh, yeah, we worked from 7:00 to 7:00.

[00:28:46.48] JOE GALLOWAY: How many days a week?

[00:28:47.01] WILMA VAUGHT: And usually got a half a day off on Sunday.

[00:28:50.73] JOE GALLOWAY: Half a day.

[00:28:51.90] WILMA VAUGHT: Half a day. And quite frequently-- I knew the Defense Audit Agency people, I became pretty acquainted with them. And they were there full time in that area. And we would meet and have lunch together, the evening meal perhaps, with Lois, the other female that lived at the place I did. We went to the zoo. They had a zoo. We went to that. And then the people who did my parent's income tax back in Paris, Illinois had told me about a woman that she had gotten acquainted with who came and got her master's degree here who had gone back to Vietnam and was teaching young children who were blind to navigate through life.

[00:29:51.39] And so she said, I would appreciate it if you would go visit her. And we went and visited her and her school and saw all the difficulties they had. And my gosh, the telephone wires were hanging around through the ceiling-- ceilings. It was just a mess. And Lois, working in logistics, got some guys to go work on the electrical stuff, and somehow a refrigerator was found for them and they got that.

[00:30:22.23] And Lois, in particular, wrote back to her home church and they sent all kinds of clothing and things like that for them and we got that to them. So that was something we did that I was always very pleased with. And we went out and ate at the hotels that were basically military use hotels, the Continental was one of them. That's where the press people usually went.

[00:30:57.72] JOE GALLOWAY: Hung out there on the Continental Shelf, we called it.

[00:31:04.65] WILMA VAUGHT: And it was kind of interesting when you went to a restaurant and if you happen to go out to the alley behind, you saw that they were out there cooking on little charcoal fires.

[00:31:17.29] JOE GALLOWAY: Charcoal.

[00:31:18.39] WILMA VAUGHT: Made you wonder about the cleanliness of the thing, but I never got sick. WILMA VAUGHT: We used to go to the other hotel. I was trying to think of its name. That's where all the troops went. And of course, the restaurant was up on the top floor and it was open on the sides.

[00:31:43.76] And many, many times you would go in there and there were some guys sitting there at the bar, beer in hand, and they'd be singing, I Left My Heart in San Francisco. And the tears would-- just as you described, the tears would be rolling. And that's the song I think of. One of the other funny things that I remember-- this was some people that had a little store along the main street there. And of course, they fed their family. They probably live there, too, by the hotel.

[00:32:21.32] JOE GALLOWAY: I'm sure.

[00:32:22.76] WILMA VAUGHT: And one day, their little girl had come out with her bowl of soup or whatever it was and she was sitting on the curb and carefully picking out the peas and throwing them on the floor, on the street--

[00:32:38.27] JOE GALLOWAY: In the gutter.

[00:32:39.49] WILMA VAUGHT: --because she wasn't going to eat those peas out of there.. And I thought children are children.

[00:32:45.95] JOE GALLOWAY: There it is.

[00:32:48.05] WILMA VAUGHT: The other thing I remember is that there was a young boy. I think-- as I recall, I think he was about 9 or 10. And the Army had picked him up and he didn't know where his family was and they were taking care of him. They'd bring him things to eat, and at night they let him sleep in their Jeep.

[00:33:11.27] JOE GALLOWAY: Our Army or their army?

[00:33:13.40] WILMA VAUGHT: Our Army.

[00:33:14.24] JOE GALLOWAY: Our Army.

[00:33:15.42] WILMA VAUGHT: They had vehicles parked there by the hotel. They let him sleep in the vehicle--

[00:33:22.37] JOE GALLOWAY: And he watched it for them.

[00:33:23.49] WILMA VAUGHT: And I wonder what happened to him. Nice young kid.

[00:33:27.14] JOE GALLOWAY: That's amazing.

[00:33:33.61] WILMA VAUGHT: There were two things that I got to do that I really enjoyed, or that are very memorable to me. When I was coming up toward my departure, I decided I wanted to be driven to Long Binh to say goodbye to the people that I had coordinated things with there. And so I managed to get a driver assigned to a vehicle and we drove there.

[00:34:04.12] And one of the things I remember was going by the cemetery, which I guess was their equivalent to our Arlington Cemetery.

[00:34:16.50] JOE GALLOWAY: Yeah, their national army--

[00:34:17.83] WILMA VAUGHT: Not in the way it looked.

[00:34:19.47] JOE GALLOWAY: No.

[00:34:20.64] WILMA VAUGHT: Because you could just see where people had been buried. And that was an unforgettable thing, particularly since I've spent so much of my time here working next to Arlington Cemetery, to think of what that was like. And then when the GAO was there once, we went by helicopter to Long Binh, and I was charged with going with them. And I was just fascinated by this. So I'm over here in the seat leaning like this looking outside, and I thought the GAO guy was going to die because he was sure I was going to fall out of the plane, and he was in panic. And I was busy taking pictures as we went. And that was another highlight.

[00:35:20.61] WILMA VAUGHT: Well, the absolute worst day was a very touching one. We had a bus driver and he had nine children-- young guy. And they had nine children because if you had nine children, you didn't have to go into the army. And he was so good to everybody on the bus, and everybody just thought the world and all of him. And he had a motorcycle. And he was in an accident, he was killed.

[00:35:58.56] And everybody felt so badly about this that we took up a collection. And as I recall, it was either \$1,000 or \$2,000 that we got. And then one of the fellows and Lois and I took the money to where they had his body with his family gathered around and took the money to her. And I've often wondered what happened to that family.

[00:36:30.24] Of course, his brother would be responsible for them. But my gosh, everybody just liked him so much. And that was the worst day of my life when he had been killed in that accident. WILMA VAUGHT: I had a little contact with the Koreans, I think it was. They ate at some of the-- same restaurant I did. They were the ones that were teaching me how to use the chopsticks.

[00:37:08.28] JOE GALLOWAY: Chopsticks, yeah.

[00:37:09.36] WILMA VAUGHT: That's how I learned to use chopsticks, it was from the Koreans. And they were very polite. And I was invited to a dinner that they had, which was kind of surprising for me as a female to be invited to that. And I did go. The other thing I remember,

they did a change in coinage or money. And let me tell you, the Koreans were out there making money off that hand over fist.

[00:37:45.18] JOE GALLOWAY: Yeah, they were good at that.

[00:37:47.25] WILMA VAUGHT: They were very good at that and there wasn't-- you had your life in your hands if you tried to stop it.

[00:37:53.81] JOE GALLOWAY: Oh, yeah.

[00:37:59.45] WILMA VAUGHT: I'm not a great letter writer and my mother kept in touch with me. And I think that one of the most memorable things was when my birthday came, what my mother always did for my birthday was made me an angel food cake. That was my favorite cake, angel food cake. And so when they brought the mail in about the time of-- date of my birthday, this guy came in with this box. And he was grinning from ear to ear. And here was this box and inside was my cake and over the top was just cellophane. You could look right in there and see the cake.

[00:38:39.53] And my mother had gone to the post office and said, how, I can mail a cake? And they said, oh, we're doing all kinds of things to send people. We will just cover it over and we'll make sure it gets there. Imagine that. And it came through. And my office thought it was wonderful. And we all ate angel food cake. The other thing that I decided I wanted to send the elephants back to my family. They were about that tall.

[00:39:12.66] JOE GALLOWAY: Mm-hm. BUFES we called them.

[00:39:13.86] WILMA VAUGHT: So I started to check. Well now, how do I send one of them back? And they said, well, you get a Coca-Cola box that you can set it in. And you set it in and then you put the thing around it's--

[00:39:27.29] JOE GALLOWAY: Nose.

[00:39:27.83] WILMA VAUGHT: --nose with the thing-- who it's to. And you don't cover it or you don't do anything and the post office will take good care of it.

[00:39:36.35] JOE GALLOWAY: They'll take good care of it.

[00:39:38.06] WILMA VAUGHT: And I sent two of them.

[00:39:40.19] JOE GALLOWAY: Did they get there OK?

[00:39:41.09] WILMA VAUGHT: They got there OK. And I still have both of them. So I sent them to my mother and my sister, and I ended up with both of them.

[00:39:51.03] JOE GALLOWAY: We called them BUFES. Big, ugly f-ing elephants.

[00:40:00.59] WILMA VAUGHT: The place it was-- I think it was-- may have been where I bought my elephants. I remember walking out to the side door one day, and right across from there was just kind of a little garden thing with flowers and some greenery. And then all of a sudden I saw something move. And I looked a little closer and there must have been 75 rats in there.

[00:40:25.11] JOE GALLOWAY: Oh, my God.

[00:40:28.37] WILMA VAUGHT: And I thought, and up and down this street, or this alley, is where they're cooking our food.

[00:40:34.91] JOE GALLOWAY: Uh-huh. Exactly.

[00:40:43.80] WILMA VAUGHT: It happened that my mother and my aunt drove out in my car to meet me at March Air Force Base in California and I drove home from there.

[00:40:57.15] JOE GALLOWAY: Without incident.

[00:40:58.77] WILMA VAUGHT: Without incident. And in my home community, they loved me. They were not upset with me because I had served in Vietnam.

[00:41:08.28] JOE GALLOWAY: You were by then still a major?

[00:41:12.34] WILMA VAUGHT: I was still a major.

[00:41:13.34] JOE GALLOWAY: OK.

[00:41:13.86] WILMA VAUGHT: And I was-- I went to Wright-Patterson Air Force Base. WILMA VAUGHT: I was assigned back to Dayton, Ohio to work at the logistics command. And I was assigned to work-- they were going to try to come out with a new computer program that they could manage the logistics for every base just from the base there. Well, we were far ahead of computers and that didn't work.

[00:41:55.64] JOE GALLOWAY: It didn't work.

[00:41:56.80] WILMA VAUGHT: No, they never were able to get that to work because the computer systems just weren't adequate for that. WILMA VAUGHT: Well, with Colonel Rossi. And I became president of the PenFed Credit Union and I asked her to be on the board of directors, so we were in close contact. Then with Lois Westerfield, as long as she was in the Washington, D.C. area we were close contact, but she moved to Florida after she retired.

[00:42:37.75] And she's still in contact. I get Christmas cards from her and I've tried to see her a couple of times and couldn't quite get contact made. And that-- there was just the enlisted woman whom I never really knew. So that was basically it.

[00:42:58.78] JOE GALLOWAY: That was it. You were only four of you.

[00:43:01.33] WILMA VAUGHT: There were four of us. WILMA VAUGHT: Well, I think it affected me in as much as-- when I got to Wright-Patterson as a major, I had done my master's degree, I had had a tour in Vietnam. And this put me in a good position for promotion below the zone. And I was promoted below the zone to lieutenant colonel. And that made me eligible for the Industrial College-- well, for the Senior Service School. And then I became the first woman to go to the Industrial College of the Armed Forces from the Air Force, ever, and the third woman in its history to go there. And all of that positioned me that I made colonel in my first time up.

[00:44:05.14] JOE GALLOWAY: Yeah. And all of that really grew out of your experiences in Vietnam.

[00:44:12.49] WILMA VAUGHT: Yeah.

[00:44:13.08] JOE GALLOWAY: Wow.

[00:44:14.79] WILMA VAUGHT: These things that I had done through time I think was what did that.

[00:44:21.93] JOE GALLOWAY: Put you on the road.

[00:44:29.02] WILMA VAUGHT: Now, I had very little contact with the people serving out in the field. And one conversation that I had that was very memorable to me was you think about people serving overseas-- and this was a senior lieutenant colonel that worked there in our building at MACV. And I hadn't seen him for two or three days on the bus because he rode the bus back and forth. And I said, hey, where you been? And he said, I'm due to leave.

[00:45:10.96] And he said, you know, this has never affected me before. He said, I'll be retiring when I get back. But he said, I have been so afraid that something would happen to me, and I wouldn't get back to be with my family again that I packed my stuff and I brought it here. And we still had cots left from--

[00:45:35.77] JOE GALLOWAY: He was living in the office.

[00:45:38.50] WILMA VAUGHT: --that were there in the office, and he lived in the office for about five or six days, so that all he had to do was walk across the street and get-- base ops into the airplane.

[00:45:51.35] JOE GALLOWAY: There he went.

[00:45:52.57] WILMA VAUGHT: And away he went. And one of the majors in my own office who had been a C-130 pilot and he had been grounded. And we were talking and he said, that was not right for my government to cause me to leave my family and come on a mission like this. And if they ever do it again, I will retire and get out or I'll quit. And I thought, what in the world is wrong with you? You're a major in the military. There is nothing wrong with them telling you to go do this.

[00:46:35.01] Those two things gave me an understanding I never really felt before of the change in attitude that the Vietnam War brought to many of the members of the military. And of course, then through my work with the women getting the memorial built to pay tribute to the women, this has caused me to visit many VAs around the country, to be more closely associated with the veteran organizations like the American Legion, VFW--

[00:47:23.96] JOE GALLOWAY: VVA.

[00:47:24.89] WILMA VAUGHT: --VVA. All of them. AMVETS. I've been more closely connected to them than I otherwise would, so I met more veterans. And then, of course, being in and out of the memorial there so much many veterans-- male veterans particularly-- come and visit there, or they come with their wives or family members when they come. And so I've had much greater contact than I otherwise would have. And I have done a lot of public speaking, too, which has brought me in contact with veterans, and far more than most people ever have an opportunity--

[00:48:13.04] WILMA VAUGHT: Of those who were your age and my age who lived during that time, we'll never forget the animosity toward military that took place during that period of time. And all of the things that were done and the lack of respect for those who served in Vietnam to a considerable degree by some people during that time, those of us in that group still remember it.

[00:48:58.27] But I think as far as people who are born since then and are now of age, it doesn't mean that much to them, I don't think. And it's been interesting to me as I have watched Afghanistan and Iraq. And the comments that are made about the losses that we have suffered there and when you think about the number and you compare it with our losses in the Civil War, World War I, World War II, Vietnam, Korea, it's nothing. It is so small.

[00:49:48.54] And yet for the people of today it has become such a big figure, our losses have become such a big figure. And I'm not saying that means we should go out and lose more people in conflict at all. It's just interesting to note that difference at how we view our losses. WILMA VAUGHT: How many, many, many, times.

[00:50:16.44] JOE GALLOWAY: Many times. What are your thoughts when you go there?

[00:50:23.95] WILMA VAUGHT: Well, there are a few people that I think of like there were some of the pilots that I knew when I was at-- in Orlando. Not very many, but a few of the names ended up there. And I have a cousin whose name is there. And I know the artist who came up with that design, and there's just been an amazing thing--

[00:51:03.81] JOE GALLOWAY: Absolutely.

[00:51:03.96] WILMA VAUGHT: --in the way it's been received. And you know, they put the names on the Korean War Memorial. But it never got that same--

[00:51:16.55] JOE GALLOWAY: They didn't quite do it the same way.

[00:51:19.56] WILMA VAUGHT: No. WILMA VAUGHT: I'm on the committee.

[00:51:24.87] JOE GALLOWAY: You're on the committee.

[00:51:26.55] WILMA VAUGHT: There's a question in my mind-- you know, if you don't do it at the 50th point, those who were in it are not ever going to be a part of it.

[00:51:37.26] JOE GALLOWAY: They'll be gone.

[00:51:38.28] WILMA VAUGHT: They'll be gone. And yet when you look at the-- we're also doing the 100th anniversary of World War I. I was quite amazed. I was invited to speak at Silver Spring. This was toward the very beginning of the Vietnam thing. And I thought, as Merle and I went up to do this, I thought, boy, I wonder how many people will show up for this.

[00:52:17.70] And we went in this huge auditorium. I looked around and I thought, boy, they'll be just a handful of people from Silver Spring, from this area particularly. My gosh, it was filled. There was standing room only. I was just amazed. And it was a very receptive audience. And so there's a place for these remembrances. I think I would refer to them as a remembrance more than I would a celebration. But it certainly has caught on to a considerable degree.

[00:53:08.06] JOE GALLOWAY: General Vaught, thank you so much for coming in and sitting for this interview. My pleasure entirely.

[00:53:14.75] WILMA VAUGHT: Well, I've enjoyed talking to you. It's interesting to talk to somebody who has had somewhat similar experiences.

[00:53:22.01] JOE GALLOWAY: Indeed. Indeed.