

12-17-2003

Brenda Faulk oral history interview by Mark I. Greenberg, December 17, 2003

Brenda Faulk (Interviewee)

Mark I. Greenberg (Interviewer)

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Faulk, Brenda (Interviewee) and Greenberg, Mark I. (Interviewer), "Brenda Faulk oral history interview by Mark I. Greenberg, December 17, 2003" (2003). *Digital Collection - USF Historical Archives Oral Histories*. Paper 225.
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Oral History Program
USF 50th Anniversary Project

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Current Position: Senior Secretary,
Air Force ROTC
Date of Interview: Dec. 17, 2003
Editor: Danielle E. Riley
Date of Edit: Feb. 12, 2004

Interviewer: Mark I. Greenberg
Location of Interview: Tampa
Campus Library
Abstractor: Jared G. Toney
Final Editor: Jared G. Toney

TOPICS OF DISCUSSION

What brought Ms. Faulk to USF?

She came to USF in late summer of 1979 hired as part of a research team in the Psychology Department concerned with work environments and employee productivity. Ms. Faulk had a wide range of responsibilities, including organizing budgets, and making travel arrangements and appointments for the staff. She worked in this capacity for two years, until the grant was exhausted.

Working in the ROTC program

Ms. Faulk then began working as a secretary in the Air Force ROTC (Reserve Officer Training Corps) in 1982, a program that was only then in its formative stages. Academic classes were offered to all USF students, the main goal being the screening and recruitment of students for officer training.

What did the program offer students?

In the first two years, students learned about the structure and organization of the Air Force. Classes were also given in military history and leadership skills. The second two years are commissioned, and require application to the Professional Officer Corps (POC). At this point, students are required to sign a contract obligating them to post-graduate military service upon successful completion of the academic and field-training programs. During these years, subject areas include leadership and management theory, evaluation skills, and national security policies. Students are required to be conscious of contemporary events as well as historical. Students coming out of high-school ROTC programs having met certain academic standards qualify to have their tuition paid by the Air Force ROTC at USF. These students are selected by the program with the hopes that they will pursue a career in the military. Even those who choose civilian careers have been effectively groomed for management positions.

On-campus recruiting

The program is geared mostly for students who expect to attend, or are already attending, college. Officer Training (third and fourth years) is for students who have completed four years of college and want to join the military. This takes them on to active duty following

completion of the program. Contracted students wishing to leave the ROTC may be required to repay those tuition expenses paid by the military, others may be required to serve following their graduation. Cases are treated on an individual basis.

Field training

Consists of four-to-six weeks of officer training at an Air Force installation. Training is both mental and physical, in effort to establish if a candidate is truly “officer material.” Exercises are constructed to encourage students to learn how to successfully work together in a variety of circumstances and environments. The workload is multiplied two or three times what they are familiar with, and the students report back to her that the process is “extremely intense.”

What are the benefits to the Air Force?

Gives students “a good taste” of the program offered at USF. “At the same time they are looking at us, we are looking at them.” Following graduation, the students go on active duty as commissioned officers, assuming a great deal of responsibility, and have the option of continuing their education at a technical school, where “the boundaries are limitless.”

How does the program function within the U.S. Air Force?

The ROTC school at USF is a military detachment (unit) that receives orders from Maxwell Air Force Base in Montgomery, Alabama. From the base in Alabama, they receive specific guidelines concerning the programs and scholarship offers available locally.

Who are the instructors?

The officers that teach courses have a minimum of a master’s degree. It is a family-oriented service program where a concerted effort is made to accommodate the families of the officers. There are currently four instructors in the program, one for each year/class of students, a precedent set at the advent of the program.

Relationship between USF and Air Force officials

Instructors are required to meet standards and curriculum goals established by Air Force officials. Occasionally, civilian instructors are invited into the classroom to share their views, experiences, and knowledge, thus providing the students with an “all-around education.”

Number/quality of students enrolled

Thirty students signed up for the program in 1982. Enrollment has gone as low as four to as high as 250. The current class is comprised of approximately 125 students. A good number of those from the pioneer class had prior military experience, and were primarily older people going back to school. One of the very first, Howard Jones, graduated from the ROTC and went on to become an Air Force physician. Another, Steve Fell, “Mr. 4.0,” worked for IBM before enrolling at USF, and went on to a prestigious position in the Organization of Special Investigations (OSI), a sort of military version of the FBI. Still

others became fighter-pilots, computer specialists, and engineers, to name a few. As a whole, the students were ethnically diverse, and came from all parts of the country.

Alumni

Active service (within sixty days) is the general rule for all students completing the ROTC program at USF. The first commitment as an officer is four years of active duty, followed by four years in active reserve. Graduates are spread all over the world holding jobs “that I call spectacular!” Some have left the military to pursue civilian careers, while others have advanced through the military to become high-ranking officers. Many continue to keep in contact with the department here at USF, “That, is the best part of this position!”

Do contemporary global events affect enrollment?

She has seen numbers fluctuate, and can only speculate as to the causes. Certainly international events influence the mood particularly among students in the Armed Services, but the enrollment remains fairly steady throughout.

How has the student body traditionally responded to the military presence on campus?

There have been minor instances of graffiti outside the offices, but no substantial opposition, and certainly no physical confrontations have occurred. She explains such behavior in part by the high visibility of students required to dress in uniform on particular days, which also helps in recruiting new students to the program.

How involved are women in the program?

She believes the numbers of enrollment have increased as a response to the opportunities available to women. Over the years, doors which were traditionally closed to women in the military have been opened. Female alumni have gone on to successful in various capacities, ranging from desk jobs to the piloting of aircraft.

How would you encourage a potential candidate for the ROTC?

She thinks it is a great opportunity, though “not for everybody.” At the very least, she suggests, the experience helps students to grow up and become more independent. “It’s a great life!”

What do you see in the future of the Air Force ROTC?

She has already seen many positive changes, but would like to see more personnel in effort to decrease the workload on the current staff. Though she likes to see the numbers grow, it is important that the quantity of students remains manageable so that every student may receive adequate attention and access to departmental resources.

End of Interview