WOMEN VETERANS HISTORICAL PROJECT

ORAL HISTORY COLLECTION

INTERVIEWEE: Gail Adams

INTERVIEWER: Therese Strohmer

DATE: October 30, 2008

[Begin Interview]

TS: This is Therese Strohmer, and today is October 30, 2008. We're in Cary, North Carolina. This is an oral history interview for the Women's Veterans Historical Project at the University of North Carolina at Greensboro. So Gail, go ahead and state your name the way you would like it on your collection.

GA: Gail Adams.

TS: Okay. Thank you. Well,, Gail, why don't we start off by having you tell me about growing up?

GA: Okay.

TS: Where'd you grow up?

GA: I was born in St. Joseph, Missouri, and I only lived there a couple of years. That's where most of my family is from. But my mother divorced—my mother and father divorced when I was a baby, basically. But my mother remarried, and she remarried a military man. He was a pilot in the air force, and so we moved to many, many locations. I moved to—as a child, I lived in Kansas, New Hampshire, Germany, a number of places.

TS: What was that like growing up with that?

GA: In the military?

TS: Yeah.

GA: I—now looking back on it, I think it was wonderful. Back then I thought it was probably a little stressful having to change schools, meet new people, new friends, at every location. But I adjusted quite well. And now I look back on it and a lot of those places where you get to read in a history books, I got to live it and experience it. So I think it

was fun and probably made me more outgoing. I was a very shy child, so I think it was probably a good thing that I was able to do that. I think it helped me as an adult to be able to communicate with people, to be probably a little more understanding of people, that sort of thing.

TS: Sure. Now, so when your mom remarried, what did—and she was travelling around also to these different places that your stepfather was stationed?

GA: Right.

TS: Did she also work?

GA: No. She was a stay at home mom. He was an officer in the air force, and this goes back to things—the way things were many years ago. I don't think they're quite like that today. But there were a lot of expectations put on male officers and their wives, who were usually expected to be members of the wives club, and they were supposed to be socially connected, and they were to have parties, and those kinds of things. So it was one of those things that my mom had to adjust to. When I was very, very young, my mother was a dancing instructor. She was a ballroom dancer.

TS: Oh, neat!

GA: But after that, she became a housewife.

TS: Now, do you have any brothers and sisters?

GA: I have two half-brothers—I mean a half-sister, and half-brother.

TS: Okay.

GA: So we have the same mother.

TS: Right.

GA: And different father.

TS: So you're the oldest of the—?

GA: I am. There's ten years between my sister and I, and twelve years between my brother and I.

TS: Okay.

GA: And they did not follow the military. I'm the only one.

TS: Oh, how about that. That's interesting. Well,, so when you're—about how old were you then when you—when your—?

GA: When this all started?

TS: Yeah! This all started, exactly.

GA: My mother remarried when I was eight, I guess, or just before I turned nine, so I went to live with my mom and my military stepdad just before my ninth birthday.

TS: When was that? What time—what decade are we talking about?

GA: In the sixties.

TS: In the sixties? Okay.

GA: Because I was born in 1951.

TS: Okay.

GA: So that would have been about '60—sixty—'60.

TS: Yeah. Do you remember then—so it took some adjustment, you said, to get used to?

GA: Yes.

TS: Can you give me an example of maybe you moved into a new place or—?

GA: Well, I was just coming from a little town, a small town. I had all my family in that same town. Most of that family was on my father's side: my grandparents, and aunts and uncles and cousins. My mother's family is very small. Really my only relationship with my mother's side of the family was with my grandmother, my mother's mother. So going from that, where all my family was and most of them still reside, I'm the one—kind of the black sheep. I'm the one that picked up and left. But of course it was because of being associated with a military.

TS: Sure?

GA: You know, the military. It was very different. I don't know how to explain it. I was just—I was like a little fish out of water, I guess. But I did—I did adjust. It was a little difficult at first, but each time we moved, it seemed like it got a little bit easier and I pretty much had an idea of what to expect.

TS: Now, you said you were shy. How did—did you like school at all? Were you—?

GA: I don't—I would not say that I was a great student. I liked recess. [laughs] I always was a child that everybody referred to as very smart. I guess naturally smart, but I didn't want to do schoolwork. I was—I didn't have good study habits, and probably some of that had to do with maybe coming from a broken family. I spent some time living with my grandparents. So I'm sure all those things influenced me in some way. Who knows how? [TS laughs] So I was not one to sit down—I did not have good study habits because I really didn't want to sit down and do a lot of that.

TS: What would you rather be doing?

GA: Sports.

TS: Oh, okay. What kind of sports?

GA: I'd do about anything. I played softball. I was in track. I was—I guess I would have been a professional athlete if I could have been back then, but women didn't do much in the way of athletics. I mean school didn't offer much in the way of athletics for girls, when I was growing up.

TS: Was the military system that you were in supportive of children in athletics at all?

GA: Well,, there were—yeah, there were some. Sure. But probably like any other school, the schools on base were still geared towards boys. There were just—there were a little bit of sports, but just not that much for girls. The emphasis was always on boys. It was always the football team. It was always the basketball team. There wasn't a girl's. It was boys. So that made it difficult.

TS: How about—what did you think about—okay, so when you were travelling around—so it was '63 when [President] John Kennedy was assassinated. Do you remember that? You were probably in your teens.

GA: I do remember that. I was—I think I was in fourth grade. I think I was probably—no, I'm sorry. I was in sixth grade, and we lived in New Hampshire. And—isn't that funny how you remember these things of what you were doing at that moment in time? It doesn't seem to matter how old you were back then. But I was sitting in class, in school, and the news came on over the broadcast system. We had little speakers in each classroom. They had it broadcast through the speakers, the sound system of the school.

TS: Wow. So like the radio, they—did they—?

GA: Apparently, that's what they had done.

TS: Okay. They put it through the broadcast, and that's how you heard about it. So what was that like? Do you remember?

GA: Well,, as a child, I guess, I was certainly taken aback by it. I don't know that it impacted me. It was something that I would remember. I don't know that it impacted me like it did my parents. My mother was devastated because they were definitely—they were Democrats. They were Democrats and they were John F. Kennedy fans; you know, just could not believe something like that could happen.

TS: Do you remember, in that period of time, of the tension of the atomic bomb and the standoff with [Nikita] Khruschev, in that period, even though you were a child?

GA: Well,, actually, a little bit before that. When we lived in—just before we moved up to New Hampshire, my stepdad—I think I was in fourth or fifth grade when that happened, when you're talking about the missile standoff.

TS: [Cuban] Missile Crisis, yeah.

GA: Yes. He was in SAC, Strategic Air Command, at the time. He flew—oh, back then I guess he flew KC-97s [Stratotanker], re-fuelers. But I remember that he left, packed up and left, and my mom didn't know where he went. He just said he was—he had to go and he couldn't tell us where he was going, basically. So I remember that being kind of an odd thing. [laughs]

TS: Right, sure.

GA: And he was gone for a while. And what it was, he was on alert—what they used to call alert. And he went—I believe he did tell us later that he was somewhere—somewhere positioned in Florida.

TS: Florida. A lot of people were sent to Florida at that time.

GA: Yeah. So he was standing by there, during that whole process. Well, that was actually before the John F. Kennedy [assassination].

TS: Right. That's true. Well, that's interesting. So you're a child growing up and your—liked sports. Did you have an idea of what your expectations were for what you were going to do beyond, say, high school or anything like that?

GA: I didn't. I really didn't. And that may be—you know, it's so different for kids that grow up in the same town and that go off to college, for example, with their—you know, they go through high school and then oftentimes they'll go off to college with friends of theirs. For me, it just didn't quite work out that way, because I ended up finishing my high school years in Germany, and we scattered all over the world. I had two of my best friends that went to the American College in Paris, France, for example. I wasn't—I was not—I was not ready, not—I don't think—I wasn't mature enough. I wasn't ready mentally. I just wasn't ready to go off to college. I had no clue what I wanted to do. All I

knew was I was ready to get back to the States, and I figured out that was really what I was thinking. I just—

My parents didn't really steer me one way or the other. My school grades weren't that great, because, like I said, I was not a—I wasn't—I think I was pretty smart. I could manage to get by without picking up a book, and that's pretty much how I went through my first twelve years of school. So that's pretty bad, I must say. But that's how I did it. I regret it now. I wish that someone had taught me years earlier about—because that was a constant battle at home, that I wasn't bringing home schoolwork and I wasn't bringing home books and— [laughter] So—but, anyway, I did much better in college. I finally settled down and figured out, "Okay. I need to study." But I really didn't know what I was doing.

TS: Yeah. Well, can I go back just a little bit?

GA: Yeah.

TS: Because you said that you graduated high school in Germany. What was that like? What was like living in Germany, at that time that you were there?

GA: Oh, it was great. We went there after my daddy returned from Vietnam—his second tour in Vietnam, back in the mid-sixties. We were there for about three, three and a half years. And it was probably—we went over there in the middle of my freshman year of high school. No, sorry, the middle of my sophomore year in school. So I finished up my sophomore year over there and my junior and senior year. But at that time, that's when Americans—they had closed a lot of our bases in France. Basically France kicked us out.

TS: They left NATO [North Atlantic Treaty Organization]?

GA: Yeah. I don't know all the history behind all that and what was going on. I know it was somewhat tied to Vietnam. But anyway, we had a falling out and closed many of our bases in France and—or all of them. So many of the kids that their parents were stationed in France, actually, instead of going back to the States, many of those people were reassigned into European Theatre, and many of them became German.

TS: Interesting.

GA: And I know quite a few of them that were at my high school, because they came to Wiesbaden, Germany.

TS: Oh, you were in Wiesbaden?

GA: One of the largest American high schools in Germany is in Wiesbaden. I think Frankfurt is the biggest and then Wiesbaden. They were our rivals,—

TS: Sure.

GA: —other schools. But yeah, we had that going on. I had a lot of German friends that were outside of—outside of the American school.

TS: Right.

GA: They were just friends that I had met through other events, things that I did outside of school. And I got to where I spoke German fairly well.

TS: Well,, good.

GA: I can't say it was what my German teacher appreciated because it wasn't proper German. Even though I was taking German in school, I was learning most of my German from German friends.

TS: So you got all the slang.

GA: I got all the slang and the pronunciations were not what she liked, but I would—I was able to converse pretty well.

TS: Yeah.

GA: So Germany was great. I loved it. I mean I had an opportunity to learn a little bit about skiing. We were able to travel very, very inexpensively through the recreation—the US recreation services. So we traveled extensively through Germany. We also went down to Italy and Spain, as a family.

TS: Right.

GA: We'd always have at least one or two vacations every year. We take off and go somewhere because it was very inexpensive. It was really—and they do it—a lot of them were bus trips.

TS: Right.

GA: And it was great. I mean, it would be a package deal. It covered your hotel, and much of your food and lodging all included. It really made it nice for the military families being able to go and experience other parts of Europe.

TS: Yeah, that's neat.

GA: So again, you know, I learned a lot through my personal experiences of going to places.

TS: That's true. So but—so when you graduated from high school, you were like, "Well,, I'm ready to do something [unclear—phone rings].

GA: Yeah.

TS: Do you want me to pause it for a second? Okay.

[recording paused]

GA: We went to Germany—

TS: Okay. Okay, Gail, go back to Germany after that little pause.

GA: We—my dad got an assignment back to Texas, so I pretty much decided I would just wait until we came back to the States before I decided what I was going to do, because I had no way of knowing about point. I was—I did do some work for—I worked for the APs[?].

TS: Right, APs[?].

GA: Yeah. I used to work at the exchange for a little while. I also worked at a German ladies clothing shop called [Brylee Knits?]. But, I think I did that for, I don't know, maybe six months or—

TS: So like after high school, waiting for—?

GA: Yeah. I was just kind of dabbling until my family came back from the States, is what I was doing. There really wasn't much else to get involved in at that point. But we came back that fall after I graduated, and he got stationed at—oh gosh. I'm sorry, I can't remember.

TS: It's okay.

GA: Fort Worth, Texas.

TS: Sure.

GA: He was the liaison officer at the General Dynamics [Corporation] plant. So he was the air force liaison. He had his own little plane they gave him. It was kind of neat, and I'll tell you how that kind of comes into play in a few minutes, but—So we got stationed there, and I finally started looking in the newspaper. I thought, "Well, I'll find some employment until I find something to do." Everything was secretarial, nursing. It was all of those kinds of things that never interested me, and I wasn't interested in going to school to do those things, and I did not know what it was I wanted to do. I had no clue. And so out of the clear blue one evening, we were sitting around the dinner table, and I

said, “You know what? I think I’m going to try to go into the air force.” And it was like everybody harmonized. They thought, “I think that’s a great idea!”

TS: So your mom and your dad liked it?

GA: Yeah. I think they were kind of—they didn’t know what in the world was going to become of me. I just couldn’t figure it out. And I said, “I don’t—maybe I’ll find something. I just—right now, I just don’t know what it is I want to do. I’m not ready to go to college still. I just don’t know.” So being overseas probably hurt in that respect, because I was really disconnected.

TS: What do you think you were disconnected from?

GA: Well, I think had I been in the States for those last few years of high school, I probably would have been more connected in deciding about schooling—future schooling and that sort of thing. I think that was a big disconnect. But looking back on it, I would never have given up those years, either. I loved it over there. Germany was wonderful. I wouldn’t give up that.

But I ended up going to see the recruiter. And here it goes back to: it’s not your book smarts. I test quite well in every subject matter. I scored very, very high on everything from electrical, mechanical, administrative, and general, including math. So somewhere along the line I guess I managed to learn something. But they were quite impressed with my scores and basically said I could be anything I wanted to be, once I got out of basic training, because my scores were to the point where they could put me into any career field. So—but I went through basic training, and in—they gave me an assignment.

TS: Yeah.

GA: And this is what gets kind of funny again, because here I am thinking—

TS: Could I ask you what basic training was like at that time?

GA: Well, it was eight weeks—I think it was eight. Yeah, eight weeks of mostly physical, and of course they would teach you about the air force and you had to learn—

TS: Chain of command?

GA: Chain of command, little bit of history. You have to learn the ranks. You know, I mean very, very basic stuff.

TS: Which you probably were pretty familiar with.

GA: Right.

TS: Because that's something—

GA: Right. I did know quite a bit. I was probably at an advantage over most of the young ladies that were going through with me. I had—I remember I had a roommate that was just stressed out, day-in and day-out, about having to maintain her room and be ready in x number of minutes every morning. So I would get me ready and get her ready too! But I think I—yeah, I learned how to do those hospital corners back when I lived at home, because that's the way I had to make my bed. It's those kinds of things that—I was easily adjusting to the military. It was not difficult for me at all. It was a piece of cake. So—

TS: So then you get out—

GA: And physically it was a piece of cake.

TS: Right, because you were the sporty one.

GA: I was the sporty one, so—but many of the girls were not. They just were not physical. And again, it goes back to there just wasn't that much in the school system, I think, for women. Now, there wasn't that much for sports, there wasn't that much—I mean we were not—when we went through school, we were not—that was the other thing. All the things—the subject matters didn't appeal to me either, because really, I think, had I been forced more into math classes, science classes, things like that, instead of home economics and those kinds of things, I probably would have had a different kind of outlook for my future. But that's not what girls typically were experiencing. So it does have a major affect on the outcome of things—your direction early on, when you're not exposed to a lot of things. So we have changed a lot. I wish now—not that I want to repeat anything—but I wish now that the way things are now with a lot of emphasis on math and science, where girls can do whatever they want to do, I wish that it had been that way back then because I was much more into, I think, things like that. More technical things, probably, were more appealing to me than fluffy things.

TS: So you think maybe the reason that you weren't so interested in school was because you weren't challenged at all, you mean?

GA: Yeah. And I didn't have, I think, a teacher—this is just Gail's philosophy—but I think teacher's have a responsibility to motivate students to learn. They have to give you—before you can teach somebody, you have to give them a reason why they need to learn something. I think that's number one, and I've learned that over the years. But I think once you instill that in somebody, once you've introduced a reason or how this information might be useful, then I think it makes it very easy to teach, to share information. I've learned that over the years, and I've been that way with people who've worked for me—that I just think once you motivate somebody to help give them a reason why they need to know or should know something, they're more likely to grasp that information. So I didn't have—I honestly can say I didn't have any teachers growing up

that did that, that could capture my interest. So that's—I think that was a major factor for why I didn't—wasn't the best student in school.

TS: Interesting.

GA: Because I think I had potential. I knew I wasn't dumb. I knew there wasn't anything wrong with me. I just didn't have the desire. There was just absolutely zero motivation.

TS: Okay. So your—so you get through basic training. You whizzed right through.

GA: Yes. And here I am thinking, "Okay. I did so well on my test so I'm going to get a great job when I leave here from training." And I got this—my orders said that I was going to be going into—I wasn't even going to technical school. I said, "Oh, that's interesting. I'm not even going to a technical training school; I'm going straight to my job." And it turned out I was going to traffic management, was the name of the field. And I'm thinking, aircraft. I think I'm going to be an aircraft traffic controller. So—

TS: It doesn't quite match?

GA: No! [laughing] No, it was not. I thought there'd been a mistake. But anyway, what it was is traffic management is the shipping of people and baggage and household goods. And anything having to do with transporting people and goods is traffic management.

TS: Yeah.

GA: And that's what I—that was my first assignment. That was my first job in the air force. And I went to Keesler Air Force Base, Mississippi, and most of that time I was sitting there making airline reservations for mostly young men going to Vietnam.

TS: How did you feel about—how did you—?

GA: So you're going straight—and of course Keesler Air Force Base is a big training center. So they come out of basic training, they go to whatever field they were training in—because there were quite a few schools there at Keesler—and then we ship them off. Almost all of them, we'd ship them off to Vietnam.

TS: How did you feel about—how did you—?

GA: It was depressing. Yeah, it was not—first of all it was boring. It was absolutely what I did not want to do because it was mostly administrative.

TS: Right.

GA: It was just totally against what I had—so I wasn't real excited about that, but that was the field that I ended up being in for—oh gosh. I can't remember exactly the dates.

TS: That's okay. That's something we can get from—

GA: Okay. But anyway, I did that for a number of years.

TS: So this is like 1970, right? How did you feel about Vietnam, at that time?

GA: Well, I had experienced it through my stepdad being in Vietnam and sending tapes back. We could hear a lot of fighting going on in the background of those tapes, too.

TS: Really?

GA: Oh, absolutely.

TS: What did you think about that?

GA: You could hear rockets and things like that going off.

TS: My goodness. How would your mother feel about that?

GA: Well, I mean it was—but you know what? We were watching it on—that was on—wasn't that the first war that people were watching it on their TV sets at dinner time every night? I mean we were all exposed to it one way or another. So yeah, it was awful. And I really didn't enjoy the part about having to send these people over to Vietnam.

TS: Well, so if you're—

GA: It's one of those things you feel helpless. There's nothing you can do.

TS: Right.

GA: You just want it to end.

TS: Well,, as a matter of fact, that's what I'm wondering. At that time, in 1970, did you have any—because there was a lot of anti-war protests and things like that went on in the sixties.

GA: There were. And I'll tell you too, there were a lot of—a lot of civilians outside of our base that hated us. I mean that hated the military. It wasn't quite like it is today where people respect the soldiers coming back from overseas and military people serving their country. They weren't viewed that way.

TS: Did you have any personal experience with that at all?

GA: I—not personally. I had some people that I knew of that—I mean they weren't personal friends—being beat up off base, those kinds of things. Especially in the evening time, at local establishments off the base, if a young military person went out there oftentimes they'd get into a brawl, usually about Vietnam or they'd call them skinheads. They had all kinds of—because back then, your hair was—men wore their hair much longer, lots of facial hair, lots of long hair. So—

TS: In the civilian world?

GA: In the civilian world. So you could pick out a military man quite easily. So [laughs] because what they did when they went in initially was they shaved their head.

TS: Yeah.

GA: For the girls, if we had long hair, we had to wear it up. And for other ones it had to be cut to a certain length. It couldn't be below your collar.

TS: Right.

GA: If you wore short hair, it had to be—couldn't fall below your collar.

TS: Right.

GA: So—but for us, you know, for girls, they wouldn't really pick us out. But for the guys it was very tough. So yeah, that was not a good—that was not a good location. They were not pro-military whatsoever. And here we were a huge training base.

TS: Well, what did you think—I know we're going to go off the military just a little bit here. But in that time that the counterculture of America, did you—were you—did you recognize it at that time? Did you see what was going on, or—?

GA: Yeah, I'd been at—well I had been exposed to some of that, part of that, too. But there was a lot of stuff going on at that time. I mean it wasn't just Vietnam, it was the marches. Now this, we're going to go back a little bit. When we left New Hampshire—I was talking about earlier that my dad was stationed up in New Hampshire—I was there when Kennedy was assassinated. When we left there, it was in the mid-sixties. And we traveled from there going down to Florida, where he was going to go through some training before going to Vietnam, because he had been assigned to go to Vietnam. We were going to go back to my hometown, back to St. Joseph, Missouri, and stay there for the year that he was in Vietnam. But meanwhile we traveled down the eastern corridor to Florida. I think he went to Fort Walton Beach. Eglin Air Force Base was his training. And I remember just outside of D.C. my mother and my little sister and I, we—well we stopped at a rest stop off of the highway. And there were busloads and busloads, huge like Trailway buses and Greyhound buses, filled with black people, and there was a lot of chanting. It was very loud. It was very scary. We were—when we went in to eat, we were like this only

white family amongst many, many, many, many black people, and they weren't happy black people. [laughing] I mean they were on a mission, and that was scary. But my mother, my sister, and I had to go to the bathroom. And we went to the ladies room and we all three—we stood in line to get in there because it was jam-packed, and we all three went into the same little stall together and stayed together the whole time. But, you know, after we came out of there, my mom said, "You know, somebody could stab you, kill you, and leave you for dead, and nobody would know who did it in an environment like that." And I remember that had such an impact on my brain. I just thought, "What is going on?" I didn't really understand at that point, because I was only fourteen.

TS: So that was—

GA: Well, I had just turned fourteen, because I was getting ready to start my freshman year of high school. That was the summer. So what would fourteen be, if I was born in 1951?

TS: [Nineteen] sixty-six?

GA: [Nineteen] sixty-five.

TS: Sixty-five, '66.

GA: Yeah.

TS: Interesting.

GA: So when was Martin Luther King?

TS: He wasn't assassinated until '68.

GA: That's right, because we were in Germany.

TS: I was trying to think when the Freedom Riders were—when they were—

GA: When we were in Germany when he was assassinated, so—

TS: Yeah. So different—so maybe—

GA: So there was that kind of stuff, and then, of course, being stationed at Keesler Air Force Base. There was also—I had several girlfriends that were stationed there with me, lived in my dorm, that were black, and we were good friends. I could remember going to have something to eat off the base and they wouldn't serve me and my girlfriends. And I'd never been associated with anything like that, especially growing up in the military, going to military schools, and—well not military schools, but schools on bases. And we had—I wasn't raised that way, so I mean I have always had friends that were—I had Japanese friends, I had—well of Japanese origin.

TS: Sure.

GA: I had black friends and—anyway.

TS: So how did you feel about that then, when you were—

GA: I was much more open-minded.

TS: —at Keesler? How did you feel about that?

GA: Well, it was just that whole environment. I mean it was a typical, little Southern town of people that they were dead set on their ideals about things. And they were—typically, whites didn't allow blacks in their establishments. I didn't know that.

TS: No?

GA: No.

TS: No until you got to Keesler?

GA: That was out—yeah. That was out in Biloxi, Mississippi.

TS: Interesting.

GA: Yeah. So it was a lot of those kinds of things going on back then that can't go on now or don't or shouldn't. [laughter]

TS: Right. Well, how about—so you're working in this traffic management—

GA: Management, yeah.

TS: —which apparently was—[laughs]

GA: And I did several different jobs in that. I also shipped household goods. There was a number of different things. You know, I spent so many months, I think, working and making airline reservations. Then you go learn how to do documents to prepare people to ship—they're moving somewhere, like a family—to ship their household goods. But it had nothing to do with air traffic control. [laughs]

TS: So did you like your job, though, at all?

GA: It was okay.

TS: It was okay.

GA: It was okay. It was—I was taking some night classes. It was one of those things. It was a means of getting to, hopefully, something else, and at that point still not sure what that something else was going to be.

TS: Did you like the area?

GA: Because I was eighteen years old.

TS: Yeah.

GA: So I still was uncertain. I did like the air force. I thought it was a great environment.

TS: Why?

GA: Of course, my—well I think it was the camaraderie. You know, I had lots of friends and we all—it was a nice social get together. I'm a social kind of person. Maybe not so much anymore, but I used to be when I was younger. It was lots of people of similar age, lot of young people, you know. All of us had—I had friends that were in all kinds of career fields. I had a girlfriend who was a photographer, base photographer. You know, I had somebody else who worked for a printing plant on base.

TS: That's true. There's no—

GA: I had a dental hygienist friend. You know, there's just all—

TS: I never really thought about that before, that in the military you are around people that are in a lot of different occupations.

GA: Absolutely.

TS: That's interesting. I never really did think about that.

GA: I had someone who was—oh gosh. I'm trying to think of all the different jobs—worked at the hospital, lab techs, those kinds of things.

TS: Do you think women had a lot of opportunity at that time—

GA: No.

TS: —in the military?

GA: No, absolutely not.

TS: How about compared to the civilian world?

GA: Well, the civilian world—my view of it at that time was most of the careers for women were administrative or nursing, that sort of thing. Now, obviously there were women that were able to get beyond that and were doctors and engineers, but very few I mean that was not typical of women's careers. And I will tell you that the first time I wanted to take a college class, I had been at the base a few months at that point and I finally decided that I was going to take a class with—I think it was Mississippi State [University] or—offered classes or night school on the base. And I took the paperwork into my boss, who was a chief master sergeant at that time, and I'm just a little one-striper. And he basically said, and we've heard this many times that he said, "Look, I know why you came in the air force. You came in the air force to get married, find a husband to get married. And I need you—." He needed me basically to be here working and, "I can't have you distracted and going to school, and that sort of thing." He basically said, "If the air force wanted you to have a husband, they would have issued you one." But anyway. [laughs]

TS: So he didn't want you to take the course?

GA: No. His whole attitude about any women in women in the service was, "You're basically here to—you know, you're not going to stay around. You're basically here to—you'll probably find a husband, get married, and go have some babies." He was not too high on me taking classes. But, actually, I finally—I went above his head and got his boss to sign my paperwork so I could take my first college classes. So that's how I started college at night.

TS: Interesting.

GA: Took night classes.

TS: Did—was there any—did the chief master sergeant, did he find out about it? Did he get upset about it, that you—?

GA: I don't remember anymore the details behind it. I just remember he was just a grumpy old—just, you know, I mean cantankerous. That's all I remember about him. All he wanted was: go do your job, don't give him any trouble. [laughing] I don't remember much about him, other than he probably would have tried to stand in my way, no matter what.

TS: I see.

GA: But thank goodness I was only stationed there about eighteen months. And then I was reassigned to Germany.

TS: To Germany?

GA: Went back to Germany.

TS: Oh, how—

GA: But I was stationed in Germany this time, and went to Wiesbaden!

TS: How about that.

GA: No, I'm sorry, not that time. I went to Frankfurt.

TS: Oh, okay.

GA: I went to Rhein-Main Air Base.

TS: Rhein-Main. Doing the same job?

GA: I was. I worked in the terminal at Rhein-Main Air Base. Rhein-Main Air Base shares the same flight line as Frankfurt. Now this—there is a lot of terrorist stuff going on at that time.

TS: About what year is this?

GA: That was 1972.

TS: Oh, [Munich?].

GA: Yes.

TS: Were you there for the Olympics?

GA: Yes.

TS: Oh.

GA: I didn't go to the Olympics—

TS: Right.

GA: —but during that—

TS: That atmosphere.

GA: During that atmosphere, yeah. Everything had been—[cell phone rings, continues] They had the [Bottom Rhein-Main Game?]

TS: [Bottom Rhein-Main?]

GA: That's what they called them. I don't know all their—what they were about. I mean I don't recall the details behind all these different terrorist groups, but that was one of them that we were aware of. There was a lot of stuff going on back then.

TS: How did—so in the military did you—was there a sense of heightened awareness of this?

GA: Oh, absolutely.

TS: How did that come across?

GA: Well, we had stuff going on even in the flight line. And I wish I could remember because I'm sure it's in the history—I'm sure if you were to go back into the archives. They actually had a plane that was hijacked sitting out on the runway, a commercial—I think it was like a Lufthansa commercial aircraft sitting out on the runway. And it had been there for a couple of days, and the Germans, they don't mess around with terrorists. They have machine guns. They had sharpshooters that were positioned around this aircraft, and this went on for, I want to say, two or three days of me coming to work and that plane still being parked out on the runway. They had let some hostages off, but they still had some on board. Then, I guess, one of the terrorists stood up in the cockpit, just enough time for a sharpshooter to take him out. And I remember that kind of ended the whole thing. They stormed the plane and ended the whole event. But there was that kind of stuff, yet we were at a heightened—constantly, especially at Rhein-Main, a major point of entry—

TS: Interesting.

GA: —into Germany. And, of course, with all the military going in and out of there, because that was—you came in to Rhein-Main Air Base regardless of where you were getting stationed in Germany, and in some cases going from that point on, if you're going to maybe Spain or Italy or Turkey—we had bases in Turkey—and maybe even to England sometimes.

TS: Well, how was it—so how was it different between when you left as a high school-er and then came back, you know, now you're in the service as an enlisted person?

GA: Well, my first reaction was I wanted to find all my old friends. [laughs] But it wasn't the same anymore. A lot of my friends had moved on. They didn't even—I drove down to Wiesbaden, and I think I found one friend. It was just different. You know, it seemed like it had been several years had passed, when really it had only been a couple of years—

TS: Right.

GA: —since I left. It was amazing. It was just like when you leave home; it's never the same when you come back.

TS: Right.

GA: It's very true.

TS: But you say people had moved on with their lives as well, you know.

GA: Yeah, yeah. You know, it was very different. Probably the plus side, though, was that I was very familiar with Germany.

TS: You could speak it.

GA: I could speak it pretty well, yeah. So it was easy for me to go there. Now, I will tell you, though, at Rhein-Main we didn't have that many women stationed in Germany at that time—in Germany as a whole.

TS: Really? Okay.

GA: No. And Rhein-Main Air Base, we didn't even have a dormitory for women.

TS: Oh.

GA: At that point.

TS: So what was that like?

GA: Well, [chuckles] they took a wing of a dormitory, one floor on one wing, and created—they designed it for us women that were going to be stationed there. But the first few women that arrived there, we stayed for—I think I was in a hotel—the Rhein-Main Hotel, on the base, for about six months.

TS: Because they didn't have the barracks ready at all?

GA: No. So I lived in a hotel room for about six months, because I had nowhere else to go. And then when they did, the base commander had decided on his own that women take baths, not showers. So we had—when it was all said and done, we had this one little wing on this building, and we had these two bath tubs. And by this time we had about thirty girls. I mean it was just—

TS: That wasn't probably going to work out real well.

GA: No. It was just a disaster. But I remember that Jeannie Holmes[?] got involved. There was a lot of—a lot of senior military women getting involved because the women—we were all writing complaints about our living quarters were so—

TS: Who did you write to?

GA: I don't know. We had a senior—we had a woman that was an E8 [senior master sergeant] at the base, and she was kind of the—

TS: Like a liaison?

GA: She was kind of acting as a liaison, I would guess, between the girls that were there at the base and the base commander. So I think through her, she was voicing concerns. And we were getting things changed little by little, but it was taking some time. The whole plan of all these women showing up and they had no place for us was just not a very good plan. And they—I don't think they had thought it through very well, and they didn't realized how many they were going to end up with in the end. So we ended up with two wings and a little kitchenette in between. And we did have some tubs, but we also had some showers. [laughter]

TS: So they fixed that.

GA: Yeah, they did eventually; it just took some time. They even gave us a little lounge area where we could see guests. [phone rings]

TS: We can pause. It's all right.

[recording paused]

TS: Okay, we're going to—

[recording paused]

TS: Okay. We're going to start up again. You were talking about housing conditions and how you got the different—

GA: Yeah. I mean—I'm sure the base commander thought he was doing all the right things. You know, he thought, "Well, women love to take baths. Oh, give them bath tubs." You know?

TS: Yeah.

GA: That's kind of how we started out. By the time we moved out of the hotel and over to this little wing of rooms, we had about thirty girls, if I'm not mistaken—something like that. And here we are with two bathtubs. It was just—

TS: Well, was Keesler—did Keesler have [phone rings] accommodations okay for women at that time?

GA: Yeah. We had a large dormitory.

TS: Okay. No, it's all right.

[recording paused]

TS: —from the dorms there.

GA: Yeah.

TS: Okay, so you were talking about—so Keesler had more accommodations for women.

GA: Yeah, because it's a big training base. So yeah. And they were used to having a lot of women there, stationed there. And then of course they have a lot of students there too. So, yeah, no problem with dormitories there. But when we go from that over to Germany to where they're just now starting to introduce women onto the base, I was like the third single woman—enlisted woman stationed there.

TS: Is that right?

GA: Yeah.

TS: Well, how was it—your relationship with the men that were stationed there too, then? I mean—

GA: Well, it was kind of wild and crazy. I mean they weren't used to having any women stationed there, other than some nurses that were there at the clinic. But as far as enlisted women, they didn't have any there, so that made it interesting. [laughs]

TS: How so?

GA: Well, you were never—never longed for a date. [laughter] So—but it was okay. I mean we were welcomed with open arms, so they were happy to have us. More and more women trickled in over time, and we got to where we had—I don't know how many eventually. I went there two years later, I guess probably sixty, eighty women.

TS: Doubled in that time.

GA: Oh, gosh, yeah.

TS: So you had talked about the one—was it the chief master sergeant?—that was kind of negative about, you know, women going just to find a husband or whatever.

GA: Oh yeah. [laughs]

TS: Did you run into that with other men too, or what was—?

GA: Yeah. I mean there would be a little bit of that, but there's always going to be somebody like that. But for the most part, most of my career, I always felt pretty much accepted. I really can't say—that certainly didn't deter me.

TS: Would you—

GA: To me, he was a minority. Of course, if there were men thinking that way, they weren't saying it. But there also came equal opportunity. A lot of that came on board in the early seventies, mid-seventies, where, you know, we had a lot of racial and sexual training for people to help understand working with people of different color, of different sexes, you know.

TS: Do you think that was useful?

GA: Oh yeah. I think [it was] very important. We called it human relations, is what we called it. I think they initially called it race relations; then they realized it was more than that. That was kind of narrow-minded. So it became more human relations training that everybody had to go through. And I do think that it helped people to better understand having to work with people of color or different national origins. I had—we had people serve that in the air force that were not American citizens too. A lot of people don't realize that. Matter of fact, one of my roommates over in Germany was actually German.

TS: Oh yeah.

GA: But she joined the American Air Force. She was able to do that back then. I don't know what they—what the standards are now.

TS: Yeah, not sure. I'm not sure.

GA: But it used to be you could be. If you were not of a communist country or something—

TS: Sure.

GA: —you could join the American military.

[End CD 1—Begin CD 2]

TS: Did you have any mentors while you were in the military?

GA: Oh, gosh. I'm sure I did. My boss at Rhein-Main Air Base was an old—kind of an older father figure. He was my immediate boss, and he was, I think, a master sergeant. And he was just a dream compared to what I had come from at Keesler. He was really somebody that I think cared about you and would stand up for you and did try to help you along. Also told you about the E-8, the woman that was kind of our liaison, I think, to some of the senior officers on base. She had their ear. I got to know her very well. And she was certainly somebody to look up to because she was one of the few at that rank back then. You didn't see too many senior—

TS: No.

GA: —enlisted women or officers. We didn't have that many women in the air force to start with, but you really didn't see that many senior positions being filled by women. So she was certainly one to look up to.

TS: Well, tell me how you—so you're going along and you're in the air force, are you thinking about—just as a way to figure out what you want to do or—?

GA: Probably, yeah. I mean, really. I've never had any clear-cut direction on where I wanted to go in life. I've just—I've been one of these people that somehow or another I have—something has either fallen my lap, or I've come across something that just seems like it was the right thing to do at the time and I took that path. So I [laughing] wish I could say I had a clear-cut idea of what it was I wanted to do and be, but it wasn't like that. So—I did continue with going to night school. When I got over to Germany, most of my schooling was with the University of Maryland because they had a pretty large offering of courses. There's a few of other schools, too, but University of Maryland was probably the largest, as far as offering undergraduate and graduate work overseas. And I think at other military bases, too. University of Maryland's—

TS: Yeah. I remember that. [phone rings]

GA: But what was difficult—let me just get it.

TS: [laughs] Okay.

GA: Because it's not going to go away.

[Recording paused]

TS: —about your courses that you're taking. Okay. We're starting up again, so here we go.

GA: I kept going to school, taking night classes. Again with no direction at that point, because it's—you know, your first two years of college is pretty much taking some English classes and some math classes and some general, you know, and some humanities, that kind of stuff. So that's what I was doing. It wasn't until several years later that I actually came across a degree program that I thought that I needed to probably go ahead and—

TS: Yeah? What was that?

GA: Well, it was at Southern Illinois University when I was back in the States. I got an industrial technology degree. It's a BS [bachelor of science] in industrial technology, which is really like—everybody always says, "Well, what is that?" Well, it's a bean counter. It's the kind of person that goes into a particular job and assesses it and determines how many people it takes to do a particular task. So we used to do the time and motion studies and all that kind of stuff. It's a mathematical way of determining how a process—you observe a process and determine how many people—or you—maybe you automate it. Maybe you take the people portion out of it and automate something, or these days computerize it—

TS: Right. How did you get interested in that?

GA: —or robotics or whatever. It really happened to be a degree program—once again, like I said, fell into my lap. It was a degree program that was being offered. I was stationed at Scott Air Force Base, Illinois. So it was one of those programs being offered that was more technical, and at that point I decided that I was probably going to try to get my degree—finish up my degree and apply for Officer Training School.

TS: How long was—

GA: And I felt like at that point they weren't taking that many. So to have a BA [bachelor of arts] in something was not going to get it. You really needed to have a more technical background to even have a chance. So I wasn't necessarily drawn to that field, but I buckled down and decided I'm going to at least get my commission. And it takes—if this is what I have to do to get it, then that's what I'm going to do.

TS: Interesting. Well, let's talk about that then, Gail. What was it that made you feel like you wanted to go in that direction? So you'd been—how long had you been in the service and—?

GA: Well, at that time I'd—I mean I'd probably had ten years of active duty time, and it was just hard because I was moving every two years. And so this was the other problem: I was having to—if I wanted to take classes, I was having to transfer credits into another school, and then they'd only accept so many credits. So I ended up, I'm sure, taking a lot more classes than I really had to take had just gone off to college. So that was the hard part, but anyway. So back—I'm sorry. I got—

TS: That's okay. I was just wondering why you wanted to go the officer route. You'd been ten years as enlisted.

GA: Well, I felt like I had given a lot of time to the service at that point, and I really enjoyed being in the air force. But I also—there was a money factor. I thought, "I could be making a lot more money if I just get my rear in gear [laughs] and get busy and finish up school and then try to apply to Officer Training School." So that's where I did it. I was at Scott Air Force Base. Of course, I had been to a couple other bases, but I was there with that program staring at me in the face. And I said, "This is what I need to do, and I need to do it here, because I don't want to go through this again, having to transfer credits."

TS: How long did it take you to finish it at Scott?

GA: Well, at that point I was really having to do some undergraduate at the same—I mean I was really having to do some of my basic math classes. I was having to go back and get a really good, solid base to go forward, because this program required that I even—oh gosh, I had to have some physics and—

TS: Calculus.

GA: I had to have a little calculus. So I really—yeah, I had to go back and really get my trig [trigonometry] and all that stuff. Yeah. And I have to say, I really wasn't too excited about it, but I made myself do it.

TS: Well, that's great. That's a lot of self-discipline.

GA: Yeah. Somehow I really reached deep down inside and made myself do it. But I had a lot of people backing me. I had one full of references and people standing behind me, and so when I applied—

TS: Who was standing behind you? Who was backing you?

GA: Oh, he commander of the MAC. They called it MAC then. It's now—what is it?

TS: Military Air Command?

GA: Military Air Command? Well, it was Military Air Command then. They changed that name.

TS: We can always look stuff up.

GA: Okay. That changed—

TS: So the commander of MAC?

GA: Yeah. My base commander, the wing commander, the commander of my command, and then I had some senior—the chief master sergeant who was the—what did they call him? He was the senior enlisted—

TS: Oh, right. Officer.

GA: Officer of the base.

TS: Enlisted person [unclear].

GA: Yeah. He was very supportive. And then they all wrote recommendations letters. Also, my previous base commander from Rhein-Main Air Base, who was now the commander of 21st Air Force, also wrote a recommendation for me.

TS: How did you get all these people to [know?] you?

GA: He [mailed?] us. I think he was from North Carolina, and he now lives in Charlotte, North Carolina.

TS: Oh, so that's—

GA: [Major] General [Thomas M.] Sadler. You probably heard him on the radio. He's always on—I always hear him on the radio—*The Buzz* [WRBZ 850 AM], I think.

TS: I don't think I've heard him.

GA: It's sports radio.

TS: Oh, okay.

GA: Yeah.

TS: I'll have to check that out.

GA: Yeah.

TS: So how did you get all of these people backing you?

GA: Well, I had retrained into another field.

TS: Oh, okay. Why don't you tell me about that a little bit?

GA: I had retrained into being a professional military edu—PME instructor they called it, professional military education instructor. I went through a leadership development

center down in—oh my gosh—down in Montgomery, Alabama. And I also went back there to school for Academic Instructor School as well—what is called AIS.

So I had a lot of—now I have a lot of—at this point I have a lot of academic background and training in teaching. But I taught leadership management. I taught world affairs. I taught communication—communicative skills, public speaking, writing to first line and middle level supervisors—including civilians up to like GS-5, GS-6 [General Schedule Civil Service pay] level. So I taught young supervisors that were about to become supervisors for mid-level—

TS: Right.

GA: —in the enlisted ranks.

TS: Right.

GA: GS—up to GS-5 or 6.

TS: So they're civilians?

GA: Yeah.

TS: Now did you—when you—did you want to change career fields for any particular reason?

GA: Well, I had always wanted to get out of the traffic management business. And actually, when I—I went through the—oh, gosh, what is the PME [Professional Military Education]— one of the PME schools. I can't remember anymore what it was. But I went through the—one of the—

TS: Like advanced training for leadership or—

GA: Yeah, it's a Leadership Management School that you go—

TS: Like NCO [noncommissioned officer] or something or other—

GA: It is. And I can't remember what the name of it was. But I became a teacher. The commandant of that school asked me to come back and—

TS: Teach?

GA: —teach—

TS: Oh, after you'd gone through the course?

GA: —when I finished, after I had gone through the course. And that was my way—I mean that was how I ended up transitioning into that career field.

TS: Well, you must have made an impression.

GA: I guess I did. So anyway, that's how I kind of got into that.

TS: Did you enjoy that?

GA: I loved it.

TS: Yeah?

GA: I loved it. I probably should be a teacher now. I really should, because I do. I love to teach and train people. And I always did with employees, in the military and in the civilian world. I always wanted to—

TS: Now, how did you find training—

GA: —impart information and knowledge on people. Isn't that funny, for somebody who was not too crazy about going to school?

TS: That is. That's very interesting.

GA: All the sudden I have this desire to want to help others.

TS: Yeah. So we're talking about what, mid-seventies here? Because I think you said four years you were in.

GA: Yeah. I went into the PME career field in 1977—'77, '78?

TS: Okay.

GA: Something like that.

TS: So you're teaching—is it mostly men, or men and women?

GA: Men and women.

TS: Okay. Were there like men and women in the same class?

GA: Well, in the same—similar ranks. You know, they're going to—most of them were, oh, probably E-4s [senior airmen] and above.

TS: Or new NCOs?

GA: New NCOs, yeah. New NCOs, and then of course—now in the—for staff sergeants and tech sergeants—yeah—we had different c lasses. There were three levels: there was one that you got off the base, and that was for your first line supervisors; and then at the school the first—I can't remember the name of it. I'm sorry.

TS: It's okay. I don't know it myself, too. I know what you're talking about.

GA: It's a leadership school. It's NCO leadership school, that's what it is.

TS: Right.

GA: Those were staff sergeant—they were E-4s and E-5s [staff sergeants], I believe. I don't know. There might have been tech sergeants.

TS: [unclear] tech sergeants?

GA: There may have been tech sergeants there as well. But anyway, so different—you know, we had different programs for—and what we taught in each one of those.

Now, when I was up at school, where I was teaching E-4, E-5, E-6s [technical sergeants], we did—we had world affairs. We taught a lot of historical background as to where we were many, many years ago, and why we are what we are today. I guess that's how they explain it. We got into a lot of why the U.S. responds or reacts to various things that the other countries do, to help them kind of understand how we get involved in little countries that you think you wouldn't have any interest in.

TS: So like the context of world affairs and things like that.

GA: It was, yeah. To kind of understand what our—why do we have an interest in the Middle East, and why do we have an interest in a little country in Africa, those kind of things. To help people understand why we found ourselves in these conflicts, and why we keep a presence in a particular country. So yeah, we would help them understand that. We did a lot of world affairs.

TS: Well, I'm just wondering: in the classrooms, because women are just—I mean there's women, but they're still a small percentage of the overall force. So how where they—what was the dynamic of that classroom, with the men and the women, I guess is what I'm saying? Because you're going to have to—

GA: I have to tell you, I had one student one time—usually I got rave reviews, but this was where the—this was the NCO leadership school where you actually go reside there for a month. One of the students was actually discharged from the school because he absolutely refused to be taught by a woman, and had to go—I mean he went in, saw the commandant. Basically he just, "There isn't anything any woman has to say, that I'm

going to listen to." I mean it was basically like that. And there were two of us teaching at that school.

TS: Two women?

GA: Two women: myself and a black woman—a sharp, sharp black woman. And he absolutely refused to stay and wouldn't change his attitude, so he was sent back to the base. I—he was threatened with a discharge, so I don't know what ever happened to the young man—

TS: Well, it sounds like you were certainly—

GA: —but it was pretty serious.

TS: You were certainly backed up by your—

GA: Oh, absolutely. Because—and like I said, in that point in time this human relations training and all that kind of stuff had been well underway, so his behavior was totally out of line. But what can you do?

TS: Interesting.

GA: But for the most part I had wonderful reviews. And like I said, we taught them even how to give presentations. So we taught communication skills. We taught them how to write a speech—all the parts of a speech and how to put it together, and they would have to demonstrate. They had three different speeches they had to give during the time that they were there, three different styles of speeches. One of them was a demonstration speech. They would have to actually demonstrate and teach. They had to teach something. And there's an actual way to do that. What else did we—leadership management. We taught [Abraham] Maslow's hierarchy skills. [TS laughs] You know, it's all that kind of stuff.

TS: Well, do you think that there is a misconception in the civilian world about the education that people in the military might be receiving while they are in there?

GA: I don't know. I have never—I haven't ever had anybody question my education at this point. I went on to get my master's degree. I think—I don't think so, unless they just haven't said anything to me. [laughter] I don't think so. I've never been encountered—I've never encountered any situation like that, where someone would question my—. If anything a lot of the—just understanding the dynamics of working with—I don't know how to explain it—hierarchy or chain of command, or whatever you want to call it, in the military—same kind of thing in the civilian world, but maybe a little different—I think that helps. I think that helps people that come from the military and enter into the civilian world. I think it's more helpful to understand the dynamics of where people are in the grand scheme of things and incorporation—

TS: Right. I see what you're saying.

GA: —and how best to—and how to interact. I guess. I don't know.

TS: [laughs] So then let's go on. So you're getting—you finished you—I forget what the degree was, that you said you had.

GA: I had the industrial technology.

TS: Okay. So then you applied and had all this backing to go into Officer Training School.

GA: Yeah.

TS: So I'm assuming you got accepted.

GA: I got accepted. I did.

TS: So tell me about that. What happened?

GA: Well, then I went—not long after I got accepted I was—I went right off to—I mean you're basically discharged from the air force.

TS: Oh, is that how that worked?

GA: Yeah. You basically get like a discharge, and then somehow or another you're reinstated as an officer trainee. And [I] went through OTS down at Medina [Annex at Lackland Air force Base]. Not Lackland Air Force Base, but this little base called Medina. [laughs]

TS: In Texas.

GA: It's in San Antonio, yeah, where all the other trainees go. But that's about a three month, I believe—a three month period.

TS: So then you became—you become an officer?

GA: Yeah.

TS: So now what I would like to reflect on is how was being enlisted in the air force different from being an officer, in your—from your perspective?

GA: Well, [pause] I don't know. Obviously, as an officer you're going to typically have people working for you. Not to say that you don't have them working for you as an enlisted person, but you're going to be dealt a little more responsibility, especially in the field that I'm in to monitor responsibility. I thought being an enlisted person helped me be a better officer.

TS: Why do you think that's the case?

GA: Well, because I think I could empathize with people. I understood where they were coming from, and I could just better relate, I think. I think it's always best when somebody has walked in your shoes. I just think you have a better understanding where they're coming from, what their needs are, how to best help them be as good as they can be. You know, to me anyway, that's always better. I think most of my—anybody that worked for me or worked under my command, I think they all felt that I had a better understanding of where they were coming from.

And I knew the military. I mean most of the people I was going through officer training school with were people straight out of college. They were having to learn everything from scratch, so I had experienced twelve years of being in the service.

TS: Plus the time that you were in a military family.

GA: Yeah. The military recognized that too. The air force recognizes that too, because I was on a different pay scale, and I am on a different retirement pay scale too. So even though I retired as captain in the air force, it's more like retiring as probably more of a senior major. So my pay is different than—

TS: Is that because of the time in service?

GA: Yes. Yeah. You get paid for that time. So I was on a different pay scale.

TS: Excellent. So what—now, you had talked about [how] you had an interesting job as an officer.

GA: Well, I knew before I went to Officer Training School what I would be doing—what my career was going to be from that—after I got out of OTS. I knew I was going to be a missile launch officer.

TS: How many female missile launch officers were there at this time?

GA: I don't remember, but very few, very few.

TS: This was in?

GA: This was in '82 that I went off to Officer Training School.

TS: Eighty-two, okay.

GA: I mean in relationship to men we were just a very small number. There were some—there were some women probably in aspects of the missile business, but as far as an actual launch officer there weren't that many because of the living quarters. This is a

job where you go to work and you live with your crew members for about thirty hours at a time. They say it's twenty four hours, but it's really more than that because you've got to consider the transportation time. There's [briefings?]. So your shift is about a thirty hour shift if you're lucky.

TS: Yeah. So what was that like?

GA: Well, it was—at the time that I was in it was very stressful.

TS: Yeah, '82.

GA: It was very stressful.

TS: See, and the KAL [Korean Air Lines Flight 007] was shot down right—

GA: Well, it was stressful—it's a stressful career field. It's one of those—it's hard to even explain it, but if you can only imagine knowing your job to zero error, where you are not—a human error is not acceptable, and that's the kind of business the nuclear business is. You are trained to the nth degree. You know every—and if you don't, you can't do what you do. They will relieve you immediately. So you are tested and retested and constantly under surveillance, constantly watched. I mean I just don't know. It's hard to even explain what that kind of environment is like.

TS: Very microscopic.

GA: Very.

TS: This is the job that you wanted?

GA: No. No. I wanted to be a pilot.

TS: And what happened there?

GA: I was told I was too old.

TS: Oh really?

GA: By the time I finished my education and—I would have had to—I believe the rules were back then [that] I would have had to have been through Officer Training School by the time I was twenty-seven and a half. So even though I could pass the tests, I couldn't meet the age requirements.

TS: There was no way over that?

GA: I could meet the physical, I could meet everything else, but I didn't meet the age requirement. So I wanted to be in the operations side of the business, so the only other thing, if you can't get into pilot training, is I can go to the nuclear side.

TS: So how long was that training for you?

GA: Well, there were two parts of it. The first part was in California, where you actually learn emergency war order procedures. So you learn—well no. Let me back up. I'm sorry. The first part is in Texas, and you learn all of the aspects of the Titan II Missile System. And it—I mean—because you're eighty miles from nowhere, underground, with this nuclear missile that is about eight or nine stories high. Everything is all underground. Your communications equipment, everything that makes that missile alive and well, you're responsible for. So you have to learn the entire systems. And we're talking about huge manuals. We had to learn electrical schematics, water systems, air-conditioning systems, hydronics, hydraulics, diesel, how to operate a diesel generator. You had to know how to repair—to actually come to an end item. You had to learn how to go through a schematic and test circuits and come to an end item of what was wrong with something and correct it, because there is no one. You can't call the plumber. There is nobody to help you get through that but you and your crew members. There is just a four person crew.

TS: I imagine there is a pretty high drop-out rate for that training.

GA: Oh, there is very—yeah, it's very tough, very technical.
So Texas training was to learn all the different systems.

TS: Okay.

GA: Then we went from Texas to California, and that's where we learned emergency war procedures. That's where you have—the other part of your job is you have to know how to take a message that's encoded, you have to be able to decode it, and you have to be able to do calculations of launch times. It's very—it's very involved. I don't even know how to begin. All I can do is tell you learn how to decode messages and calculate launch times.

TS: So when you were in this training and you were getting ready to go work in this field, did you think about the fact that you would be maybe be launching a nuclear missile?

GA: Absolutely.

TS: So how did that—

GA: Not only do you think about it, you get asked that question quite often through the whole process. I mean they're constantly looking at you psychologically.

TS: Yeah.

GA: You have to be what they consider quite stable.

TS: Right. [laughs]

GA: I mean they look at everything. They pay attention to if you're having an affair to your debts. I mean they're concern was selling out to the Soviets, and we had a couple people do that.

TS: While you were in the field, is that right?

GA: As a matter of fact, a lieutenant that was at Little Rock Air Force Base—that was going to be my first assignment in Titans—while I was in school I believe he was—he'd been under surveillance, and he was apparently spending money that a typical lieutenant wouldn't have. But he basically sold out the emergency war procedures. It's what we used—when I say "we," it's not just in the Titans. It wasn't just in the nuclear. In the nuclear world—air, land, and sea—it's the whole triad system. So it's what every military person that launches a nuclear weapon of any kind—whether it's from an aircraft, from a ship, from the ground—you all get the same training. So when one person sells out that entire—of what we all—that language we work from—when one person does that, you have to bring it all down and retrain—and create a new one and train the whole force—

TS: Right. Interesting.

GA: From a nuclear sub to a Titan II Missile to a bomber, everybody has to get retrained. I was going through—that was actually was—we were all trained on a new system because it had just been sold out by some lieutenant that was stationed where I was going to be going.

TS: Well, what did you feel about this responsibility?

GA: Pressure. I mean it was—I just can't even begin to tell you. It just was—everybody was constantly under a lot of pressure. You couldn't even—if you had a headache, you could take an aspirin, but you couldn't take anything stronger than an aspirin without permission. So we all had a flight surgeon that we went to if we were sick. If you can't be there, somebody else has to be there for you.

TS: So an extremely high level of readiness, physically and emotionally?

GA: Yes, constantly. I mean at two o'clock in the morning when the phone rings, you can't be coming out of a sleep. [laughter] You have to be able to launch at a moment's notice. You really do.

TS: So tell me what it was like then in the thirty hours of—you said there were four of you that lived together?

GA: Yeah. You had two enlisted crew members and two officers. The senior officers were the crew commander and then the deputy commander. And then the two enlisted people had different jobs. One was called the ballistic missile analyst technician, and the other one was a missile facilities technician. So you know that training I talked about in Texas where we learned water systems, the electrical systems, and all that? The missile facilities technician, that was more of his expertise as well.

TS: The technical?

GA: The technical, yes. So the officers had to know what they knew, but they were also there to support us as well. And then the ballistic analyst missile technician was more related to the actual launching of the missile and all the things that go into that side of the business.

TS: Right.

GA: So there's the side that keeps the missile alive and you underground alive.

TS: Right.

GA: And then there's the side of the actual being able to launch the missile. And then there's the side that as all of the classification—classified documents and everything that it's focused around.

TS: Goes along with that?

GA: Yeah, goes along with that. So it's quite involved. But you do, you have two enlisted people and two officers. They're in the control center, which is three levels. There is kind of a living area on the top level. The center is a control center where all the launch things, the classified documents are kept, the weapons—everything was there. And then on the bottom floor of the control center is all the communications equipment that is underground—underneath that. Everything is under—

TS: It's all underground, right?

GA: It's all underground, and you're sus—and everything is suspended with these gigantic springs.

TS: Oh?

GA: You could actually move. If you got a—the guys used to sometimes get against the wall of the silo—control center silo area and start pushing the control center. You could actually get the control center to sway.

TS: [laughs] Something to do in your spare time?

GA: Oh yes. They always had something to do in their spare time. [laughter] But you always had to have—one of the officers always had to be at the control center level two, always. So if one wanted to go lay down for a little bit, she could go upstairs and do that, but that meant the other one couldn't go upstairs and go to the bathroom or anything.

TS: Right.

GA: You had to be in the control center.

TS: So were there—were they—were you with three other men or was there another woman with you?

GA: No, I didn't have any other woman on my crew. As a deputy commander, when I first started out—you start out as a deputy commander. You're more responsible for all the communications as a deputy commander. I mean you also take part in other things, but that's your number one priority, is all the communications equipment the deputy commander is responsible for. But then I became a commander of my own crew, and I still had three guys on my crew.

TS: Now was this during the period—I remember when I was in the service that there was period of time where the wives of the missile—the guys who were in the missile were really upset about women going in and living. Was that happening at that time?

GA: Oh yeah. There was always that concern of women—yeah, yeah.

TS: Did that affect you in any way?

GA: Especially probably more so in the Minuteman [LGM-30 Minuteman intercontinental ballistic missile] field—

TS: Maybe that's what—

GA: —because that's only a two person crew.

TS: Oh, okay.

GA: And it's a little more close quarters. And I've not been in a Minuteman silo, so I really can't tell you much about it.

TS: Right.

GA: I just know that the system is different, and it is just a two person crew. I think it's two officers.

TS: Did you personally get any kind of flak?

GA: No.

TS: No?

GA: No. And really it's not a very [laughs]—it's not a very nice environment. It's cold. It's underground. It's dark. It's miserable. It's loud. I mean there's alarms always going off, constant loud humming of equipment. It just—it's a tough environment.

TS: How long did you—

GA: Not glamorous at all.

TS: No? [laughs]

GA: No.

TS: You're not going there for romance, huh?

GA: No, not at all. [laughter]

TS: So how long did you work in the Titan Missile silo?

GA: I was in that for about four years and managed to get out of it.

TS: Yeah. Was it because of the stress level, you think?

GA: Yeah. I was ready to go. I really was. But I did well in it. I did become not only a commander, but then I became an instructor. I became a commander of an instructor-crew, so I was teaching again—other crews. Because what you have to do, you have to also go into simulators and train when you're not actually at the site. There are some things that you can't perform at the site that have to be taught, trained. You have to have hands-on.

TS: Right.

GA: You can't always do it on a live missile.

TS: Yeah.

GA: But you can do quite a bit on a live missile.

TS: Is that right?

GA: Yeah, because you would have to.

TS: Yeah.

GA: We would have to test the system. Each missile site had to be tested—the missile itself, as well as the silo closure door had to roll. There were lots of things that had to happen so that you make sure everything worked like it was supposed to, up to launch.

TS: So did you do that every day?

GA: No. The system had to be tested maybe once a month or something. I can't remember now exactly, but each missile had to be tested. Certain aspects of that missile had to be tested and at that site had to be tested, probably once a month. And if you happened to be the crew that was on duty that particular day when it needed to be tested, then you would have to be—you would have to do it.

TS: So you are thirty hours on, and then how much time did you have off?

GA: They couldn't— obviously you couldn't—

TS: — as far as twenty-four?

GA: You couldn't go out on another alert the next day, but you could go out the following. So you'd get off and then you'd get home. You're coming home and usually you'd get back around late morning or noon time the next day. I mean I left home about six, eight— no, I left home about—well I guess I probably—I had a 6 a.m. briefing—

TS: Oh, okay. So to get to the briefing—

GA: —with my crew. Yeah.

TS: So 6 to 6?

GA: Any—yeah. Well,, no. It's more than that, because you had to get up to the silo—I mean to the site.

TS: Oh, right.

GA: So let me think about that for a second. No, I think that the briefings were at 6:30[a.m.]. I think I left the house at 6; the briefings were at 6:30. All the crew members that were going to be on site each day would—you got a crew that's out at the site. There's someone always at a missile site, always. The crew—

TS: Right.

GA: So you got a crew that's coming on. They get intel[ligence] briefings. And you've got to get your vehicle squared away. And if you've got any classified documents that have to be taken out—you may have to carry a brief case of classified documents, which are handcuffed to you, carrying a .38 [Special pistol]. They decide how you are going out to that site that day. Sometimes you're driving out in like a [Chevrolet] Suburban; sometimes you're choppering [travel by helicopter] out. It depends—just depends. But then you get out to the site.

TS: Why would there be a difference? Just for a different routine or—?

GA: Different reasons.

TS: Okay.

GA: Just different reasons. Depending on what you're carrying, maybe.

TS: Okay.

GA: Most of the crews would take a Suburban out. We'd load everything up in that and go out. But there would be a few that would be choppering out that day.

Then you've got the crew on site, so when you get to the site you have to decode—I mean you pick up the—there's a phone at—there's a perimeter fence with all kinds of cameras and alarms and stuff, you know.

TS: Right.

GA: You pick up that phone—first phone and you—it rings directly down to the control center, and they do some verifying so that they know you are who you are. You have some codes you recite.

TS: Yeah, sure.

GA: They hit a little button that releases the lock to the gate, we bring the vehicle on with our equipment, we close the gate, verify everything, and then you get to the outside of the door that goes down into—down to the control center. You then pick up the phone again to verify you are who you are again, and then the commander goes in that door and stands in front and you verify again.

TS: Visually?

GA: Yes. And the commander always does. And then they have a camera on you so that they can visually see who you are and verify again. So everything has to jive—

TS: Right.

GA: —at all there points. And at that point then we're able to—they'll bring up a—there's an elevator that comes up and opens up at the top, and we can load all of our equipment and everything that's going to go with us on that, and then we ride it down—the rest of the crew rides it down to the control center.

And then you've got these huge steel and concrete doors that you have to go through. They're called blast doors, and they're hydraulic pump, I guess, but they're huge. I don't know how to explain it. But you go through two—I think there were three that we went through to get in to the actual control center. Once you get down to the control center level—

TS: Right.

GA: —then you have those doors to go through to the control room.

TS: Quite a procedure to get in then?

GA: Quite a procedure to get in. And then once you are there the two—usually the on-site deputy commander and then the deputy commander that's coming on would—they would go do the inventorying of all the classified documents that are supposed to be on the site, and if there's any new classified documents being brought in and some that have to go back that need to be destroyed, all that. They were handling all of the classified stuff. The two commanders were going through—the on—the commander on site would be briefing the commander coming on if there is anything like malfunctions, anything that is going on that you need to be aware of at that point in time, that effects that missile or whatever.

And then the two enlisted crew members would get with their two counterparts, and they would actually go out to the missile. There is a long cable way that goes out to the missile area, which is—they have to go from the top to the bottom and verify. They have a check list—

TS: Check—

GA: —that they go through, from the reentry vehicle all the way down to the engines. So there's about eight or nine stories of equipment that has to be checked. So by the time all that happens, it's an hour and a half or more before they actually leave the site and you take command.

TS: I see what you're saying. It was thirty hours, not twenty four. It makes sense now.

GA: And then they've got to drive back, and they may have an hour and half drive back to the base.

TS: And where were you stationed for—?

GA: Little Rock, Arkansas.

TS: That's right, cool.

GA: But those missiles are not at the base. They are quite a ways away from the base.

TS: Right.

GA: Lots of little towns and communities outside of the base.

TS: Well, did—were you afraid at all?

GA: No.

TS: No?

GA: No. We would have some weird things happen at night.

TS: Yeah?

GA: Where I would have to get security involved and they would come and—they would have security teams around. They were like security police.

TS: Sure.

GA: That kind of maneuvered from site to site. They would be assigned to so many sites that they would kind of maneuver around. So when alarms went off that we couldn't explain, they would have to come and verify before we could reset them.

TS: Right.

GA: I had some people that—I think that they were college kids, probably—that tried to—maybe on a dare that would do things at two or three o'clock in the morning.

TS: [Mess with things?]

GA: Get alarms going off and—oh yeah, stuff like that.

TS: They probably had like wildlife too that would, I would imagine, set things off.

GA: Yeah. We had problems with birds sometimes.

TS: Yeah?

GA: They'd fly through and set something off. I can't say that I was ever scared. This is a crazy world, but you have so much other stuff going on that you didn't have time to think about being scared. [laughs]

TS: So you were—?

GA: It's a very dangerous environment though, very dangerous. The propellants on that missile were very, very dangerous. They'll kill you if they even touch your skin.

TS: Wow.

GA: So you couldn't inhale. Yeah, that was always a concern. [There were] just a lot of things that you were exposed to—

TS: Right.

GA: PCBs [polychlorinated biphenyls].

TS: Oh, yeah.

GA: Lots of stuff. So probably those kinds of things.

TS: More dangerous than the actual missile.

GA: Yeah. Or having to—oh yeah. Or having to go out to the actual—to the silo and open—actually access the missile to get to a panel, you'd have to lower these huge steel platforms. And you'd have to tie yourself up with lanyards, you know. I mean it—yeah, a lot—it's a very dangerous environment and people got hurt.

TS: Yeah.

GA: Definitely got hurt.

TS: It seems like the enlisted ones would have a lot more—

GA: Officers too.

TS: —opportunity.

GA: Well, yeah, but officers too.

TS: Yeah.

GA: Yeah.

TS: Both were checking them out. Interesting.

GA: Yeah, absolutely.

TS: Now what years were you in the silo then?

GA: Well,, from ’82—I was going through training but I was there. I was stationed there in by ’82.

TS: So until about ’86? You said about four years. So that was pretty—that was when [Ronald] Reagan was president. We had the—

GA: “Star Wars” [officially the Strategic Defense Initiative]. Was it Star Wars, was that his program?

TS: Star Wars, yeah.

GA: Yeah.

TS: It was a tense time, you know.

GA: It was a tense time. We had three targets. One was your primary target and you had two back-up targets, so you may have to adjust what you—

TS: Are they usually the same—I mean did you have the same three targets for the whole four years?

GA: No.

TS: No, they changed?

GA: No, every missile has different targets.

TS: Okay.

GA: Three different targets. What you would have to do is sometimes you did have to change your target to take over another missile’s target. If a missile had to go down for maintenance or something—

TS: I see.

GA: —you’ve got to be able to take over.

TS: Compensate.

GA: Yeah. So there's always that constant maneuvering and making sure that a target is always being covered.

TS: Interesting.

GA: Yeah.

TS: So after four years you said, "I think I need to do something different?"

GA: Yeah, I needed to get out of that business. I did get my master's that way.

TS: Oh, because you could get some studying done?

GA: Yeah, even though I was going to class with no sleep, but I was able to. Yeah, sitting down there at two and three o'clock in the morning, I could get some of my studying done.

TS: What did you get your master's in?

GA: Operations management, which is—again it was an MS, master of science in operations management. So it was technical. Again it was almost like an extension of the industrial technology degree.

TS: Now all this time that you're taking all of these professional courses, academic courses, are you paying them out of your pocket? Are you getting assistance?

GA: I had full VA [Veterans' Affairs] benefits. There were a lot of times that I didn't use my VA benefits; I used some assistance, because I wasn't sure I wanted to save some of that. Because I thought at some point I may go back to school, I may look at a PhD, I may look at another degree program, so I was never wanting to use up my VA benefits. Do you know that I let them expire?

TS: Well, you're not the only who has done that, Gail. That's true.

GA: Yeah. It's ten years from the time you—

TS: That you get out.

GA: —leave the service. And I left in '93 and I didn't use it. Now I wish I had.

TS: Yeah. Well, I always think that should have extended that period.

GA: They were talking about it.

TS: Yeah. I think they should, but that's probably nothing that I need to put on tape so.

GA: No. [laughs]

TS: Well,, okay. So what did you do after the missile experience?

GA: Well, I got stationed—I got an assignment to Andrews Air Force Base. And just for a couple of years I was what they called a section commander. And I was kind like an administrative commander at a squadron. And pretty much, I guess, I'm the one that did all the legal stuff.

TS: Discipline?

GA: Discipline stuff, yeah. I had a first sergeant that was also a disciplinarian, and I had a staff of about three people in the administrative office. But I only did that for a couple of years.

And I met the public affairs officer on base. She was the chief of public affairs, sharp lady. And she, for some reason, thought that I would make a great public affairs officer. So I had done some presentations for some of the senior leadership at the base, and of course—now remember, I had a lot of—at that point I had a lot of background in giving presentations.

TS: Right.

GA: [laughs] So she saw something in me. But anyway, she asked me if I would want to—she was losing her deputy and wanted to know if I would be interested in coming into public affairs. But I would have to go through the school, the Defense Information School in Indiana. But that I could actually come over there and until I got a slot. I could come over there and sit in that position and learn the field. So I was able to finagle a way to retrain and get over there. And I became the deputy commander of the—or deputy chief of public affairs at Andrews Air Force Base.

Now what makes that really interesting is that Andrews Air Force Base pretty much exists to support the White House, the president. And number one, it's the president, the state department [U.S. Department of State], and the Pentagon. If it wasn't for that, they wouldn't be there. That's where Air Force One is and all the backup. Everything that's focused around presidential travel is at Andrews Air Force Base. So when you see the president leave, at the other end of the flight line are his Secret Service people going out on cargo planes. There are vehicles. I mean you name it, it's going on. Every time you see a head of state going in and out of this country, they come through Andrews Air Force Base. So we were set up to handle the media. I mean we had a huge—it's like a piece of concrete that just lifts up out of the flight line, and all the media outlets can plug-in: CNN, ABC, CBS. You name it, they can plug in and go live from that flight line. So it was quite involved.

So I got to experience things like [Mikhail] Gorbachev's visit. I was there when [Margaret] "Maggie" Thatcher came after Iraq had invaded Kuwait and she made some statements. I was there—actually I was involved with *Nightline* [ABC television news

program]—with Ted Koppel's *Nightline*. I set up the two ambassadors from Iraq and Kuwait on the Nightline interview with Ted Koppel, but they were in their respective embassies.

TS: Interesting.

GA: Things like that.

[End CD 2—Begin CD 3]

TS: How'd you like that?

GA: Oh, I loved it. Oh, loved it. I mean I actually had the itinerary of presidential travel for each month. So I knew where he was going and—because what happens is they have this huge—all these media outlets have a—they've all combined their funds, I guess, and they have an aircraft that picks them up at Andrews and takes them in advance—they're like an advance team—and takes them before the president leaves, before he travels. They go to wherever it is—if he's going to Crawford, Texas, then they go to Crawford, Texas, at three o'clock in the morning, and he leaves at 6 or whatever.

TS: Get's all—they get set up.

GA: Right. And they get set up with the cameras, yeah. And then they have a—they always take turns on who sits in the back of Air Force One. The media all have a different—

TS: The pool of reporters that they have.

GA: The pool of reporters, yeah. They each—they have a list of names and they take turns on who is going in the back of Air Force One. The rest of them have to go on—

TS: Ahead.

GA: Yeah.

TS: Oh, interesting. I didn't know it worked that way.

GA: Yeah. So—

TS: Did you get to meet any of these dignitaries?

GA: Yeah, but just in passing, you know.

TS: Did any of them an impression on you at all?

GA: Probably Maggie Thatcher, I thought.

TS: Yeah?

GA: I really thought that she was a pretty cool lady.

TS: Yeah. Why? What do you—?

GA: She was very personable, very personable. But very—I don't know. She just—she's a woman leader—or was a woman leader. She's just a—just a positive role model, I guess. I just thought that she was a sharp lady.

Gorbachev, in passing—

TS: Yeah?

GA: —very likable guy, very likeable. Oh, I met Bob Hope.

TS: Oh, is that right?

GA: Yeah, there was a USO [United Service Organizations] tour coming through. Great guy, very personable, but at that point in time he was—gosh, he had to have been in his nineties.

TS: Getting on up there.

GA: Yeah. And his wife traveled with him.

TS: Oh, is that right? With Bob Hope?

GA: Yeah, and she was quite funny. [TS laughs] But she was like this little old lady that would be in the background. He got all of the attention, and she was off in the background somewhere.

TS: But she had her little fun-ness to her too?

GA: Yeah, she was quite a neat lady, so—.

I don't know. There was quite a few that I met. Lots of different events that took place. We had bomb threats a couple of times that ended up being nothing. We had—I can't remember who it was that was coming over. I was a Soviet leader.

TS: [Boris] Yeltsin?

GA: No, no.

TS: Just like one of premiers or—?

GA: Yeah. I can't remember who it was right n7ow. Anyway, it was one of those late night flights, and we had all kinds of media, including Soviets. The Soviet press were on the base. We had these dogs that kept sniffing out something, and so they weren't letting the plane land. They were having to circle.

TS: Right.

GA: And I finally actually had to go do a statement, on the tarmac, to the press. It was so funny how we were having to write and rewrite this little statement before we could even—

TS: To make it just right, huh?

GA: To make it just right, because we didn't want anyone to get into a panic over these dogs that kept alerting us about something. That kind of stuff.

TS: Yeah. So that was pretty like—you're really in an active kind of busy—

GA: Yeah. That's very—I mean it's just constant because there's always—if the president isn't traveling, somebody is coming or going constantly. King Hussein came through. Just—

TS: So you had to do quite a few different interesting things in the service?

GA: Yeah.

TS: Shipping people's goods to missiles to press briefing.

GA: Yeah.

TS: That's pretty neat. So was there any—which one of the different types of jobs that you did did you like the most?

GA: I think I liked aspects of all those jobs.

TS: Yeah.

GA: I am a very diversified person. I think I have figured out [phone rings] that I can do just about anything I set my mind to do, if it's something I really want to do.

TS: You want to get that? We can pause again. That's all right, if you want.

[Recording paused]

TS: Okay. So we had a little break there. We're back now. Go ahead, Gail.

GA: Well, what had happened after Andrews Air Force Base—or while I was at Andrews we were in the midst of—we were in the middle of [Operation] Desert Shield, which became [Operation] Desert Storm. And I was actually going to be going to the Pentagon to go to air force level public affairs. I had pretty much been promised a position there, and I was really looking forward to moving on and doing that.

TS: Right.

GA: But unfortunately my phone rang at home one Sunday afternoon and my command was calling me to tell me that, "Gail, we need to move you somewhere, but—and we will bring you back. We promise. You will come back to the Pentagon at some point. But right now we have some shifting of people to do, and we're going to give you a choice." So I could either go to the desert or I could go to North Carolina.

TS: Okay.

GA: So I ended—that's how I ended up in North Carolina. I took a position at Pope Air Force Base, because they were having to ship some people around.

TS: Because of the war?

GA: Yeah. And I really did not want to go to—I did not want to go over there if I didn't have to.

TS: To the desert?

GA: If I had a choice, I just did not want to go. I just didn't. So I came to North Carolina as the chief of public affairs at Pope Air Force Base. I was there for about four years, I guess.

TS: Yeah.

GA: And that's when I decided to finish my career and move on to commercial.

TS: Okay. Well, what—

GA: Civilian world.

TS: When did you—is that when you met your husband or—?

GA: I did. He was a golf professional and as a public affairs officer. I used to call it "eating for my country," but I used to do a lot—[TS laughs] I used to do a lot of stuff with the local community and got my—the public affairs officer works directly for the wing commander. You are their mouth piece. You decide who's going to talk to them, and who isn't going to talk to them. Or if you have any media events, you prepare that person. Anyway, you work directly for that person and nobody else. You had a direct line to that person.

So I did a lot of stuff for him, but I also—just to be representing the base. But I also had a lot of involvement with the community and local leaders. That—I was involved in that—what did they call it? Fayetteville [North Carolina, site of Pope Air Force Base] has a dogwood festival every year, and it's a big to do, and it brings money to the community, and all the key leaders in the community get very involved in it. So I was always one of those people that was on their committee. There were lots of activities that took place during the week of the dogwood festival. One of them we used to tie the—the base open house used to be tied to that week. So it just made for a really big event, and that was just one of the events. So that was part of my role, was tying that into the community. We also had a big ball—I mean a formal ball. That is how I met my husband.

TS: At the formal ball?

GA: Yes. Well, there was a mutual friend of ours that knew my husband, that was on the dogwood committee with me. He said, "Gail, you really need to have a date to some of these functions. I've got somebody in mind for you that I think you should go to the ball with."

And I said, "Well, why don't we work it out where I go and he goes and we meet there?" [laughter]

TS: Safer, huh?

GA: Yeah. Anyway, to make a long story short, we actually hit it off and we had—we ended up getting married about three years later.

TS: Well, that was terrific.

So let me recap a couple of things, or actually ask you about some general—we actually covered quite a few things here. Do you have any particular memorable award that you received while you were in the service?

GA: Well, I received several meritory [meritorious] service medals. But they were for various things. Just for, you know, apparently serving above and beyond, because not everybody gets those. So I got, you know, accommodation medals and things like that. Nothing—I mean I don't have any purple hearts or—[laughs]

TS: I mean is there anything though that you're particularly proud of that you did, maybe? Not necessarily getting an award for it.

GA: No, I think all of my—besides maybe my first couple of jobs in the—when I first started in the air force, those aren't anything that I'm all that proud of. But I think especially being an instructor. I think being able to teach people, especially helping people—teaching someone how to be a good leader, good manager, good supervisor, I think that was very important. I think I made a lot of impress—positive impressions on a lot of people. I really do. At least that was the feedback that I got.

I think I played a major role in the nuclear field. [I] probably was a good positive role model for other women that decided to come into fields that were not typically fields for women. So I'd like to think that I kind of paved the way for women—more women to be able to be accepted into those kinds of fields. I think I did my part there.

I think I made a great public affairs officer. [I] was involved in a lot of things nationally, international events, was a part of history. I was there in—I was at Andrews when Reagan left and [George H. W.] Bush Sr. came on board. So the changing of the guard, I guess. [laughs]

TS: Sure.

GA: I—gosh—the public affairs officer even at Pope Air Force Base, I had a lot of responsibility there. I was very involved with the community. But I also had things like aircraft accidents, people who actually died, and handling crisis communications and things like that.

TS: How was that? How did—

GA: Well, you're trained to do it. You learn that at Defense Information School, and you hope that you never have to deal with it. As a public affairs officer, that's probably the one thing you absolutely hope that you don't have to do is deal with a disaster.

TS: Right.

GA: And doggone it, it happens. And probably the worst one I had was we had a C-130 that crashed in Blewett [Falls] Lake. I don't know if you've ever heard of Blewett Lake. It's down in—gosh.

TS: It's in North Carolina?

GA: Oh, yeah.

TS: Okay.

GA: It's—I'm trying to think of where it's near. It's in Western North Carolina, I guess, down south of Randolph County, down and beyond Montgomery County—Montgomery, Moore County, around that area.

TS: Okay.

GA: And we—what was so—what made that so bad is that Pope Air Force Base existed basically just like Andrews Air Force Base existed to support the White House, the State Department, and the Pentagon. Pope Air Force Base existed to support the 82nd Airborne—

TS: Fort Bragg.

GA: —and Fort Bragg. So anything that happened at Pope, like an airplane going down—if you can only imagine that there's 50,000 army troops at Fort Bragg. Any one of those troops could be on our plane—planes. So if a plane goes down that's 50,000 army troops of families—

TS: Worried.

GA: —worrying whether it's one of theirs. So the day that plane—that evening—it was seven o'clock in the evening and I had just finished working all day, just got home. My phone rang and it was our command center telling me, "Gail, you need to come in. We've got a C-130 that hasn't reported back to us. We don't know if there's been anything is—we know that there's been a C-130 that's crashed, and we haven't heard back from our crews. We don't know for a fact that ours is down, because there's also another C-130 that's been flying in the same area that was a reserve C-130 out of Charlotte." So we eventually identified that it was our plane that was down. It was in the lake. It was underwater. So it's not like it crashed on the ground where you could have easy recovery, some situation like that. This took actually several weeks to recover anybody, so it was just a—it was a tough time. It was a tough PR [public relations] job. So trying to find—and what a good public affairs or a good public relations person is good at trying to find the positive things, trying to have a silver lining to a really rough situation. So that was what you had to be very good at.

TS: What would find for a silver lining for that?

GA: [laughs] Well, that was a tough one. But what you do do you is you pull out historical documentation, stuff—factual stuff, things like how many hours that C-130s fly without incident, you know. You talk about all the positive things about what these flight crews have to go through. You talk about the aircraft itself. There's just a lot of things that you—but it's always factual information, not hearsay or what you think.

TS: I see.

GA: It's factual information that helps people understand, yes, that these things do happen. But what was so bad about that was, like I said, it could have been anyone of the 50,000. Well, what made these really bad is that we also had exchange officers from foreign countries on that plane. So we had a couple of our pilots from Australia that were

training. I don't remember where else. But anyway, it came more of an international event.

TS: Right.

GA: It was quite the—

TS: Do you remember how many were lost in that crash?

GA: I think each position had one or two trainees. I think the pilot had—the pilot and co-pilot—I think there were two or three officers up in the cockpit. Then you've got enlisted crew members on the flight as well. So it seems to me like eight—eight or nine people. It doesn't sound like a lot, but eight or nine people and then of course, like I said, we did not—luckily enough, we had no army troops. There was nobody but air force troops on the plane.

TS: It was like a training mission?

GA: It was a training mission with no—no jumpers.

TS: I was going to say because it's a C-130, right?

GA: Yeah, which is not a huge aircraft but—

TS: They're—

GA: —it is used to carry, you know, quite a few—it can carry quite a few jumpers. It also carries—you can drop loads, pallets, out of the back end of a C-130. That's the neat thing about a C-130, is they can actually fly five feet above the ground and you can roll a pallet out. You can roll a tank out. You can roll a small helicopter out, and then they assemble it. They have it broken down to a point, and then you roll it out. And then you can do these high level drops like for food or supplies into various areas. So the C-130 is a pretty neat old plane. It's been around a long time.

TS: Oh, sure. Oh, sure. Well, would you say that—well, maybe not. What do you think was the most emotionally hard thing that you had to do in the service?

GA: Well, that was probably one of the toughest ones.

TS: Yeah.

GA: That one, yeah. Because even when I was at Andrews Air Force Base, we didn't have—we had a plane run off of the runway, and I had one of those at Pope as well, but nobody was hurt. So, you know, the media would pick up on those things. Sometimes

they know stuff before—they would know stuff before I would sometimes, because they monitor emergency nets.

TS: Right.

GA: So they're actually—they're calling you to find out about that plane that just ran off of the end of the runway or just crashed before you had even heard about it from your own command center. Yeah, that happens a lot.

TS: "I'll get back to you."

GA: Yeah. [laughter] "Excuse me? Let me check on that."

TS: Well, now was there anything in particular that was physically hard for you?

GA: Probably, the nuclear—I mean the missile business. A nuclear site is not set up for the weak. [laughs] And even though in stature I'm not very big, I was actually—I'm pretty strong, and I was pretty strong back then. I've always been into fitness: running and did weight lifting. So I was pretty strong. But it was a challenge. I mean they were trying to lower steel—these steel platforms that come down to access the missile—a panel on the missile or something. I mean those—or opening and closing one of those doors. Even though it's assisted with hydraulics, it is still—you got to get it moving first. I'm 118 pounds soaking wet, so I don't have a lot of weight behind me. So that's probably physically the most physical. Your crew members, which were all guys, expect you to pull your load, you know. I mean even if they were gentleman, they still expect you to pull your load, your part. So I never felt like somebody was stepping in front of me to help open the door for me. They were not doing that. [laughs]

TS: Right.

GA: And you didn't expect it. That wasn't going to happen.

TS: So how would you say in general then, over time—so you entered in 1970, I think you said, right?

GA: Yes.

TS: You got out in 1993. So—and when you talked briefly about being home and trying to make changes in the housing area and things like that, did you see any changes for women in any way during this period of time?

GA: Well,, yeah. A lot of changes in terms of a lot of career fields that opened up for women that didn't exist when I first went in, and certainly have more so since I left the service. But yeah, I mean, when I left the service we were just starting to get women into combat roles where they could fly fighters. It used to be that the first few women that were pilots

were flying cargo planes but not—you know, not fighters, because they always felt like that was a combat role. But I was actually in a combat role, and that was the one thing that— even though I wasn't face to face with the enemy, we—I mean that was our—we were a combat crew. And we actually—I have a combat medal.

TS: Which one was that for? For the nuclear aspect?

GA: No, it's just—no, it's a combat medal.

TS: For which position did you earn that, the combat medal?

GA: In the nuclear.

TS: Oh, okay.

GA: Yeah. Yeah, because of that role. Because you are. It's just like sitting in the cockpit of an airplane: you may not be face to face with the enemy, but you're in a combat role. So with your finger on a nuclear weapon you're in a combat role, sitting there with a .38 on your hip. You are in a combat role. [laughs] Just, you know, not how people view combat but—

TS: Sure.

GA: But the air force doesn't typically have ground soldiers.

TS: Right.

GA: We typically were just—or are just a little more technical. We do things from other locations. [laughs]

TS: That's true. Yeah, changing or expanding the definition of what combat really is.

GA: That's right. And of course that's why we're a much smaller force too, because we're not about numbers of troops.

TS: Well, how do you think these—how do you think the roles of women were able to be expanded then in this time? What—

GA: I think probably by women showing that they can do things, you know, like Gail that was a commander of a nuclear crew. I think as women were given the opportunity to eventually move into some of these positions, and could show that they could do as well or better as the guy sitting next to them, I think that we earned our way there over time.

TS: How do you think—

GA: And attitudes changed.

TS: Yeah.

GA: But we did it. We did it in our actions I think, and showing that we can do these things.

TS: How do you think that women got the opportunity? Say, how did you get the opportunity—?

GA: Well, there was probably a lot of fighting going on to get us into some of these. I'm sure. I'm sure. But again, like I said, I think the opportunities over time with someone allowing us to at least get our foot in the door and try it. You know, I'm sure that there were test programs, and that is way above my pay-grade. But I'm sure there were test programs of women doing various—some of these various fields, like starting in the nuclear business and moving on into combat—more direct combat roles as a fighter pilot. I think we earned it through how we performed, and could show that we could do it the same as our male counterparts. I think, you know.

TS: Right.

GA: But you're saying or wanting to know from the very beginning or—

TS: No—

GA: —probably actually how did we even get into those?

TS: Well,, your perception of it, because I wondered—you know.

GA: I think we earned our way.

TS: Yeah. Well, and you had talked about a little bit—it's interesting how you talked about the support that was really behind you to help you get into different aspects of—different fields, I guess.

GA: And every one of those, for the most part, were all men in senior positions that viewed me as a very capable person. So somehow I earned their respect to the point that they were willing to put their name on the line and say, "I think Gail would make a great officer. I think Gail make a great missile officer or whatever," is what helped me get into the different—

TS: So you think that maybe—because sometimes the perception of—was Gail a great officer, or was Gail a great female officer? Do you think that there was any distinction between those with your superiors at all?

GA: I don't think so. I don't. I mean I think initially with so few women in the nuclear business it was probably—there was a lot of emphasis—there was a lot of—they looked at us pretty hard as women, the few of us that were around. I don't know if they were wanting us to fail or not, but they were definitely really watching us pretty closely. I did feel that way. But over time I had proven myself, and obviously proved myself to the point that I became a commander of an instructor crew. And I earned my way there. It wasn't somebody trying to fill a quota. I never felt that way. I did feel that anything I ever did, it was I earned my way to that. Someone felt that I would be good at that, or that I would succeed at that, or that I could contribute something by doing that. Every one of my jobs I felt that.

TS: Right.

GA: Even in public affairs. It was a woman who was the chief of public affairs at Andrews Air Force Base who picked me out of plenty of other people on that base that she could have possibly considered bringing under her wing as her deputy and sent them off to Defense Information School. But for some reason she was—she gravitated to me and she saw something in me that she thought would work well in that field.

TS: So would you say you felt that you were treated fairly in the military?

GA: Absolutely, absolutely. Initially starting out, no. But I think for the most part you just—if you wrap up my whole career for the most part, I don't look at my career at feeling like I was dealt with as just a woman. I really do feel like I was dealt with—people reacted or respected me based on what I had achieved or could do, or what they felt I could do. So I felt—anything I did I felt like I earned.

TS: So it was based on your job performance then?

GA: Yes.

TS: Excellent. What—how about—do you recall anything particularly funny that happened while you were in the service?

GA: Oh, there's probably a number of funny things. [TS laughs] Probably one of the funnier things is [laughs]—back to the nuclear business—it used to be—I told you we had to exercise things at the site to make sure things worked as they were supposed to. One of the things was we had to roll the silo closure door. You've got to be able to roll the door open to be able to launch the missile, if the day comes that you need to launch the missile. So the door is very crucial. Well, we used to know when the Soviet satellites were watching us, so that's how we knew when we could and couldn't open the door. So there were certain days or certain times when the door could not be rolled because of when the satellite was coming around.

TS: You didn't want a picture.

GA: But by knowing when the Soviet satellites were watching us—I had a couple of enlisted crew members that were just—they were a delight, but they would pull some stunts. I told you how they sometimes would get the silo to—or the control center to move, because we were on springs. Well, they would go up top-side and moon [laughs]—I hate this is on tape.

TS: [laughs] It's very typical military type action though.

GA: And they would moon the Soviets!

TS: When they would know when the satellite was coming over.

GA: Yeah.

TS: That's pretty funny.

GA: So things like that. And then this didn't happen to me specifically, but because we were out in the middle of farmers' fields and stuff, I heard all kinds of stuff about bringing "Betsy the cow" down on the elevator and to the control room. Somebody say, "Want to know what's for lunch?"

TS: [laughter] Well, I would imagine—

GA: And they would return "Betsy the cow", but you know.

TS: You would have to be creative to be able to—

GA: Well, you're out there for a long time and it is very serious business, and you do—I think to get through it sometimes, you do have to have some sense of humor and you got to inject a little bit of fun. So superiors probably would not have liked it very much if they knew exactly every little thing that went on out there. But we took our job very seriously and we were very good at what we did. And we had a little fun every once and a while.

TS: [laughs] That's good.

GA: I guess that's probably about the funniest. I will tell you, though, when I first joined the air force my little sister had always—she always thought that I was like Goldi—she thought I looked like Goldilocks. This was back when I was younger.

TS: Right.

GA: I'm trying to remember the name of the movie that Goldie Hawn was in.

TS: *Private Benjamin.*

GA: When she shows up at basic training and she gets her uniform issued and wants to know if this comes in any other color. Well, that is exactly my little sister—she thought because I was always a fashionista, and she could not believe that her sister was going to go into the air force. She just always thought that had to be the funniest thing when I arrived and saw where I was going to be living and what I was going to be wearing. [laughter]

TS: Well, that's interesting, because before we started the tape you were looking at the brochure and you were talking about one of the uniforms that you really liked.

GA: Yeah. And that was that blue—that light blue one.

TS: The summer cord?

GA: Oh, that was the best. And then they did away with it.

TS: And you had—you also talked about how you had specific outfits you had to wear because of the jobs you had, too—not just air force blue.

GA: In the missile business we had—well in my particular unit, we had dark navy pants and shirt. They didn't come in women's sizes, so I had to have my altered. I always had to have my uniforms altered anyway to fit right. That was another thing: I was always into making sure the uniform fit like it was supposed to fit, whereas a lot of women would just go but it off the rack and wear it that way. I always had—something that needed to be taken in a little bit, I had it taken in.

TS: You had it tailored to fit you?

GA: I always had my—my uniforms were always tailored. From day one, I always had my uniforms tailored. But I did the same thing with my missile uniform because they were men's clothes. They were not women's sizes at all. They were not made for us. I actually had those tailored to fit too, but they were just a navy—dark navy pants and shirt. We had short sleeve and long sleeve shirts, and we had these ascots that we wore, and the color of the ascot would reflect what squadron you were in.

TS: Sure.

GA: And then we had little pins that we could pin on our ascot that identified how many—when you get evaluated at a certain level of that evaluation—

TS: Right, your rating level?

GA: Yeah, if it is an outstanding evaluation, crew evaluation, you [get?] a number associated with that. So we would have these little pins with numbers. You knew who the good crew members were.

TS: [laughs] That's pretty interesting.

GA: Yeah, little things to distinguish you from somebody else. And then you had all of your patches, you know. You'd have an American flag on one arm and then a squadron—a squadron and a command and the wing patch somewhere. I can't remember—on a pocket, an arm—

TS: Sure. Did you—during—so during—let's see, seventies. Were you connected—did you have any connection with what was happening in women's movement at this time too? Did you feel anything about how that might have affected the military for women?

GA: Not particularly. I do think—and of course I wasn't in the civilian world—but after leaving the military and going into the civilian environment, I do think that the military is—or the air force, I'll speak for the air force—is much further advanced, much further ahead at breaking that glass ceiling than corporate America. And they're getting better in corporate America, but I had so much more expected of me at a much lower grade and a much lower rank—so much more responsibility than you'd see placed on someone of some kind of equal stature in the civilian environment.

TS: Would you say that for men and women too?

GA: Yeah, absolutely. Yeah. But I do think that women are given much more opportunities in the military, which was one of the reasons why I did stay in, because I didn't have any idea what I wanted to do in the outside anyway. And I just felt like there were more opportunities available for me to find my way than there were out in the civilian market at the time. Until I got ready to leave and I actually was—it was CP&L, Carolina Power and Light, which is now Progress Energy. When I was stationed at Pope Air Force Base they actually were courting me because they were looking for someone with a nuclear background and a public relations. Someone with strong communication skills—I'm trying to remember what the job—

TS: Sounds like they wrote it right for you.

GA: Yeah, someone in a technical environment with a strong communications background or something like that. And only to find out that my resume ended up with a recruiting firm in Atlanta that was doing all the—they were trying to find people all over the country, and then they were going to narrow it down send those top ten or whatever resumes up to the headquarters, which was here in Raleigh, for that position, for them to start the interview process.

I got a call one day out of the blue. I said—well first of all, I didn't even know who Carolina Power and Light was. I'm sitting in Fayetteville, North Carolina, and they didn't have CP&L down there. But that's how it all started. And I started the interview process that went on for a couple of months. And some testing—had to have some psychological testing. Finally I got the call that they wanted to offer me a job.

TS: So what kind of—how hard of a decision was that for you to make at the time?

GA: It was easy.

TS: Yeah?

GA: I was ready to go .

TS: Yeah.

GA: I really was. And we were still dealing with the desert. I was still faced with probably having to take a tour over there if I stayed in. I really didn't want to go at that point in my career—twenty—close to twenty-four years. I was ready. And I was concerned about—you know, I'm in my early forties and I'm thinking if I want to transition and get—have another career—and I always thought that I wanted to be in corporate America. I mean I went to school and got my master's not for what it was going to do for me—well I thought promotion wise that would be a good thing to do—not so much that as what it would do for me when I did eventually leave the service. I was trying to look ahead. I had no exact plan, but I was trying to look ahead in terms of how that would be on a resume, and I thought I wanted to be in the corporate world, moving up the corporate ladder, till I finally [got?] there.

TS: [laughs] You had a different view once you were there?

GA: Yeah, it was just so political. And it was fine. I mean as long as I wasn't in the corporate offices, everything was wonderful. But my last job that I took, which was a promotion, was at the corporate office, and it was just—it was just so political. I was just miserable, and I didn't last a year. I just got up one day and said, "I just don't want to do this."

And my husband said, "Well, don't."

So I went in and sat down at my desk and wrote up a resignation letter—decided to resign. And I was the breadwinner of the family.

TS: Well, what did you—did you find that you had any difficulty transitioning from the military to the civilian world?

GA: No. I thought it was quite easy. I really did. It was, to me—especially the air force is—I mean it's like a big corporation anyway. It's very—to me, most career fields in the air force transfer very well in the civilian world. Like I said, it's not a bunch of ground soldiers. These are people who are in very technical fields. It's run very much like a business. I mean you've got to budget your—you have profit—you may not have profit centers, because the military doesn't make a profit; they're providing a service—

TS: Right.

GA: —but you do have to budget. You do have to fire people.

TS: Accountability. I was going to say, that's—

GA: You do have accountability and responsibilities, absolutely. So no, I don't think it's all so different. Now maybe had I been in an environment where with hundreds of troops or something—and then I can't even relate to that—[phone rings] maybe that would have been different.

TS: You want to get that?

GA: I'm sorry.

TS: We'll finish up with you then.

[Recording paused]

TS: Okay. We're back with Gail. What were you going to say about the couple of things you remembered about the transition?

GA: Well, I thought that I transitioned quite well. I didn't think that it was that big a deal. I know some people would think that somebody in the military coming into the civilian world it's going to be that different. But to me the air force is like corporate America. It's not all that different.

But the one thing that drove me crazy was how people don't have a sense of urgency, and how they don't show up on time. They don't come to work on time, they don't come to meetings on time, and they don't think anything of it that you've got a group of people waiting for someone and they show up late. I just never could quite wrap my brain around that. So that's probably the biggest adjustment I think that I had to accept, because there wasn't anything—I couldn't fight it.

TS: Yeah.

GA: There's just some people that are just chronically late. And there was no—it's not like you're going to take any kind of action against them. I mean nobody ever said or did anything about it! [laughter] And I remember that being a really big deal in the military. You don't show up late for anything. You don't go to war late.

TS: That's right. [laughter] That's right. That's a good phrase.

GA: Every second counts, you know? So it is—some of those kinds of things are a bit of an adjustment.

TS: Well, do you think the military has shaped or influenced you life at all in any way?

GA: Well, it probably did in those terms. I mean I am—my husband calls me a type A personality. So as much I say I was one of those people that kind of floundered around through school, I do—I am a bit type A. I mean I have certain ways I like to do things or have things done. Not to the point that I'm difficult to work for or work with, but I do have—I do like things done right.

TS: You have certain expectations of—

GA: Absolutely.

TS: —yourself and others maybe?

GA: Exactly. Yeah. Yeah. And I don't ask anyone to do anything I'm not able or willing to do. So that's who I am.

TS: What about your sense of patriotism, having served and having lived in a family with a military background?

GA: I'm very, very patriotic.

TS: How would you define patriotism? What does it mean to you?

GA: Love of country, love of what—our freedoms, what we have. And I don't think you know just how much it is or how—I don't even know if you can define until sometimes you leave this country and go live somewhere else. So sometimes it is more—it is a feeling more than it is words. There is no other country on earth like the United States of America. We've got it all. We really do. And you really don't realize that—I think a lot of people need to get up and leave this country and go somewhere else and spend some time there. Not for a vacation, but I mean live in another country, travel to other countries, to realize what you truly have here.

TS: What do you think that other—what do you think that United States has that other countries don't have?

GA: Well, specifically, I think the biggest thing is what we call our freedoms—all of our freedoms. You can worship whoever you want to worship or whatever you want to worship. You can come and go. We don't worry about—well maybe we are these days—but you don't really worry about having a coup or a takeover of your government. You know the strength of a nation isn't just having a strong military; it's much, much more beyond that. The strength of a nation is measured by its people. It's measured by its government. The fact that we can go from a democratic government to a—from a Democratic president to a Republican president or whatever in between, and still be able to function and we don't fall apart, says something. I mean the stability of a country is

there. Regardless of who you want to win this presidential election, whoever it is, we will still be who we are November 5. Economically—typically we're pretty strong economically. But it's economical, it's political, it's military, it's a lot of things.

Now, what I am very concerned about right now is our relationship with other countries. Our policies that are in place, the way we go about—or have gone about doing business over the past eight years with other countries and other leaders of countries, that needs to change. I'm not proud of that at all. As an American, I am not proud of that.

TS: Interesting. Well, would you—I don't know if you have any children at all.

GA: No.

TS: If you did—or if you have any nieces or nephews—

GA: I do.

TS: Would you recommend—are any of them young women or girls?

GA: I have two girl nieces, the rest are boys.

TS: Okay. Well, would you recommend the military as a way to go for either of the boys or the girls at all?

GA: Not the girls, because they're—I don't think they're of the right mindset. I don't think they would do well in the military.

TS: Not because they are girls, but because of their personalities?

GA: Yes, yes. Not because they are girls, but just—they happen to be girls, but I don't think they would do well in the military environment.

TS: No?

GA: No. I mean it's a little stricter environment than what they're accustomed to. [TS laughs] I just don't think they would do well. The boys [are] pretty sharp young men. Both of them would probably do well. [They] have a good head on their shoulders. I think they would do well if they wanted to do that, but I don't think they will.

TS: Yeah. So it's a fit—you think that certain people fit into a military lifestyle?

GA: I think so. And then there are some people that can learn it, but I do think that people that are going to do well in the service usually have a different—I don't know what it is. I don't know how to [pause]—I mean you can—I think some things can be trained and taught, but there are some things—like I said, when I go all they way back to 1970 basic training, and I don't know what happened to the girl that was in my dormitory through

basic training, but I basically carried her through basic training. And I doubt very seriously that she did very well. I just can't imagine that she did very well, because she couldn't handle the stress of just getting herself ready in the morning and the things that they—just basic things that they teach you. That sense of urgency, you know, all those kinds of things. The discipline, you know. I think if you don't have discipline, if you're not that kind of person, I don't think you're going to do well in the military.

TS: Now do you think—we talked a little bit earlier about how a lot more jobs had opened up. Do you think that there are any jobs that women are not capable of doing, or shouldn't—maybe not even capable, but maybe shouldn't be doing in the military?

GA: No. I can't think of anything that a woman should or shouldn't do over a man as long as they are—have been properly trained and show that are capable of performing just like anyone else. No, I can't think of anything that just jumps out in my mind. I don't see any reason why they—I never did before. I never saw any reason why women should not be considered for any role in the military. If you can physically do it—physically and mentally do it—now there may be something that a woman may just not have the physical strength to do. I don't know what that is. These days you know even—I don't—there's so much technology out there and assistance that even lifting something is probably—physically don't have to lift very much anymore.

TS: They might have help with those doors now, right?

GA: They might have help with those doors, yeah. [laughter]

TS: Well, is there—we've talked about quite a lot, to almost twenty-four years, right?

GA: Yeah.

TS: I know we haven't—

GA: I'm sure I've left out a lot of stuff, but that's okay.

TS: And we may—I'm sorry if I haven't asked you questions about certain things that you have wanted to talk about. But is there anything in particular that you might want to add for someone who is listening to this or learning about your experience in the military?

GA: No. I—it was a great experience. If I had it to do over again, I probably wouldn't do it any other way, you know, given the circumstances that were in front of me along the way. Like I said from the very beginning, there was just—I had a choice. I could either—I thought I could only be a nurse or a secretary. And even if I went to college, I wasn't really visualizing other things that I could possibly be or do, and I had to just find out for myself—experience some other things and find out for myself. So I think it was a rewarding career. It probably left me—now I can do a lot of different things, but I probably am left to sometimes wondering, "Well, what am I going to do now?" So

because I did have a lot of different careers, my body clock is almost like I think I need to change and do something else about every five years. [laughter] Have you got any ideas?

TS: I think you're doing all right, right now. [laughter]

GA: Well, yeah.

TS: So do you think that you went into the military with a sense of independence or anything like that, or did you develop—because you were talking about you were shy—?

GA: I think that I developed it. I think I developed it over time through each experience in my life: from having to change schools, acquire new friends, reestablish myself, to going into a completely different world of actually being an active duty person in the military and having to learn a new job, new people. You know, once—

TS: Language.

GA: Language, yeah. Yeah. So—

TS: Well, this has been a terrific interview, and I—do you have anything else that you'd like to add?

GA: Gosh, I think it's—I think I'm boring.

TS: No, no! Not at all. Not at all, Gail. [GA laughs] Well, okay. Well, thank you so much. I really, really appreciate it.

GA: Well, thank you for the time to come here and gather this information.

TS: Oh, it's no problem at all.

GA: I'm impressed that somebody even wants to know about the background of my career.

TS: Well,, we do. We do. I'll go ahead and shut this off then.

[End of Interview]