WOMEN VETERANS HISTORICAL PROJECT

ORAL HISTORY COLLECTION

INTERVIEWEE: Ellen Peebles

INTERVIEWER: Therese Strohmer

DATE: October 20, 2010

[Begin Interview]

TS: Today is October 20th, 2010, this is Therese Strohmer, I'm here with Ellen Peebles in Gibsonville, North Carolina. This is an oral history interview for the Women's Veterans Historical Project at the University of North Carolina at Greensboro. And Ellen, how would you like your name to read on your collection?

EP: Ellen R. Peebles.

TS: Ellen R. Peebles, okay. Well, Ellen, thank you for joining me today, I'd like to start out by having you tell me when and where you were born.

EP: I was born in Oconto, Wisconsin, to a family of eleven, and it was in 1957, November 3rd.

TS: And what kind of environment of Wisconsin was that, rural area?

EP: It was rural, it was on a dairy farm.

TS: A dairy farm! And you had a family of eleven, so you had eleven siblings?

EP: Correct.

TS: And where do you fall in that?

EP: I'm seventh of twelve.

TS: You're the seventh. So you're not like the youngest or the oldest or—

EP: Pretty much in the middle.

TS: How does it break down for your boys and girls?

EP: There were eight girls and four boys.

TS: Oh, so the girls ruled.

EP: They were double.

TS: That's right. And so you had a dairy farm?

EP: Correct, a small dairy farm.

TS: A small dairy farm, so is that what both of your folks did for a living, or did they do anything else?

EP: Yes, they did, that was all they did.

TS: That's all they did. I guess that kept them pretty busy.

EP: It does.

TS: Oh, they still have it?

EP: No, he retired when I was in the university.

TS: Is that right? So what was it like growing up on a dairy farm?

EP: Well, I think for me it was fine. I mean, you don't know what you don't know, and I had plenty of folks to keep me occupied and whatnot, so we kept out of trouble.

TS: What kind of chores did you have to do?

EP: I was more helping milking the cows versus indoors, cooking and doing the dishes and such, so I guess I was outdoorsy, per se.

TS: Yeah. So you had plenty of girls, your mom probably had plenty to choose from to help her in the house, right?

EP: That's right.

TS: And so, did you do anything—gosh, I know, with eleven in your family for children, you can probably make a baseball team, for sure.

EP: And we did.

TS: Did you play sports?

EP: And football.

TS: And football? Did you have a lot of neighbors or was it so rural that you didn't have a lot of neighbors, or did you—

EP: Oh, we had neighbors on our block, for sure, and there was a family that had foster kids, so they were about as big as we were, and they grew and they shrunk.

TS: Oh, they came and went as the—

EP: That's right.

TS: So did you play a lot of sports as a little girl?

EP: Well, you know, a little bit of football and a lot of softball, and rode horses, so.

TS: And you probably did a little bit of, like, in the snow kind of stuff.

EP: Yes.

TS: What kind of things did you do?

EP: Tobogganing.

TS: Tobogganing, yeah. No, like, cross-country skiing or—

EP: Oh, just ice skiing or skating when the conditions were right.

TS: Yeah. [chuckles] And did you—what kind of school did you go to?

EP: Well, just the town school. By the time I was entering first grade, you know, we went to Oconto, which was a bus ride about ten miles. And went through twelfth grade there. Didn't go to kindergarten, because that stopped just in the time that I was supposed to go, so.

TS: Oh, it did? So you didn't have kinder—so first through twelfth.

EP: Right.

TS: Now, I know, having been from a large family that the ones who precede you and then when you're in a rural area for school, all the teachers know about you before you get there. Was that your experience as well?

EP: For some of it. Of course, my older brothers and sisters went to the country school, and that stopped before I entered those grades, so it was kind of a transition for them, too, but once I got into high school, they kind of knew there was another one coming up and another one coming up. So they tried not to compare us.

TS: Yeah. How'd they do on that?

EP: I think they did all right.

TS: Did they? Yeah. Did you have any particular subject that you liked in school, or is there anything you really enjoyed, like elementary and then high school?

EP: For the most part, not, I kind of veered away from the math, I wasn't all that great in math, but I liked the sports, and the chorus, and I played band for just a little bit, but other than that, just—and I didn't plan to go to college.

TS: No?

EP: No. I mean, nobody did in my family at that point, and then a scholarship came up, which I won, so that's probably the main reason I was able to go.

TS: What kind of scholarship was it?

EP: It was a local one, it was called Sharp, and it paid a couple thousand dollars each year—semester, so that basically paid for my tuition and what not, so.

TS: Did you get to pick what kind of college you wanted to go to, pretty much?

EP: There were only a couple options and I chose the one that was a little further away so I could be on my own and just be away.

TS: Yeah. So if you didn't—until that scholarship came up, what were your expectations, did you think—

EP: I really didn't know.

TS: Yeah.

EP: It was like stumbling through, and you know, even after I finished my bachelor's and trying to find a job, it was really nothing that was grabbing me, per se, to do. So I guess I was ripe for the military at that point.

TS: So, growing up, you didn't have, oh, I sure wish I could be a nurse or—nothing like that?

EP: Not really, not really. I mean, I loved animals and, you know, maybe pondered a little bit

about vet school, but knowing that that probably wouldn't be a possibility anyway.

TS: Why didn't you think so?

EP: I just think it was too far off for us, you know, just that the opportunity wouldn't be there.

TS: What do you mean—I don't know what you mean.

EP: Whether it was in my mind or not, I just, you know, I always had the doctor kits and all that, but as far as really saying to anybody or doing something that would make that happen, I just didn't do it.

TS: Oh, it's like a dream, but not—I see.

EP: Yeah, nothing that I said, you know, I'm going to do what is necessary to do it.

TS: You didn't have any courses in high school, like college prep type courses or anything like that?

EP: No, no.

TS: No?

EP: Not at that time.

TS: But did you—you said you played a little bit of—what kind of sports did you play in high school?

EP: I just did a little track, that's what I did.

TS: Oh, you did? What'd you run?

EP: The 800.

TS: Nice.

EP: Which was awful.

TS: Why is that awful?

EP: Halfway through it, you would—my legs died, and there was nobody wanted it, and I know why. It wasn't short and it wasn't long.

TS: You're not a sprinter and you're not long distance.

EP: Exactly, it was like oh my god, why'd I do this?

TS: That's funny. So when you—so how was college for you, then? Was that the first time you'd ever been away from home, did you work at all except for on the—

EP: I worked—I think my first year out of high school, I started working a local pickle factory, and I continued that during the summer, so that's where I got some money to—for school and what not.

TS: What kind of things did you do in a pickle factory?

EP: Anywhere from stuffing jars to the lids to packing.

TS: Just any part of the production line?

EP: Any, any part at all.

TS: What'd you think about that?

EP: I—it was a cultural experience, I'll say that.

TS: What do you—[laughs] what do you mean by that?

EP: Just kind of being with the factory workers and you know, their day to day, versus we're summer hire, so we'd come in there and—

TS: I see.

EP: You know, they'd—I think they liked that, too, because it's something different, and we're kind of funny in our own rights, being a little jovial and joking around and stuff, so they kind of liked that.

TS: Yeah. Was that like a big—in your area of growing up, was that a big hiring?

EP: Well, it was for us, who just needed it for the summer and could only do it during the summer.

TS: That's probably when the big production came, when they had the harvests and things.

EP: Correct, yeah.

TS: I see. All right, now where did you go to college at?

EP: Oshkosh.

TS: Oshkosh. And you said you mostly did this because of the scholarship you had, you hadn't really thought about it before then?

EP: Correct—no, I didn't.

TS: So what'd your folks think about you going off to college?

EP: Well, my dad, he kind of at one point said, "Well, what are you going to do? Do something with—try for this," whatever, so he kind of encouraged me, which was kind of surprising, because I didn't—I don't think he did that normally, so I went ahead and did that, and got the scholarship, so.

TS: So he encouraged you to apply for it? It was something you had to apply for.

EP: I did, yes.

TS: I see.

EP: So it was based on need and also grades, and so we fit the bill.

TS: All right, so you're off in Oshkosh and you're starting off and you're away from home and away from your big family, what was that like?

EP: I liked it. I mean, I've always grown up where being by myself—because there's always the opportunity to be with a bunch of people, you know, from school to siblings, and so I didn't mind at all. It's not like I get, you know, homesick or whatever. So I thought that was probably about the best thing that could happen, hindsight.

TS: Be off by yourself and—

EP: Yeah.

TS: Did you consider yourself very independent at that point in your life?

EP: Not financially, that's for sure. [chuckles] But as far as being able to do that, not worry about, you know, being homesick and other ties, you know, that was easy, that was easy.

TS: Yeah. Were you—did you have that sort of, I don't know, it's not stubbornness per se, but just like a persistence to be able to do something by yourself, even like when you're on the farm—

EP: I think so.

TS: Like, don't help me, I can do it?

EP: Well, and not only that, it's like I—[back?] that the pressure is there, that I can't fail. I mean, it's just not an option at this point. Not necessarily growing up and such, but at this point, you know, getting the scholarship and, you know, making that happen and graduating, that was never an option. I mean, for me, anyway.

TS: So, because you felt like—you had the scholarship, and you need to be able to do your work so that you have a good representation for yourself as having earned the scholarship, that sort of thing?

EP: Exactly, yeah, I guess it was the start of responsibility.

TS: Oh, there we go, the word responsibility.

EP: There you go. [chuckles]

TS: So what did you think of Oshkosh and college, there?

EP: I liked it. It was—I mean, I changed—I changed my major right after I got to College Algebra II class, and I said, there's no way I'm going to do this.

TS: What was your major initially?

EP: It was business.

TS: Okay.

EP: And again, it was "Well, I think that would be a good thing to do." It wasn't something that I said "Oh, I've got to be a business major," or whatever. So I quickly—and I always like to dabble in the social type of classes and whatnot, and then the psych minor, that was just like right in my alley, so I kind of liked it.

TS: What was it that drew you to that field?

EP: I guess it was just the curiosity of different social families and different countries and all the other social classes. Criminology kind of got in there, and also the abnormal psychology, and it kind of got where, well, maybe I could turn this into some police work, or corrections of sorts.

TS: Oh, really? You were thinking about it at that time?

EP: Yeah, very, very in the back of my mind, so I took a lot of the classes geared towards that.

TS: Did you have anybody in your family with a background in criminology or police or anything like that?

EP: No.

TS: It's just something that drew—you were drawn by this, okay. So you had—so you're—was there anything to—well, let's see, I'm trying to think about what years you're in college.

EP: Seventy-six to '80.

TS: Seventy-six to '80. What kind of stuff were you doing in college at that time?

EP: [chuckles] Not listening to the Beatles.

TS: No?

EP: No. I mean, I had a work-study type job, so that kept me busy, and I was also able to do my homework, so I kept doing that, and you know, the partying a little bit, and some friends along the way and whatnot. So I didn't get into any sorority or anything like that, I just—you know, went, partied a little bit, and studied hard.

TS: Did you do anything with sports at that time?

EP: I didn't. Of course, I jogged.

TS: Okay. "Of course", you jogged? [laughs]

EP: Of course I jogged.

TS: I don't know what that means. Of course you did? You were running the 880 in high school, [unclear]. But had you been a jogger all along?

EP: No! No, no. Before I went into basic training, I started jogging.

TS: Oh, you did?

EP: Yup.

TS: Any particular reason?

EP: Well, I knew I would need to do it in basic training, so, and that kept—

TS: But wasn't that after college?

EP: Yes.

TS: But you're jogging in college, too?

EP: Yeah, I think just to—

TS: I guess maybe that era, too, that jogging was a big thing in the mid to late '70s, too, wasn't it. Like kind of a—

EP: Yeah, there was always a group that would do that.

TS: Yeah. Well, did you have—so was there any other experience in college that you'd like to share?

EP: Not necessarily. I mean, I didn't go to football games or whatever, but just the times I had with—off campus in a house that we shared, that was fun, because again, it was like a little household and the scenarios there were kind of humorous.

TS: Sure, like [unclear] growing up. Did you get back home very often?

EP: I would want to say maybe every third week or so, we went home. There was a girlfriend that lived just a little ways down, so I got dropped off at a corner where I was picked up by—

TS: How far away from college was that, though?

EP: Probably about an hour and a half.

TS: Oh, that's not too far. And you went as far as you could, you said? [laughs]

EP: Well, yeah. So—that was far enough, so I couldn't commute.

TS: No, I see, that's true, that's true. Okay, so then after college—well, during college, are you getting a sense of what kind of job you think you want to have, or what you think your future is going to hold for you?

EP: I didn't, I had an interview at the Pond State Prison down in the psych ward, and that didn't go real well.

TS: Why not?

EP: Went down there, and I just kind of saw the environment and saw the clients and thought "I just don't think I want to do that."

TS: You didn't want to do it there, or you didn't want to get involved?

EP: I didn't want to do it at all.

TS: Like prison guard sort of thing?

EP: No, it was down in the psych ward.

TS: Oh, okay.

EP: So it would be kind of like interviewing the prison inmates and kind of trying to, you know, do some sort of counseling with those guys. [telephone rings] I'll just leave that to ring.

TS: Okay.

EP: It was like—from—just going down there, the profanity and the conditions and you know, I'm sure it's good for some people, but I just—

TS: Wasn't the environment that you wanted to be in?

EP: No, and I don't think I would have done so well with that.

TS: No. So did that kind of go "Hmm, maybe that's not the—"

EP: And you know, I could have went a little bit of social work stuff, but I decided I just wasn't going to do the extra schooling to do that, because I didn't take the right courses to do just social work. That was just a special major, not just sociology in itself.

TS: I see, okay. So then after this experience, what did you think, what was next for you?

EP: Well, I decided to stay with my sister, my oldest sister, for a while.

TS: And where was she at?

EP: She was in Michigan, and—

TS: What drew you over there?

EP: Well, she's kind of a special sister. She's the oldest, and so she wanted some company as well. And so I said "Well, I'll stay there and look for jobs in Michigan." Of course, they had one of the highest unemployments at that point.

TS: And this is what, '80, '81?

EP: Eighty, '81, yup. And after that, you know, after almost a year, I decided I've got to do something. So that's when I saw a recruiter.

TS: How was it that you got to the recruiter? Did you see something that triggered it, or?

EP: In the newspaper.

TS: Oh, you saw something in the newspaper?

EP: It said "Do you want a career in law enforcement? See your army recruiter." So I did.

TS: So you went down and talked to the army—now, had you considered—did you think about any other service besides the army?

EP: I didn't, but I don't know if that—I don't remember if that was a conscious—I just want to go army, I don't think it was.

TS: It was just like, this is the ad, this is the army.

EP: This is the ad, yup, I just kind of stumble into this.

TS: I see. So had you ever thought of doing anything in the military before you saw this ad?

EP: No, no, but it didn't bother me, because—and even though they kind of—they portray—you know "Want a career in law enforcement?", well, that's not necessarily going to happen in the army. But that just led me to one thing over another, and then, you know. You've got a career in the military.

TS: [laughs] That's kind of how it is. Oh, are we done now, our interview's over, that's what happened?

EP: [laughs]

TS: Well, did you—when you were thinking—tell me—I know we talked a little bit before we started, off tape. Tell me about the experience of recruiting, how you ended up—because you were first going to enlist, right? You were just going to enlist.

EP: Yeah.

TS: So talk about that experience.

EP: It just came out, when we were doing some paperwork with the recruiter, that—I guess that we all have to figure out whether, you know, you're dealing with—a recruiter needs to—did you graduate from high school?

And so she started asking me these type of questions, education-wise, and when I said I've got a bachelor's degree, she says "Oh, then you know, you could apply for Officer Candidate School, how do you feel about that?"

And I said "Well, what's that?"

So she says "Well, it's so many weeks of Officer Candidate School, and if you graduate successfully out of there, then you're a second lieutenant. If you don't, worst case, you've got a two year hitch as a specialist 5." At that point, there was a specialist 5, versus sergeant.

And I said "Well, I don't think I can go wrong with that." So that was agreeable to me.

TS: So then you got on this path of—on the officer path.

EP: That's right, correct.

TS: Now, what did your family think about you joining up with the army?

EP: Well, you know, I didn't—I don't remember communicating with my father that much about it. I don't even know if I called him and said "Hey, I'm going to go in."

I mean, I just—at that point, you know, we didn't talk very often, it's not like there was a reason for that per se, but we just didn't, and then when the rumor hit other siblings, one that said "Don't go, you'll get raped in the army!"

I said "I don't think so!"

TS: Was that a brother or a sister?

EP: It was a sister.

TS: Oh, really, so she had this perception?

EP: Yeah. "Oh, you will get raped in the army! Don't go there!" [chuckles]

TS: What'd your older sister, your mentor—

EP: She was supportive. I mean, she didn't want me to leave, but she knew that I needed to do something, and whatever drew me, she was okay with that.

TS: How about your mom?

EP: Well, my mom, she died when I was eleven.

TS: Oh, she did? Okay.

EP: Yeah. But you know, people just kind of—and there are siblings that, you know, you talk to a lot, and some that you don't, so, but, for the most part, after a while, they were pretty supportive, you know. At least, I didn't hear them not be supportive.

TS: How about your college friends?

EP: I kept contact with them, and they were okay with that. I mean, I see them less and less, but there was no—

TS: So nobody except for the one sister who thinks you're going to get raped—

EP: Yeah, yeah. She— "Cindy[?], no!" [chuckles]

TS: Well, this is a—

EP: "I won't let that happen!"

TS: So this is 1981, so actually, Reagan's just been elected, right?

EP: And that was good for the army.

TS: Was good for the army?

EP: Seems good for the army.

TS: Yeah. So there's this different environment, too, after Vietnam, you know, the buildup and stuff.

EP: Yeah, and we—when I went to my first duty station, the remnants of the push to get rid of the drugs in the military happened, and platoons were at half strength if that, and they kind of flushed out all the druggies—I call them druggies, but those that chose to dabble in drugs. So it was—and then they had just gone from the green fatigues to the battle dress, we had half and half in Officer Candidate School. So yeah, there was a lot of—and I never did a test, a physical fitness test, on my knees doing pushups, it was always the regular ones. So that was after that.

TS: I was going to say, what do you mean—oh, okay. [laughter] So—well, let's talk about, now, did you go through basic training, or did you—

EP: I did. That was one of the things.

TS: How was that experience for you?

EP: It was pretty humbling.

TS: In what way?

EP: Well, it was—it was that breaking us down and trying to build up process, and there's drill sergeants that do it okay, and there's some that don't do it very well. So you see some of the people that fall out of that, you kind of feel sorry for them. But in hindsight, that prepared me for Officer Candidate School, because that's just more of the same, and

so if you can separate the mind game from what's really important, then you're okay. So that was an interesting, I will say, kind of game to play.

TS: So was it more mentally difficult than physically, then?

EP: For basic training, it was—for a lot of folks, it was more mental, and it was physical for me, because I've not experienced that kind of heat before.

TS: Where was your basic training at?

EP: In South Carolina, Fort Jackson. I mean I just—that was just awful.

TS: That's right, you're from Wisconsin. [chuckles]

EP: That's right.

TS: And what month were you there?

EP: Well, we started in June.

TS: Oh my.

EP: So it was like, boom. But—

TS: Yeah, you didn't have time to acclimate, you get off the bus and you're there, right?

EP: Right, yeah, and there are a lot of people, a lot of folks in the platoon and whatnot just fell out, you know, and they're gone. You kind of knew that they went heat injury, so.

TS: But you were able to make it through?

EP: Yeah, and Officer Candidate School was a more balance of mental versus physical.

TS: And how was that experience for you, then?

EP: Well, it was all right. I mean, I think I was strong enough to go through it, and I, you know, proved right. There were things that I didn't do well, but you know, nobody does everything perfectly.

TS: No, that's true.

EP: [unclear] can't imagine that.

TS: So did you—now, you signed up, you knew you were going to do something in law enforcement, did you know exactly where you were going to go or how did that work out

for you?

EP: You don't—well, I knew I was going to go to the Military Police Officer basic school after Officer Candidate School. And you get your orders for your first duty assignment sometime halfway through that course, so I knew that, but until that it was like, okay, I'm going to another school, I'm going to another school.

TS: And did you put in to go to that school, or did they select you for it?

EP: The—you select your—you put a request in for the airborne school, the slots were there. You automatically go to your basic course, officer basic course, and then I applied for the air assault school. And you have to be selected to do that.

TS: So you went to Fort Benning for the airborne school—

EP: Correct.

TS: —after your officer training.

EP: And that was the—that was a hard but exhilarating experience.

TS: Well, tell me about that.

EP: Well, I was afraid of heights.

TS: Oh, really?

EP: Yeah. And it was like—my girlfriend says, "Hey, we're going to go to airborne school, come along with us." It wasn't like, hey, I think I want to jump out of airplanes. It was like "Hey, sign up for this, we're going!" So I signed up, but it was—and it was one of the best schools that I've been to, I mean, yeah, it's physical, it's not a lot of memorization, although you have to do things right or they won't let you proceed, but just getting over somewhat controlling my fear of heights and doing that and then the idea of jumping out of an airplane and such. Although now, I'm glad I'm not doing that, but at that point, when you're young, or somewhat young, it's all fun. So. And then it's one more thing on your badge, on your shirt, that says, I've been there.

TS: But did you have an idea about it when you first went there, that it was going to be something that—

EP: I had no real expectations. I just plugged along, and, day after day.

TS: So your girlfriends that said "Come on, let's go into airborne school." Now, in, I'm thinking 1981, that's not something that—or maybe even '82 by then—isn't what a lot of women were doing in—

EP: No, there was about half a dozen of us, if I remember.

TS: Out of how many.

EP: I can't remember how many there were, but I mean, there were plenty of—they call them sticks. But there was a core three or four of us that started and then finished together. Yeah, we were very, very the minority.

TS: Okay, yeah. And so how were you treated just as a female within that school at that time?

EP: Neither here nor there, really. I mean, they put you in front of the formation, thinking that you'll be the slowest, and they don't go fast anyway, it's that shuffle. So it doesn't really matter, but they wanted size, you know, smaller to—and you know, they always have the problem with the [shin] splints in women, and so they just didn't want to lose that many just due to injuries like that.

TS: Why did they have that problem with women?

EP: Well, I guess our bones are weaker. But more often than not, the women will experience the, you know, the problems with the running and shin splints.

TS: Like the shin splints? Was it the boots, perhaps, that—

EP: You know what, I can't—either that or we don't run properly, it's hard to figure.

TS: [chuckles]

EP: We didn't have enough calcium?

TS: I wonder if it might have just been the type of footwear that we had.

EP: Well, we all had to wear the boots.

TS: Because they weren't really designed for women at that point. I don't know, it'd be interesting.

EP: Well, I don't know if combat boots now are built for women either, but I think they may have said "Let's run in tennis shoes when we can."

TS: I see.

EP: Now, it's hard to do it in airborne school or air assault school, because you know, you go right—you jog to your place, and then you start doing your exercises or what's going on. You can't just say "Okay, you know, transfer your tennis shoes into your rucksack and

put your boots on." Maybe they do, maybe they don't, but it was just kind of like, okay, in combat, you know, you're going to have to wear your boots, so you've got to get used to them, and you've got to do road marches and all that, so.

TS: Right. Well, what was it like, jumping out of an airplane?

EP: It was exhilarating, it really was.

TS: What'd you think about it the first time? Were you nervous or?

EP: Oh yeah, everybody was nervous.

TS: Yeah. How were you in the line, like the beginning, the end?

EP: Thank goodness, I wasn't first, and I wasn't last.

TS: Okay.

EP: So I could always follow somebody and get pushed from behind.

TS: [laughs]

EP: That's the best place to be.

TS: Is it?

EP: Yeah.

TS: So how many jumps did you get to do?

EP: I think you had to do six to graduate.

TS: Yeah. You didn't have any problems with the landing or anything like that?

EP: No.

TS: Because a friend of mine, who's still out there at Fort Bragg, he says "Therese, it's not the jumping, it's the landing." [laughs]

EP: It is, it is. If your parachute opens okay, that's what it is.

TS: Yeah. Well, then right after that, you went to air assault school, right?

EP: After—

TS: Oh wait, you went to MP school, there.

EP: Air assault after the MP school. And that was just horrible weather, and that was the most strenuous—

TS: At Fort Benning?

EP: No, at Fort Campbell, Kentucky.

TS: Oh, for the—

EP: For the air assault school. That was the most physical thing I've ever done.

TS: How was that more physical than the other?

EP: Because—I think it was day one or day two, we went through obstacle courses, and it was when they switched from the winter to the summer training activity plan, so I got heat exhaustion after the obstacle course, and I was in the hospital and all that, so.

TS: How long were you in the hospital?

EP: Well, overnight. Well, it wasn't overnight, I think it was a few hours and then, you know, hydration and that kind of stuff. But I also pulled a muscle, so—but every time in air assault school, you have to road march, and so it just was horrible after that. I mean, the training was fine, but—

TS: What's a road march?

EP: Well, it's—you've got your backpack with so many pounds, and then you just travel up and down the hills of Kentucky until you reach the end.

TS: About how many miles are you going?

EP: I think the last road march is like a ten miler.

TS: Yeah. Then how many pounds are you carrying in that rucksack?

EP: I think it was thirty to thirty-five pounds, which isn't much, mile one, but mile ten is—

TS: Yeah, but how many pounds were you at that time?

EP: I don't know, hundred and fifteen, a hundred and twenty.

TS: It's a good percentage of your body weight, I'm thinking. It's a good percentage.

EP: That's true.

TS: So you went through two really physical type training, even before you get to your first assignment. And also you went through military police training. How was that?

EP: It was okay, it wasn't strenuous per se, physically. I mean, it was more, here's how to be a military police officer and here is your missions and here's what you could be doing at any one job. And then you go on your field training exercise and whatnot, so I mean, it was kind of educational a lot more than physical. You had to pass a physical fitness test—

TS: Like, these are the tools that you need to be able to do your job, sort of thing.

EP: Yeah.

TS: Well, compared to the other two, I can see why that one is not going to be as physical.

EP: That's right, it was a breather.

TS: Even in that, though, so how—what was the percentage of women in your class at that time? Not—I don't mean exact, just approximate.

EP: I don't know, I would say twenty percent.

TS: Oh, pretty good.

EP: So it wasn't that bad.

TS: That's actually more than the percentage of women in the army.

EP: The military police corps did a good job with balancing that, I think.

TS: Well, that's interesting. Yeah, that's more than I would think at that time. So then, now, when you're in air assault school, did you get your orders to where you were going to go?

EP: I already had them before.

TS: Oh, you did?

EP: This was just a schooling route.

TS: I see. And so where are you headed to next?

EP: Presidio, San Francisco.

TS: And was that like on your dream sheet of a place to go?

EP: I said I would like to be stationed in California, as one of the options, or Colorado, and—

TS: Could you pick states, or could you pick a particular base, or post—

EP: I think, if I remember right, I think it was country—not country, but state, per se. So I got what I wanted.

TS: Was there anything that attracted you to California?

EP: I just have a sister, one of my sisters lives there.

TS: [laughs]

EP: The one—"You're going to get raped!" [laughs]

TS: Oh, is that the one? [laughter]

EP: No, and that's not why I went over there.

TS: No, no, but you'd have family, right, so you want to be close to family still, right? So how was your first assignment? Oh, one thing I did want to ask you too, was, so throughout your training and everything, do you remember the first time you actually put on your uniform? Do you remember anything about that experience?

EP: I remember going through the line to get issued our uniforms. I remember going through that.

TS: What do you remember about that?

EP: Just—I mean, just grabbing it and getting the white T-shirts and getting, you know, the boots and such. And it wasn't a bad experience, I just remember going through that central issue facility, and.

TS: Yeah. Don't necessarily remember when you had to first put it on, or have it inspected?

EP: No, no.

TS: Did you guys have like a parade at the end, a ceremony for your graduating—for officer training school, things like that?

EP: There was a graduation for Officer Candidate School.

TS: Yeah, Officer Candidate School. Did any of your family get to attend that?

EP: No.

TS: No?

EP: No. The only thing—and I don't even know if I told them, at that point. I mean, I'm just going through going "I'll get through this, I'll get through this, I'll get through this. And when I can take a breather at my duty station, you know, I can start writing letters or whatever."

TS: That's interesting, okay. So how was your first duty station, then? What was it like in San Francisco, Presidio?

EP: It was different in the fact that Presidio San Francisco really doesn't have a division, or hire there, and it's kind of like a ceremonial type place, so there was a little conglomeration in the battalion of some engineers, some personnel weenies, you know, the MPs, and I forget if there was—there was a little postal detachment. So we were just kind of orphans under this headquarters, and we hardly got to do any, really, good training because we went down—you had to go way south in California to get to a decent training area, like Camp Roberts area. And that's past down Fort Ord, California, so it's just—it was unfortunate. And then I guess that's why they moved it and the unit, per se, because we really just didn't get the training we needed to in case we needed to deploy anywhere.

TS: What'd you think about it at the time? Almost like, did you think about it that way while you were there?

EP: I started to think about it after a year there, because it's like, okay, we don't go anywhere.

TS: What would you do on a typical day?

EP: Well, you know, you had your platoon. I also had road duty on the installation, that my soldiers would participate in. We did have some little training exercises, which were very lean and I won't say unorganized, but very basic, and we really didn't get a lot of support or realism in that. So I think we got shorted in that, per se, but it was beyond our control. And I think ceremonies was more important than anything—

TS: Were there like—

EP: We had a—our platoon was [sloop battery?] platoon, in case we had dignitaries that came in, San Francisco.

TS: Right. Didn't they have a hospital there, too?

EP: They had a hospital there too, right. But—so, it was okay, I got to be selected for the detachment commander, and I guess that's—at least you're a commander of something. [laughs]

TS: What did you get to command?

EP: Well, the detachment, which has the headquarters staff in it, so almost everybody's senior to you, but you're their commander.

TS: Oh, is that right? How'd that go over?

EP: Sometimes okay, sometimes not. You always had the battalion commander helping you out or correcting you, so.

TS: Is that right? [chuckles] So then you went from there to—you said—

EP: Fort Lewis.

TS: Fort Lewis, Washington.

EP: It was a unit move, so.

TS: So everybody moved.

EP: Those that met the criteria, I think whether it was time to rotate anyway, or we had some personnel already up there that were going to fill in the battalion spaces, so it was a combination of those going with those staying.

TS: So how are you feeling about the army about now?

EP: I kind of liked it. I mean, I did miss home, per se, I mean, family, yes, but it wasn't enough to get me homesick enough to say, oh, I don't like this.

TS: What was it that you—that drew you to it, I guess, what was it that you liked about the army?

EP: I think the structure, and you know, there was always some challenges and responsibility and yours and yours alone. You had your troops and you were responsible for them, too. But I just—I just thought that it suited me well, because I was okay being by myself at that point. I've always had friends that I could, you know, go out with and you know, talk to about things, but I just thought it was okay, and even through the other years as I went on, especially when I met Bruce and we got married, then it was together, so then we had each other to lean on when things got rough.

TS: Yeah, that's right. So—and that's where you met him, was up in Fort Lewis, right? And he was also an MP at that time?

EP: Yes. He was a detachment commander.

TS: Okay, so you both were.

EP: We both were commiserating.

TS: [laughs] So that's how you got to meet. So was there a difference, then, in the way that the unit, I guess, acted? The atmosphere, moving from what you were saying about San Francisco and then you moved up to Fort Lewis in Washington. Was there a difference?

EP: Well, I think there was a difference, because we trained a lot more, and we had more structure above us, and we could go out and support other units, because Fort Lewis had a division there.

TS: Well, for somebody who's not a military police officer and doesn't know anything about the army, what kind of things would you be responsible to do when you say you went out for support? What kind of things were you supporting?

EP: Well, as a, say, platoon leader, you would be responsible for convoy security, possibly, or area security. You'd be—whether you'd be protecting a command post with your troops or convoying ammunition or a VIP. You also had the prisoner of war type mission where if you did go to war and capture prisoners, we were responsible for securing and safeguarding them.

TS: I see. And so those are the kinds of things that you would be training for, as well, in these little niche areas of—for support. Okay. Well, was there any particular part of it that you enjoyed more than the other, or?

EP: I think the battlefield circulation control, where you had your soldiers patrolling the area of your responsibility, and that would entail convoy escorts and protecting the command post, whatever you were assigned to.

TS: Whatever perimeter it was, things like that.

EP: Right, right, and the tactical part of that always suited me better than the garrison.

TS: And what'd they do in the garrison?

EP: Well, if you were assigned to a garrison MP unit, you would be law enforcement almost specifically. Maybe a little bit of physical security, but you would be responsible for securing the post or the installation, so your troops or your job would be crime related to whether—soldiers on soldier or speeding on the post.

TS: I see.

EP: That kind of stuff. And that was not my preference.

TS: And that's—I guess, in my mind, that's what I see as military police, is—

EP: That's one of our missions.

TS: Okay, so yeah, it's interesting for you to talk about it more in detail, what the other kind of things were, that you did. What kind of stuff did your husband Bruce get to do?

EP: He did more corrections.

TS: Yeah.

EP: So he had—there was a confinement facility up at Fort Lewis that he was the detachment commander for, and later on when we went to Germany, he had the correctional facility there, he was the commander for that, so he dabbled a lot more in the confinement area.

TS: Oh, I see. Now, was it—so, at what point did you guys get married? Did you get married in Fort Lewis?

EP: Yes, we did.

TS: So, explain how, for military personnel, that—you know, when you're being sent to different assignments, how you get to go together, or if you always do. I don't know if you were able to.

EP: Well, the army married couples program was in place at that point, so as soon as we got married—and even before that, you could tell branch that hey, we're getting hitched or whatever—for example, I had orders for the advanced course, and—

TS: Advanced MP course?

EP: Correct. And so my husband had already gone, and I think that probably upped his proposal. [laughs] But—the timeline for that. [phone rings] So—but as soon as that happens and once that hits the system, then they put you together where, if one comes up on orders, they automatically consider what they can do for the other spouse, put them together or—

TS: Try to get slots that are in the same place.

EP: Correct. And you know, I guess that could be a good and bad—if, for example, I believe that it was easier for the military police branch to assign us both to the military police school, because there's more jobs there for captains than anyplace, and so that probably being the driving force of why we got stationed there in the first place. Hindsight—that's not necessarily the preferred place and job for company command, for somebody that wants to get promoted, because you really want to have the company commander of

some combat support mission company instead of at the MP school, you know.

TS: Oh, I see, okay. Looks better on your resume, sort of thing.

EP: In charge of drill sergeants, training base, you know, basic MP soldiers. Just like, okay, which one do you think would be more important?

TS: Well, it's interesting, because when I talk to a lot of the officers who've made it a career, they talk about this idea of having—checking it off, you know.

EP: Checking the block.

TS: Checking the block, can you explain what that means, a little bit?

EP: You're pretty much judged, I think, and evaluated by the types of jobs you do and how well you do it. There are some that say, doesn't matter what kind of job you get, it's how well you do it, but I don't think many believe that. I think you need to have the jobs that have more responsibility and oh, by the way, if you can get deployed, that's a plus. Which, if you get in a non-deployable position, yeah, you can do well, but—

TS: Probably not going to get promoted as quickly?

EP: If you put your—yeah—if you put your, you know, performance in with this other person that went, you know, and deployed in a combat situation and they did really well, I think you'd probably not be judged as well.

TS: There's some weight given to it.

EP: I think so. And I think if you talk to most folks—and that's kind of what people would say if they would counsel you on, you know, what do you need to do to get promoted.

TS: Well, there seem to be, too, there's a sort of training track, that you need to have certain types of training as well.

EP: And education.

TS: And education, right. Training, education, you continuously have to do that. And so who is like helping guide you to make the right decisions for these kind of things?

EP: Well, your branch officer should be able to do that, and part of the responsibility, but that's—I mean, there's one branch officer, most of the time, and hundreds of people that they're trying to—not mentor, but to say hey, you need to get this and I need to send you over here because you don't have a deploy—you don't have a combat assignment, a combat support assignment. But the other thing is, there was a push for mentors, you know. Every officer should have a mentor. Well, that's good to say, but they're few and

far between. So your mentor should be telling you, hey, when they sit down for your performance appraisal or your OER support form, they should be telling you, here's where you need to go, I recommend, you know, that you look at trying to get this job versus that job.

TS: How did it happen for you?

EP: I think it probably was hit and miss.

TS: So you didn't necessarily have a mentor that was—

EP: No, I don't think I did. I mean, I guess if a soldier says he doesn't, he probably doesn't. [laughter]

TS: Okay.

EP: Yeah.

TS: So that's an interesting part of that, you know, that career progression for—you have to be cognizant of what assignments you're getting and things like that. And you had said earlier that maybe you weren't so aware of that at the beginning, but at some point, you became aware of it.

EP: Right, I mean, there's some educational courses and discussions where they say, here's what you need to do to manage your own career. Fight for this, go for that. Balance this and that. So after a while, they'll have courses where, whether the branch folks come down every once in a while and talk to you about hey, here's what you need to have happen. You know, where do you want to go? And then, here's what I think you should do.

TS: So you start getting an idea of maybe where you should apply. Well, how was the culture for you as a woman in the military police and in the army, for you, at this period, you know, in the 1980s, early 1980s?

EP: I really didn't notice much of a difference anywhere except when I started getting in where deployments and then especially getting assigned to a division where there's few and far between as far as female officers or enlisted soldiers. And the environment there can be overwhelming if you let it.

TS: Like what kind of things would be different?

EP: Well, I want to say the grunt mentality. I find that there's some—there were some female officers or enlisted that went too far over to try to be like the guys, where that always was more uncomfortable for me. I mean, I'm not saying I wasn't physically fit and could do—I always kept my physical fitness up and maxed out on that, never failed on a run,

you know, did all that. But didn't go overboard.

TS: What would overboard be?

EP: Well, trying to compete physically with them or trying to, you know, go out and drink them under the table, whatever. I mean, it's just—just don't go there, I mean, because that's not—I mean, that's not part of the profession, I don't think. So—and there were times when things would happen and if you just kind of let it go and not let it be the issue, it'll correct itself, whether somebody says something out of context or whatever.

TS: You mean like a sexual innuendo or something?

EP: Yeah, I mean—right, I mean, it's not—nine times out of ten, it's not pinpointed at anybody, it got out there and it doesn't happen again. So I really—there were times where I'd sit there in a meeting, for example, in the division, and just look around and say "Geez, I'm the only gal in here," but it was like I was daydreaming. It wasn't because somebody said something about it, or somebody said "shit" or something, and went "Oops, I'm sorry," and looked at me. It's like, I don't care if you say "shit". [chuckles] You know? So—

TS: So in these meeting and stuff, they weren't like making you make coffee for them or anything like that.

EP: No.

TS: You never felt like you were being assigned roles or certain jobs because of your gender.

EP: No.

TS: [comment about puppies redacted] Were you ever—when you were in command, did you have any females that came to you for any things like sexual harassment or those kinds of issues that—

EP: To tell you the truth, I don't think I had a—as a commander, I don't think I had an investigation about that. I want to think if I—I may have had a drill sergeant that did something inappropriately, there may have been one or two, but then as soon as that happens, then the battalion takes over and really gets—

TS: Gets out of your hand?

EP: Right, right. So it doesn't disrupt the rest of the company, but.

TS: What kind of things would you experience, like what kind of disciplinary things would you have to take care of within your command?

EP: Normally, if it was of a sexual nature, it would go beyond me, because—and again, company command is, you know, it's company grade, and some of these offenses that we're talking about are field grade offenses, so they just bounce up to the battalion level.

TS: So what were the kinds of things at your level that you would—

EP: Not anything sexual in nature, but—

TS: No, I don't mean—I don't even mean—I mean like what kind of stuff happened?

EP: Yeah, you know, whether it's not reporting for duty, or you know, they did something stupid off post, that kind of stuff.

TS: Non-criminal actions that just came to your attention.

EP: Exactly.

TS: Fall asleep at the job, and.

EP: Yes.

TS: So how would you handle those kind of situations?

EP: I looked at my first sergeant and we decided together what we thought was appropriate and went from there. There was nothing—nothing that really was hot, you know, just whether it was pay or you know—nothing, no jail time, couldn't do that.

TS: Oh, you mean like reducing pay or something for a period of time?

EP: Yeah. And reducing in rank is above my pay grade.

TS: Above your pay grade.

EP: Yup, yup, so we could take some money, we could restrict 'em, that's about it.

TS: Yeah. Did those kinds of things help?

EP: I think it did, to a certain point, it showed the soldiers that we just didn't wipe things under the carpet, that, you know, some things happen, we had to take action for it.

TS: I had one woman tell me that when you mess with their pay, they paid attention.

EP: Some of them do.

TS: But not all of them.

EP: No, the repetitive ones, they just—

TS: It didn't matter what you did.

EP: That's right.

TS: And did you have—so those are kind of the disciplinary things, but did you have like real positive interactions that you enjoyed in this capacity, too?

EP: Well, yeah, I commanded the military police one station unit training, so there's just so many things that the unit did, and you know, whether it was marksmanship or some other award that the brigade had, yeah, it was always nice to have it, but we didn't dwell on, we got to get the best in the brigade, we have to do the best. But just day to day stuff was good enough.

TS: Yeah, getting along.

EP: That's right.

TS: So then where'd you move along to after your MP school?

EP: After our assignment there?

TS: Yes.

EP: I went off to my alternate specialty, systems automation.

TS: And what is that about?

EP: Computers, and that was awful. [laughs]

TS: Oh, it was awful?

EP: Yeah, it was not what I wanted. I didn't do computers.

TS: What kind of—this is like the '80s still, then, right?

EP: Yeah.

TS: Bit different, we had the WANG [computer] and the—

EP: Oh, it was awful, and AIDA[?]—I didn't own a computer, I mean, why did they pick me? It was a quota thing, they needed MPs to be automaters, because each branch had a quota, and I thought, oh my god, why didn't you pick somebody that had—and I could see the

basic qualifications, degree in automation—well, I don't have that. [unclear] I didn't have that. So it came down to a quota thing. I thought, oh my gosh. That was one of the hardest classes.

TS: Was it because you were an MP? Was it because maybe you were a female MP or something?

EP: Well, what I was told it was, the MPs needed to cough up so many for this functional area, you know, and you've got it.

TS: So what happened there? You went to Fort Gordon? Where's Fort Gordon at?

EP: In Georgia.

TS: In Georgia. So what did you get to do?

EP: Struggle through how to learn a computer. I mean, I really, from the basic, and so that was hard.

TS: What were you doing, DOS-based computing at that point, right?

EP: Yeah, we made a little program on selecting certain things. Whether it was ordering, requisitioning, and database stuff, and then—

TS: The very—

EP: Then we did a little bit of programming in AIDA[?] and some of it—this is hard.

TS: So how long did that last?

EP: Oh, just short of six months.

TS: So it was just a training for it?

EP: Yeah.
TS: Okay, so you went—what is Bruce doing at this?

EP: He was off to Bragg and Presidio Monterey for German language school.

TS: Oh, that's right.

EP: He had all the fun.

TS: [laughs]

EP: He didn't think so, but it was better than computers.

TS: That's right. He was probably laughing, though, I'm sure he enjoyed that. So then, you both ended up—did you both go to Stuttgart?

EP: We did.

TS: Okay, so that's your first overseas—did you both want to go? I'm sure, well—

EP: Well, we wanted to go to Germany.

TS: Right.

EP: And from there, we really—he was supposed to go to his specialty and I was supposed to go to mine, so we were both supposed to do our functional area. He kind of almost got to do his, and then the Gulf War started, and I started my job, I was chief of the logistics automated systems support office for the second COSCOM [corps support command]. And then when we got deployed, went over to Saudi Arabia, I still did my job, Bruce ended up doing—he was just like a courier and he worked nights in the G3 shop, the operations there, they were collecting night reports. So he really—he went over and did some sort of liaison related to his functional area, but other than that, that was it.

TS: So you both got deployed.

EP: Right.

TS: Now where was it that you went?

EP: We stayed in Saudi Arabia.

TS: Okay.

EP: So—

TS: Where in Saudi Arabia?

EP: In the basic camps, I forget, was it Al-Kusama[?] or—somewhere.

TS: Was it Nuriyad[?] or? You don't have to remember it.

EP: I don't, but—we got the little thing here somewhere.

TS: Oh, yeah, you've got maps on there too, I see.

EP: Yeah, maps and everything.

TS: Okay, well, we'll have to go through some of those and figure out where you were at.

EP: Yeah, little camp, base, I forget the name of the base camp.

TS: Did you expect to be deployed when the Gulf War broke out? I mean, it happened kind of quickly, summer of '91, right?

EP: It wasn't a big surprise that we went, 7th Corps went, at all, because—

TS: Of the mission.

EP: Most of—almost all the divisions out of Europe went anyway. So it wasn't a surprise at all. As far as that, that was—I regret that I didn't go and deploy as a military police officer.

TS: How did—what did you deploy as?

EP: The chief LASSO [Logistics Automation System Support Office] in a logistics unit. I mean, I know logistics is important, but it just wasn't my idea of supporting the mission. [laughs] Sitting in the base camp, and—

TS: So what would you rather have been doing?

EP: I would have rather been in the military police units doing battlefield circulation control, area security, anything else. Getting out, moving, being with other MPs.

TS: Well, of course, they didn't want women so much in those areas.

EP: Well, they never pulled any out, the women deployed with their units.

TS: So they didn't pull them out, you just happened to be assigned to this—

EP: I just happened to be assigned in my functional area when the boom went up, so. [snaps fingers]

TS: [laughs] What was it like over there?

EP: Sandy. Hot, most of the time. Just slept, worked, slept, worked, slept, ate.

TS: No time down?

EP: No.

TS: Except for when you were eating.

EP: Yup, and even then I'd rather eat an MRE [Meal Ready to Eat] than go—because it took about a klick [kilometer] and a half to get to the mess hall, and by the time you got there, it was cold, so it wasn't worth the trip. Plus you had to wear your rucksack and your NBC [Nuclear, Biological, Chemical protective] gear, and it was like, by the time you got there, it was like, geez, what'd I come for? [laughter] Then you got lost getting back, because it was dark.

TS: Oh, really?

EP: Nothing was familiar, nothing, because—flat.

TS: Did you just walk?

EP: Yes.
TS: Were you going by yourself or with other people?

EP: Well, sometimes you'd go by yourself and sometimes you'd go with two or three, but everything looked the same, base camp's lights looked the same and—

TS: Where'd you end up?

EP: Sometimes in the next base camp and I had to go find the way back. Now see, I would rather eat something cold in my tent than go through that again.

TS: So was that what you did after a while?

EP: Well, if I could, I did.

TS: What do you mean by if you could, did you—

EP: Well, sometimes I had MREs and sometimes they didn't.

TS: Oh, I see, so then you'd have to go get something.

EP: Yeah, get something to eat, so.

TS: Huh. Now how long were you—when did you get over there?
EP: I went over there in November.

TS: And how long were you there?

EP: It was close to six months.

TS: Okay. So after—so it would have been after the hostilities broke out, I guess.

EP: Yes, right, right. I think that was what, Februaryish. And then we didn't get out of there until May, I think.

TS: Right, so [unclear] done in March, and then—so what did you do after the end of the—

EP: Of the hostilities?

TS: Yeah.

EP: There was still a lot of equipment to be accounted for.

TS: Oh, that's right, you're logistics.

EP: And requisitions, yeah, you still needed to process those, and—

TS: Did you get to see Bruce at all while you were over there?

EP: Only during the dine[?] facility meets.

TS: Yeah.

EP: And very rarely did I get to his area, because he had a separate little camp and we had ours.

TS: What's a dine facility meet? Do you just mean when you ate?

EP: When we ate at the mess hall.

TS: So you kind of scheduled it so maybe you could meet a few times.

EP: Right, right, yeah.

TS: But you'd have to meet at the same mess hall, because there wasn't just one.

EP: That's right, that's right.

TS: That's interesting. So what did you bring back from that experience, when you look back on it?

EP: I won't say not a whole lot. I mean, the experience, I guess, is valuable, I just did not enjoy—

TS: The type of role that you were playing?

EP: That role, yeah, if you want to call it a role. The mission that we had, it just didn't hit me.

TS: No?

EP: No. But I guess all jobs are important, but it would have been, to me, a lot more satisfying deploying as a military police officer.

TS: This is one of the—it was in 1989, Panama, when women did combat type things, Linda Bray and some of the other women. But the Gulf War was really the first time that it was really visible in the public that women were involved in combat related roles, if not combat. Did you get any sense of that while you were in?

EP: No, I mean, I heard about the Panama thing, and good, you know, that was a good thing that happened, I guess. But [dog howling] [recording paused]

TS: Okay, thanks for that little interruption. [laughs] But—so, I was just thinking that when you first went in, when you were commissioned in '81, you're actually—they actually had—the government kind of put a freeze on what they wanted to do with women and how they were going to fit into the military. And then ten years later, you've been in for ten years now and then you're deployed over to Saudi Arabia. Did you, just in your personal experience, I don't mean it has to have been negative or anything, but did you see anything change in the army as far as treatment, you know, of women, or—

EP: The opportunities?

TS: The opportunities.

EP: Yeah, I did. Not so much before, but for example, after coming back to Fort Bragg, there were instances where some of the female officers there, for example, I think she was one grade below me, one year group, but she was one of the military police platoon leaders that kicked down doors in Iraq during the Gulf War and, you know, didn't care whether she was female or male. But the environment was such, her commander allowed that, which was great, I mean, there were enough commanders that didn't care whether you were male or female, you know, you were in charge and that's what you did. He had no intention of pulling anybody out just because we're going, you know, to war. Which was very interesting.

TS: So she actually went into Iraq.

EP: Yeah, yeah.

TS: Were there many women that went into Iraq during that period?

EP: I don't know the numbers or whatever, but she shared that with me and I heard about it when I went to the—the sixteenth MP brigade in Fort Bragg.

TS: So do you think that opened up some eyes of people who maybe didn't—

EP: Well, yeah, and I think it showed whether her subordinates or peers or whatever, that you know, it's nothing out of the ordinary, you know.

TS: Here's a soldier, and this is their job.

EP: And this is their job and this is what they do.

TS: So instead of saying, here's a female soldier.

EP: Right, right, yeah.

TS: Do you think that that was some of the mentality that maybe needed to be changed a little? In some units, like you say, depending on the commander, right?

EP: Right, yup.

TS: On how they were perceiving what—

EP: Exactly, right.

TS: What women could and couldn't do.

EP: Right. I mean, there really wasn't an issue and—like going to Haiti, for example. There were first in soldiers that were part of the division commander's security platoons that did that, and they didn't expect any—and we have had some females in the division MP platoon, which before, that was a no-no, and they just allowed that, and of course, it came up at a point where, okay, you have different platoons in the MP company supporting the division. You can put the females in the platoons that do jobs that may not get them in direct combat or whatever, but then that would be foolish, because the division gets deployed forward anyway, I mean—so even the one squad or such that protected the CP of the division commander had a female on there, and nobody mentioned, oh, let's pull her out. No, no, she's part of that, so there was nothing said after that.

TS: Well, why don't you talk about going to Haiti? We can jump ahead to that. Was that—

EP: That was interesting. It was—I was part of the long range planning for the brigade, the MP brigade, for that operation, and so I was involved in the plans, you know, the forced-in plan versus the not so forced-in plan, and so when we rehearsed the airload for that, it was—I mean, it was good experience for me.

TS: What kind of preparation time did you have for that planning? I mean, were you—because there's a turmoil going on in Haiti, it wasn't until that that you were—

EP: Yeah, there was enough. I mean, I don't know if it was a month or two months or

whatever, but it was adequate to go through all the different scenarios as far as, you know, I'm concerned, as the MP planner there.

TS: So that—what year was that around? I know it was the '90s, because President Clinton.

EP: Ninety-two to '93?

TS: So it was early—and so that was kind of an interesting deployment, right, because it was like deployed and then pulled back, but some people did go.

EP: Yeah, from my understanding, there were airplanes in the air, and then—President Carter—

TS: Yeah, got them to leave, right. But what was your role in this? Mission, what was your mission, I'll say mission now. [chuckles]

EP: Well, my job was to make the military police plan support for the operation, forced entry versus the, you know, come in and assist. And so I would go into the 18th airborne course planning cell and do the MP support piece to that, and then when we deployed, I was in the headquarters, doing the same thing. Planning, being the liaison between the staff at the corps level plans down to our brigade commander and operations officer for the brigade.

TS: So when you did deploy, where were you at, Port au Prince, or?

EP: We were in the—we were in Port au Prince but we were in a—kind of like a secured—I forget the name of it.

TS: Like secure off-site area, sort of.

EP: Yeah, it was an old factory of sorts that we just came and occupied, and there was already a fence around it. That's where the corps headquarters was, and our brigade, which I went home to every night [laughs] was in another grouped set of buildings.

TS: What was it like over there?

EP: Condition-wise, it wasn't really bad. I mean, it was—from what I'm hearing, it was nowhere near the austere conditions that Bosnia had.

TS: Oh, really?

EP: And so—
TS: Conditions for the troops, or?

EP: For the troops, the living conditions and the—of course, the environment in Haiti, there

really—there really wasn't any opposition, per se, so—not that we didn't put any security up, we did, but—

TS: People weren't really shooting back at you.

EP: No, no. And it would have been really a disaster if we would have went in forcefully. There just would have been—it was—would have been an obliteration of everybody.

TS: Because they really didn't have any kind of—or, resistance, no organized resistance planned, something like that.

EP: Right, right. We just would have blown up a lot of things that we probably would have repaired afterwards.

TS: [laughs] And did you get to see the Haitian people at all, did you have any contact with them, or mostly—

EP: A little bit, we'd go out, but if you're stuck in a division or a brigade or a corps headquarters, you don't go out very often.

TS: No?

EP: I mean, you do your little meetings and briefings, and every once in a while you get pulled out one time a day to see the scenery or go out and then come back.

TS: Little tour?

EP: Yeah, yeah.

TS: Where you don't see really—the real thing anyhow, right?

EP: Right, right, yeah.

TS: What was your rank at this point, when you—

EP: Major.

TS: You're a major, okay. And, so, is there anything else about the Haitian deployment that you wanted to add?

EP: No, I mean, like I say, we—I don't think anything happened that was a disaster, whatever, I mean, we did the mission, then we came back, that was good.

TS: It was stabilized, right?

EP: Yeah.

TS: So then, we jumped ahead a few years there. So let's go back to when you were in Germany, you were deployed to the Gulf War.

EP: Right.

TS: And then when you got done with that deployment, did you go back to Stuttgart?

EP: Well, we went back to Stuttgart just to finish the inactivation of the unit. So it was a lot of dead time, people—a lot of the personnel knew where they were going, they left, and then some stayed a little bit longer and—so there really wasn't a mission other than, you know, just to hang out and try to close up some unit activities.

TS: Well, I'm going to take you off the military job for a minute. When you were in Germany, did you [audio file 1 ends, beginning of audio file 2, overlap audio redacted], ever do anything for your off time?

EP: When we were there, we really got into doing their volksmarches [European non-competitive walking sport].

TS: Can you explain what that is?

EP: It's a walk, and they normally happen in the weekends, and you go walking through the countryside, and then after you have a little celebration with the Germans, and they just have fun. And they walk and get exercise and—play music—

TS: So you'd pick out the places you want to go walk?

EP: Right, there's a list of volksmarches and we'd just say "Oh, we haven't been there, we haven't been there, so."

TS: What did you end up collecting for the little prize you get at the end?

EP: Well, we really—we didn't go into the pin thing.

TS: No?

EP: Once in a while, they'll have a larger activity associated with their volksmarch, and we may buy, you know, a piece of pottery or a mug or something, but other than that, it was just going—

TS: For the activity?

EP: Yes.

TS: Did you get out in the German culture at all?

EP: And that's kind of how we did that, when we went out, and then we also visited as many castles around as we knew about, so.

TS: Did a lot of touring and things like that?

EP: Yeah, we only did a couple of the unit tours, per se, but we liked to just get out on a day trip and go out, and there were wine fests and other celebrations. The local onion—you know, the Stuttgart area had a onion fest, and they just had fests for everything, so.

TS: I hadn't heard of the onion fest.

EP: Yeah, [das vilen?], [vilenfest?]. [possibly Zwiebelfest]

TS: I went to—I like that area around Stuttgart, and I was talking to Bruce yesterday about—I love Trier and [Burncastle?] and, so, they have all the little—cute little castles along the river and things, that you go—

EP: That's right.

TS: Now, what other things—you're in the military, and you're doing your job, we're pretty much sticking to your job, but what other kind of things would you say about the military culture, for you as a—how—what kind of things could you do, being connected to the military? And you're overseas.

EP: Well, we didn't have children, so we didn't go through that part of the support, but just having your facilities enclosed and not have to worry about dealing with the German economy all the time, it's good to go out and purchase things on your own, but to come back to, you know, the commissary and the PX and get the gas there, it made it a lot more comfortable to live there. And for us, we were able to be kind of out a little bit in the economy, more so than some other folks.

TS: So were you living off of post?

EP: Well, we did the first tour. And the second one, there were—there was housing available for us, so we stayed in there, but you know, it was nice to get out, but then it was nice to come back to home base, not have to worry about, you know, the German economy, per se.

TS: Did you have—did you make any, like, German friends or anything like that?

EP: We didn't—we didn't do that, and I don't know why. We went out and ate and stuff, but we just never had the opportunity to do that, I don't know whether it was between

deployments or—

TS: That's what I was going to say—

EP: Yeah, that's a lame excuse maybe, but we just didn't get there, although we did go out and enjoy the German countryside and the people and such, we just didn't have like a German neighbor that we—

TS: Well, you're here during a really historical time, too, I mean, because the [Berlin] Wall's come down, it's coming down, you're there—I don't know exactly—

EP: First tour.

TS: Yeah, it would have been the first tour, how—did you get any sense of that, when you were over there?

EP: Where we were at, not so much, I mean, I knew it was historical—

TS: Yeah, you were more on the western side, right.

EP: And we were, you know, outside of Stuttgart, but we didn't see the German reaction, and it wasn't long after that when Bruce, you know, left early to Saudi Arabia to make some initial coordination there. So we really didn't see the immediate reaction from the locals.

TS: Oh yeah, so you would have been deployed, and then—

EP: Right, right.

TS: And then when you came back, how much longer were you there when you came back after your deployment?

EP: Not so long in Stuttgart, but then we went to Heidelberg and finished up our tour there, so.

TS: Oh, right. How was that different from Stuttgart?

EP: Well, it was the major headquarters for Europe, so it was a lot more established, and Heidelberg is such a, you know, a fun city anyway, and it's close to the Weinstraße, so we got to know Weinstraße really well.

TS: And what's that?

EP: The wine road, that got all the vineyards lined up, and we grew to like that.

TS: Is this on the Rhine?

EP: [phone rings] The Neckar [River].
TS: Oh, the Necker.

EP: Yep, all that.

TS: So you did a lot of those kinds of things when you went up to Heidelberg, then. Was being in a city—did it offer you different opportunities from, you know, Stuttgart, a more rural area?

EP: Not all that much, but the jobs changed, which was, to me, both good for us. We both got into MP jobs, and that helped. We felt a little bit more comfortable. [laughs]

TS: So what kind of jobs did you have—

EP: Even though [hen?] quarters. Well, I got into the officer of the provost marshal—[answering machine message starts]

TS: Here, we'll pause it. [recording paused] Okay, we're back, we just had a little break there. So you got to do an MP job in Heidelberg.

EP: Right, yeah.

TS: We were talking about what kind—you were the executive officer for the—

EP: Officer of the provost marshal.

TS: What kind of responsibilities did you have there?

EP: It was coordination of all the other staffs in the office of the provost marshal, for the actual provost marshal and the deputy. So I kind of coordinated the actions that would go in for approval, disapproval, and kind of keep house there.

TS: What kind of things would they do?

EP: We would—for example, we would get tasks to answer issues, military police issues, or plans, and when a staff element in the office of the provost marshal wanted that plan to come through to the provost marshal for a look and whatever, I'd make sure it was organized properly and it was done correctly before it got in there, so I was kind of coordinating, you know, with the—more than often, they were senior to me, but I'd have to say "Okay, correct this."

TS: Right, you're in that middle—

EP: Yes, negotiator, yes.

TS: There you go. How did you like that job?

EP: I liked it, I liked it.

TS: Yeah. What was it that you liked about it?

EP: There was always something new, something different.

TS: And you're kind of right at the headquarters, too, so you're like in the mix of everything that's going on, too, right?

EP: That's right.

TS: Now, were they—I don't remember at what point they were trying to make some of the—close some of the bases over there. Was that happening yet?

EP: It probably was, and that's where our plans department would get involved in—we had a planning cell that would take care of those types of actions. [comments regarding dog redacted]

TS: So we have—is there anything else that you're doing with your social life besides traveling? You guys—

EP: Other than military social functions, which there are more when you're in a headquarters area.

TS: Like what kind of things?

EP: You'd have the military police ball every year, and then you'd have a [USR?] ball every year that you'd get involved in, so those kinds of social parties, and—

TS: How'd you like those?

EP: I'd rather not have them, but I mean, I didn't have an option. [laughter]

TS: You have to go and shake hands and—

EP: You have to plan and you have to be dressed properly.

TS: Now, with you and Bruce being in the same field, you couldn't like have a direct line of command over each other at all, right? Isn't that—does it work that way, or what was that rule in the—

EP: We were in the same headquarters, but there was always a slight difference—I mean, we didn't have the same rater, senior rater, and I think that was the key. We may have had—we can and a lot of times had the same senior rater, but it's the rater, senior rater

combination that you shouldn't—

TS: Not, like, the direct line.
EP: Correct, right.

TS: I see, okay. Was there anything else that you enjoyed about your tour in Germany that you'd like to talk about?

EP: No, other than it was a great place to be stationed, I just liked Germany, just liked the structure and liked the way they did business. You know, we didn't have to live economy-wise on it, but we just liked how they did their weekends and everything was—

TS: How did they do their weekends?

EP: Well, you know, they had the quiet time and on Sundays, not everything was open, and I kind of liked that. I mean, they just reserved a day where, you know, things were closed. Now, I think they're getting more like we are, where everything's open all the time, but you could really tell, they had their quiet time and they had—Sundays were reserved for, you know, family and certain other activities.

TS: I remember, in the—if you went into a restaurant, you pretty much were left alone, that you could just have your meal and if you needed something, you pretty much had to call someone over, they weren't constantly coming over.

EP: Correct, yeah. And there wasn't an expectation that they would want you to get off that table to have somebody else sit down, it was like, if you were the only ones that night at that table, that was okay. Not like here, where they've got to, you know, pay and go.

TS: Move you along. Yeah, yeah, that's true. That's a little difference, I think. And then you had said you got on-base housing when you were in Heidelberg?

EP: Correct.

TS: And how—what was the housing like for you? So, were you both majors at this time, or?

EP: Yes, and we got into that row of—

TS: The flags and the brick houses?

EP: Right, one to three stories. Now, our second time we went over there, we got a single—well, it was a duplex, but there were better—it was a better housing. Of course, as you got higher in rank, that's kind of how it was, so. We felt pretty good about the housing, I mean, I didn't think they were bad at all.

TS: Yeah, were they pretty nice? I mean, I have no idea what they were like.

EP: They were okay, they were fine.

TS: Yeah.
EP: I thought they suited a condition.

TS: So did you have a yard or anything like that?

EP: We did our second time. The first time, it was community, because we were three stories high, but the second set of quarters and our last one, we did have a little backyard, [unclear] yard, have to maintain.

TS: Well, I'm thinking, okay, third one, okay, we're not back there yet. [laughs] I forgot you went back another time, okay. So now—so then you—after your second tour, then, in Heidelberg, where did you end up?

EP: Well, initially, when I went over, I signed for quarters in Manheim, and then I went down to Bosnia, and then Bruce came and set up house there. When we came back, that same tour, we moved to Bad Kreuznach, because I moved jobs and then Bruce moved to a new job. So we had two different housing situations the last tour.

TS: Okay.

EP: Because we moved and changed jobs.

TS: So how did you end up in Bosnia?

EP: Job-related, I mean, I knew when I got selected to be the operations S3 officer for the 18th MP brigade, they were already in Bosnia. They got there early that year and I came in early June, I believe.

TS: Was that part of the NATO force?

EP: Correct.

TS: Okay, so that was a peacekeeping mission, I guess?

EP: At that point, they were about to change the name, which indicated that it was more of a peacekeeping versus entry, you know, establish, you know, peace—instead of peacekeeping.

TS: That's right, that came first, didn't it? [laughs]

EP: Yeah, yeah, yeah.

TS: That's right. So you were there as part of the peacekeeping force, then. What kind of jobs did you do in Bosnia? What was the country like then?

EP: Well, the S3 normally stayed in their operations area, and we would just manage the missions that the brigade was handed down, and each battalion—we had three battalions that were deployed in—throughout Bosnia, and had their area of operation to support part—portion of the division.

TS: What kind of missions did they have?

EP: Again, it was kind of like area security, escort, and the like, so—and when the elections, the local elections came up, we did the security of the election booths and all that, so we would do a lot of rehearsing.

TS: Did that go pretty smoothly, or were there any problems with that?

EP: There was problems here and there. You know, not so, you know, there was an all out fight or anything, there was just some things that we had to monitor as far as Serbs versus the Muslims, trying to keep that peace going. So I kept mainly—once in a while, a battalion S3 would invite me out to their base camp, and I'd be able to go for a day or so and see—and go with their missions and go look at their terrain, where their operations are at, but I would mainly stay in the brigade operations area.

TS: Did you ever feel—in any of these places, whether you were in—when you were in Saudi Arabia or in Haiti or in Bosnia, did you ever feel like you were in any physical danger, ever? Or could be placed in any physical danger?

EP: Not in Haiti. In Bosnia there was maybe a little uneasy feeling, but there wasn't any specific situation that I came up in that I thought "Oh my," you know, "I may get killed." No.

TS: Just a tension because of—

EP: Yeah, yeah. The second time I went down to Bosnia with the division, one of my jobs as a provost marshal for the division was to coordinate with the local police chiefs. And so sometimes when I'd visit the Serb guy, he was notorious for—you know, being there when things got blown up and all this, so I was always very calm or secure when I'd go up and meet this guy, so.

TS: How did he treat you?

EP: I had no inclination other than I think he, because I was a woman, he would kind of—just kind of maybe not say things as rough as he normally would. So, but I mean, that was just me, I wouldn't accuse him of that, per se. But never thought I'd get blown up or whatever.

TS: Never felt threatened by him.

EP: No, no.

TS: But just the environment of having the tension between the different sides.

EP: Right. I know if I was out more, it's like "I never get out!" [laughter] You know, I'm sure there were situations where you would feel, hey, this doesn't feel all that great, you know.

TS: Well, what did you think, then, about—this time—well, at what point did you feel like "You know, I think I'm going to stay in the army"?

EP: Oh, that happened, I'd say, midway. Ten to twelve, you know, there was this "You can get out in ten years and you can get this package," and I thought—and then what? So, once I made that determination—

TS: What kind of package were you offered?

EP: I can't remember what they were offering captains with eight years or so experience, they had some sort of lump sum.

TS: Was that the Gramm-Rudman period of time? [refers to the Gramm-Rudman-Hollings Balanced Budget and Emergency Deficit Control Act of 1985]

EP: I'm not quite sure.

TS: They had like an early—reduction of the forces.

EP: But it was almost kind of like a captain riff, is what it was—

TS: Oh, because they were heavy in the captains?

EP: Yup.

TS: So if you got out voluntarily, that reduced the forces. Okay. And you thought, well, no. What made you want to stay in?

EP: I just—I thought I had too much invested already, and it wasn't like "Yeah, I want to get out, I want to go back to school," or " I want to do this," you know, I was looking and saying "Well, I can do a career doing this."

TS: What was it that drew you to doing the career?

EP: Momentum?

TS: Momentum? [laughs]

EP: Yeah, I just think momentum. Not that I was way up in the, you know, in the below the zone selections or anything, but I thought "Yeah, I'm doing this okay."

TS: I see, okay. So you're getting, like, interesting jobs.

EP: Interesting, and I'm deploying, and you know, at that point I had the functional area thing gone, and so now it's—

TS: Was the functional area thing is the—

EP: Systems. Computer thing.

TS: Oh, the—automation school.

EP: Yeah, yeah.

TS: You got rid of that at some point, huh?

EP: Well, I didn't have to dabble in that anymore, so it was off for the—

TS: So all the other kind of side things you were doing were interesting as well.

EP: Yes.

TS: What did you feel about the type of—you know, you talked about your OERs, officer—

EP: Right. Evaluation Reports.

TS: Evaluation report. How did you feel that you were treated on those reports by your superiors?

EP: For the most part, I was very—you know, I was pleased. There were some that, the words would be really nice, but then, you know, we were always concerned about the senior rater profile up there.

TS: What's that?

EP: It's a—it's a ranking of the senior rater's evaluation of, for example, if I'm a major, all the majors up there, how did he rate all the majors and where do I fit in? If you're top blocked, that's what you want. But then you overlay the senior rater profile in the blocks—the blocks should, ideally, be like a diamond, where very few are top blocked, because there's only a few—I mean, the rater should say "Hey, these are my top ten majors that I've rated in their jobs, whatever they did, this is how I rate them." And then,

of course, it goes where most—the majority should be right in the middle, and then you should get down to where, you know, you have the ten percent that should be doing something else.

TS: You would like them to get out, okay.

EP: But you can see where there's philosophies of senior raters and they try to change them and, you know, they're very possessive of them. There're some that are inverted, where they put the majority of their officers top block, and you know, they say "Oh, one of the top captains I've ever rated." Well, yeah, the majority are up there. So that doesn't tell the promotion board much.

TS: Right.

EP: Other than, this senior rater's profile is very upside-down, it's inflated.

TS: How—I mean, how did you get those kinds of ratings? Was it—I mean, it seems like it's a little subjective.

EP: Well, for the senior rater, you know, I'm sure they get told and they know enough where—how to rate officers, whether they're engineer officers or MP officers or whatever, if they're doing a good job you should know.

TS: Right. Do they know you personally, the ones who are rating you?

EP: They should.

TS: Do they normally?

EP: I'm sure—well, everyone I know, you would think knows your name. [laughs] And you know, that's another thing, if you've got a senior rater that—there's, you know, rates forty, fifty of your peers, then, you know, you've got to say "Oh, geez, how can I—how can I single myself out, positively?"

TS: Right, you want to stand out. Right.

EP: Without getting a, you know, having a problem. So it's a two-edged sword that way, but.

TS: So that's why you go to the USAR[?] balls and—

EP: Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah, brown-nose and the whole thing, right, yeah.

TS: [chuckles]

EP: And the—it's kind of unfortunate, sometimes, like say your most important jobs, okay,

company command, whatever. And if you have a senior rater that has an upside-down profile, you just lost your chance in one of the most important jobs to shine with a senior rater, for example, say, in a division, where, okay, there are only onesies, twosies up there, and you happen to be one of them, that shows the promotion board in a much—you know, it shows the officer in a much better position than the one that's in with a bunch of other ones in the top.

TS: Right, you really stand out then. Instead of just being part of the mix. That—it's always kind of fascinating to me, the different ways that they do ratings, you know. Because I was enlisted, and so it's like, you wanted to get the highest rank you could possibly get on that sheet.

EP: That's right, that's right. How many points.

TS: [laughs] Yeah, you want to get all the—whatever the highest score was, but you needed to get it—set it by, you know, somebody at a high rank.

EP: That's right, that's right.

TS: That's all I remember about it, but it seemed it was a little bit more political for the officers, to me. I mean, I don't know if it was, it just—that was my perception of it. I don't know. I think all kinds of ratings have that subjectivity to it. [possible recording error?] So you had—so you went back for the third time, and where were you stationed at, again, in Germany?

EP: Well, and I say the third time. We got stationed, we deployed, then we got stationed again in a different place, and then we came back for another regular tour.

TS: I see.

EP: So there was only two basic tours, but the first one got broken up.

TS: Split up, right, because you moved Stuttgart to—

EP: Correct, yeah. But the last one was—the last tour involved me going to Bosnia first, and then coming back to Mannheim, finishing my S3 operations, and then going to the division to be the provost marshal.

TS: And where was that?

EP: In Bad Kreuznach.

TS: That's right, okay. And how was that?

EP: I mean, it was great. I liked it.

TS: What'd you like about it?

EP: Well, I guess a little prestigious, being in a division as the provost—the, you know, the senior military police officer.

TS: So what'd you get to do in that position?

EP: A lot of what I'd done before at a lower level. It's organizing the military police support that the division needs, at any time, whether it's deployment or at an exercise or in the community. The division has a division MP company, or used to have it. I think they've changed the structure since I've been retired, but so I was—I had the division MP company, but if I needed more assets, then I would go to the corps MP brigade and say "Can I have more troops, because we're doing this mission," or whatever. So you kind of fight for those, and as many as you can get. So that was—and you know, any misbehavior by any of the MPs, I was in division commander's office or the chief of staff's office, or the deputy, and just kind of trying to figure out what happened and what we should do about it.

TS: Right. Did that come up very often?

EP: It came up more than what I would have liked in that tour, but you know, that's the way you get to know your superiors and how they deal with those kinds of issues, whether they're MPs doing stupid things, or, you know, just accidents that happen.

TS: Well, is there anything that stands out, was there any incident that you remember that was like "Oh my gosh, I'll never forget this,"?

EP: Well, not getting specifically, but when the company commander gets in trouble, then it's like, oh.

TS: Oh yeah? That's a lot of [unclear] around.

EP: "All right, colonel, why can't you control your captain? You only have one!"
"I don't know!"

TS: That kind of stuff.

EP: Well, anyway. But it was fun.

TS: It was a good tour. And so you and Bruce are still doing your traveling around Germany?

EP: Yeah, he was—he had like a second home during the week, and he'd come back to Bad Kreuznach during the weekend, because he was in a job far enough away where he didn't want to drive that far every day, so.

TS: How'd you guys handle that, okay?

EP: Yeah, it was fine, it was fine.

TS: And did you have a sense of how long you expected to stay in the service at this point?

EP: Oh, yeah. Well, before we went to [Fort] Leavenworth, [Kansas] which was our last assignment, we kind of figured that that would be our retirement place.

TS: Why?
EP: Just because we were going on twenty years.

TS: Oh, okay, both of you were about the same time?

EP: Yeah, and—for Bruce, I think he had enough of it, he wanted to do something else, whether teaching or whatever. And I thought that way too, because my next step was battalion command, and I made the alternate list for that, the year before. But then I thought to myself, you know, even if I do get battalion command, I said, I'm not all that driven, necessarily, to do that. Now if it was just deploying a battalion or whatever, it would be something, but I think it's dealing with the day to day that I just thought, "Do I even want to do that?"

TS: And had you made like colonel by now?

EP: Yeah.

TS: So it wasn't going to get you to the next—[unclear]

EP: Well, a successful battalion command will definitely get you to colonel.

TS: To colonel.

EP: Not saying I wouldn't have made it anyway, there's plenty of them that don't have battalion command that get to colonel, I think I would have.

TS: How many more years would you have had to stay in?

EP: But yeah, I would have had to stay in, you know—and even if I did get colonel, then you've got to stay another couple years, so I'm thinking three more years, I said "No." Because if Bruce is going out, I'm going out, so.

TS: Oh, really?

EP: We've done this together, we're going to do it together. And I had no regrets, really.

I mean, some people said "Do you miss it, do you miss it?"
And I said "I miss some of the people, but other than that,"

TS: Did you have any kind of transitional culture shock from going from the military to civilian world?

EP: Not really, other than, you know, after two, three years I said "Shouldn't we be moving now?" [laughter] "Oh, that's right, we own this place." And that'll go on ten years next year.

TS: Oh, here, really?

EP: Yeah. I was like "Shouldn't we be moving?"

TS: Is that the longest you've been in one place for a while?

EP: Yes. Well, yeah. Yes. We've never stayed longer than four years, I don't think, in the military, anywhere. And then shorter than that. So it was like—and that was the only itch, it was like, geez, we've been here a long time. But, you know, good thing we don't have to move.

TS: Well, when you got out, what month was it that—did you and Bruce retire around the same time, or?

EP: We retired on the same day. We had different transition leaves—

TS: Okay. What day was it?

EP: —A little bit. I'd moved—I signed out about the middle of June, or—yeah, and Bruce maybe a week or two later, so even though we were on transitional leave, our retirement date wasn't until 31 August. We just had that much leave built up that we could say—

TS: Really. August 31st of 2001.

EP: Yeah.
TS: And then—

EP: Nine days later, was the Twin Towers.

TS: So what'd you think about that, when that happened?

EP: Well, we just said "I hope we don't get recalled." And then we thought of our friends that put their papers in and got yanked.

TS: Right.

EP: So it was—

TS: Did you have any sense of—I mean, you're always worrying about not being deployed, did you have any sense of, like, guilt of not being involved in it?

EP: Well, it's not guilt, but its concern.

TS: Well, not guilt.

EP: It was concern, when all the units started deploying and redeploying and redeploying, I said "Oh my gosh," I mean, even deploying as we did is bad enough, but for them to just go through again and again and again, that, I mean, I don't know how they do it. And I don't know how we would have done it, if we would have stayed.

TS: Yeah.

EP: You know, what jobs would we have had, and how many times would we have had to have been down there.

TS: Very likely you would be, though, with the jobs you had, right?

EP: Well, I just don't know where we would have went after Leavenworth, because it was only a year, so we probably would have been there at least another year, unless they did an individual—you know, pick you out, go.

TS: They didn't deploy out of Fort Leavenworth? That wasn't one of the—

EP: Leavenworth isn't a deployment base, it's a school, so—but not saying they couldn't pluck you out and say "We need an MP colonel to go,"

TS: In this slot with this division, get on the plane?

EP: Yeah, yeah, yeah, exactly.

TS: So, okay, your timing was very interesting, then, so just the luck of the draw.

EP: But I'll tell you, I don't know how they're doing it, because it's just insane to keep going back down there.

TS: Well, do you think about that, us being involved in a couple different wars right now?

EP: Well, this one concerns me, because of the length of it.

TS: Which one is that.

EP: Well, the one we're in now, that switched from Iraq to Afghanistan. And to me, it's not the same country, but it's the same, it's just another episode.

TS: You mean like a continuation of Iraq, you think?

EP: Continuation, right, right?

TS: How do you—what do you mean by that?

EP: Well, I just mean, as far as a soldier being deployed, it's a continuation. I mean, whether you deploy to Iraq or Afghanistan—

TS: I see.

EP: —It all stems from the Twin Towers, I mean, we're still trying to find Al Qaeda and, you know, Osama Bin Laden, we're still trying to do that. And then go from Iraq to Afghanistan, to me, it's the same continuation of the—

TS: So do you think there's an end to it?

EP: I'm hoping so, but in those kinds of—in our conflicts these days, there's no clean end to any of it.

TS: Even in Bosnia, you know, you still have a little—

EP: Well, that—and, geez, I mean, it's like—I won't say you're embarrassed to say you were in down in there, because again, I mean, soldiers—soldiers aren't getting killed by direct fire or IEDs, they weren't—they just didn't. They have been very, very isolated, even in the Gulf War, it was an isolation. Here, it's different, I mean—

TS: It's a shooting war, sort of.

EP: Yeah, yeah. And a long one.

TS: Yup. Well, what did you do after you got out of the army?

EP: Ah, just settled in here.
TS: Yeah?

EP: Had—grew to five horses and a dog and cats. [laughs]

TS: I've seen a lot of the dog, I haven't seen the cats yet.

EP: Yeah, there's two cats, hiding.

TS: And I saw your horses, they're beautiful out there.

EP: But yeah, I've got the luxury—and Bruce does too, but he wants to work, so—of being here, and we have a little apartment that we rent out, so we get a little bit of income there, but both our pensions and his teaching job money, I mean, we do real well with that.

TS: Yeah. So with the military, when you look back on that decision in 1981 in Michigan to go and check out and see what that law enforcement career was in the army—

EP: Yeah, yeah, yeah. People see that recruiter. Again, I think I stumbled through the first half of that.

TS: Of your career?

EP: Yeah. And then it was like, oh geez, I'm halfway through.
TS: [laughs]

EP: Got ten more go to!

TS: And then you were like, oh, this isn't so bad, right?

EP: Yeah, it just becomes a little more clear, little more clear. And you know, a little more focused.

TS: Well, let me ask you a couple things about transitions, we've talked a little bit about transitions over time, but when you look at women in the military today, and we talk about the war in Afghanistan and Iraq, women in combat today is much different—even since when you got out in 2001, you know, the use of jet fighter pilots, women, and in the army, you know, the [forward?] area. What do you think about women in these roles, in combat positions and things like that? Are there roles, do you think, that women should not be able to do, I guess maybe is how I'll frame it?

EP: I don't, as long as the mission of that job and the qualifications are realistic, and if a woman can meet those qualifications and capabilities, then they should be able to do that. Now, would I want all those jobs? Nope! [laughs]

TS: Well, I think the most controversial one now is with—not in the army, but in the navy, with putting women on the submarines. Think that's the one that's being controversial right now, with close quarters and things like that.

EP: And I—you know, I just think that's—it's the same thing with gays in the military, it's like, get over it. I mean, if we can live in society, then what makes them think you can't do it in the military? This hoo-ha about close, you know, close whatever and what—I'm thinking, if somebody's that fearful of their masculinity or whatever, I mean, it's their problem. But—and I don't think that they have that concern because they're thinking that

their livelihood is threatened.

TS: What do you think they're thinking?

EP: I just think it's—they are uncomfortable, and that's why they're saying "Oh, we can't have it." I just think they feel uncomfortable, and what they don't feel comfortable with, they're not going to support, they're just going to say "Nope, nope, nope, don't want to do it."

TS: So this whole drama this whole year with the "Don't Ask, Don't Tell" repeal, what do you think about that, then?

EP: I just think it just needs to be dropped. I mean, it's just not—

TS: It should be repealed?

EP: Yeah, I mean—I don't know for sure, but I just don't think it's that much of a problem. I mean, from what I've seen, it just doesn't matter.

TS: Right.

EP: As long as people can do their jobs, it just doesn't matter.

TS: So, the same thing like you were saying with women, if they can do this job, then let them do it.

EP: [chuckling] Because if you're thinking about sex in wartime, there's something wrong with you, because there are more important things than that.

TS: Right.

EP: Like, people's lives? [chuckling]

TS: So that's not the primary consideration that's going on in those foxholes, right?

EP: Yeah, right.

TS: Well, if you had a young woman come to you today that wanted to join the military, and even, you know, the MPs, what would you—what kind of advice would you give her, or him, you know, if it's a young man?

EP: I would say—I think I would support it, if I knew the person well enough as far as their intentions. Why do you want to join the military? We have a niece that's in reserve, and she's deployed twice. And we would encourage her to go and do whatever she wants to do. She's very good at what she does, and she's gung-ho, and I just think she ought to

be—you know, a warrant officer or an officer, because I think she's got a lot of potential to do that kind of stuff, and to take the responsibility that we give on the—

TS: What is it that she's doing?

EP: Well, she's—I don't know, truck driver? The last job she had down in Iraq, she was actually working in the stockade, in with the intel guys, gals. And she liked that, and the first tour, she was in charge of a convoy, escorting convoys. She was like a squad leader to do that. So I mean, she's done all the hard stuff. [laughter]

TS: Now get her in a leadership position, right?

EP: Now get her in a leadership position!

TS: Well, that's interesting. And you know, one thing I don't think I asked you at the beginning, which I usually do, is [comments regarding dog redacted]—did your father or any of your relatives, is there any military history or family service?

EP: My father was in World War II.

TS: He was in World War II?

EP: Yeah, but I was the only—

TS: Out of those eleven kids, you were the only one that went—

EP: Yeah, I was the only one that went into the military.

TS: Is that right?

EP: I'm the odd duck.

TS: Yeah, out of eleven.

EP: My oldest brother was drafted for Vietnam, but he failed his physical, so.

TS: So he didn't have to go.

EP: Correct.

TS: I see. And so do you think that your life has been different because of your time in the military?

EP: Yeah, I do. And not necessarily that bad, good, or indifferent, but it took me away from home, which I may not have done, and I think it did me a world of good to get away. Not necessarily losing the relationships, the closeness of the family, but just getting out,

because—I won't say there's nothing in Oconto, but it's very depressed, and I just don't think I would have been there, done that—

TS: Different opportunities presented themselves, you think?

EP: Yeah.

TS: And do you—we're actually almost at the end, I don't know, that may be Bruce coming home. Okay. Let me pause it for a second for you. [recording paused] –The answer. So. Okay, we're back, and Bruce has come home and so he's joined us, but I've got a few more questions here for Ellen. So, one of the questions that I wanted to ask you, because you were in a period—we talked a little bit about being in in 1981 and then getting out in 2001, that for women, different things changed over time. We talked a little bit about how the men reacted a little bit differently, and you can add to that if you want, but what about—you had said that there weren't a lot of women leaders, but you did have some? Did you see any change over time in the type of leadership that women had as role models or something like that?

EP: I think as the years went on, I think I saw more of the female role models in the tactical combat support area. Early on, not so much.

TS: What kind of—what would the main mentality, I guess, be, would we say? Because I guess—I can't remember what year exactly the WAC melded into the army, that was 1970s.

Bruce Peebles: Seventy-six, I think it was.

TS: Seventy-seven? Somewhere around there, yeah. So it had been really fairly recently after that. Did you have any—well, you probably were commanded by some women who were in the WAC.

EP: Right, right. I had two female battalion commanders that were in the—had made that transition.

TS: Right.

EP: And yeah, I think, looking back, there was kind of a difference, I think, because even though they were very knowledgeable, very intelligent, the role model—their role model didn't necessarily entail the tactical aspects of our profession.

TS: Tactical, like—what do you mean by tactical?

EP: Well, for example, in the military police corps, you have the combat support roles, and whether it was mission dependent or whatever, I just didn't see that out of the battalion commander, per se.

TS: Was it more like a nurturing kind of environment, or?

EP: Yeah, you could say that, but as—reserved, put it that way.

TS: Reserved, okay.

EP: Yeah.

TS: Well, did you have any—we had talked about role models—or, mentors, and you said "I guess I really didn't have any." But did you have anybody that you really looked up to as a leader?

EP: Yeah, yeah, I sure did.

TS: What did you learn from them, do you remember any special times that maybe struck you?

EP: Whether they're male or female role models, I think the quiet leadership was what I looked for more, you know, quiet confident ones that—it didn't matter who you were, if you needed help, it was there, and there was no hoopla about it. I mean, I just—whether it was just something that happened, normal routine, or whether you were deployed or in an exercise, it didn't matter.

TS: It was like a [unclear] all the way through.

EP: Right, right, yeah.

TS: Manage like that. Well, that's interesting. Was there anything else that you saw that changed in the army over this period? Doesn't have to relate to women at all.

EP: Well, we can stick to that. I really think that the military has allowed the women to go into roles and not worry about it so much. When actually there was a time when some people would say "Oh, we had—" There was one talk about somebody pulling females off the plane right before they deployed, and I forget where it was.

BP: Saudi Arabia, it was supposed to be out to Saudi.

EP: And our brigade commander at that point was very reversal in that respect, the last brigade commander that I had, MP, over at Fort Bragg.

TS: Would never have thought of something—doing something like that.

EP: Oh, gosh, no. He was very supportive of female officers, enlisted, it didn't matter. If they were part of the unit before the deployment, they went with you. So.

TS: Well, what about—so I'm going to bring Bruce into this a little bit, because with your time, when did you first join the—

BP: Our active duty times overlapped, I came in in '81 out of the National Guard and then retired as well in 2001. So my exposure is different because I have those ten years in the National Guard before I came on active duty, but that's the only real difference.

TS: Well, Ellen was saying one thing about when you went to your MP training, that you thought about approximately twenty percent were female. And so with you as a male in the MP field, what was the reception like, do you think, for the women that were coming in? Because that's a high percentage, especially relative to how many women were in the military at that time.

BP: It varied, it was an individual reaction, in my observation. Some people, it was—to some people, it didn't matter. "You're a soldier, you're a soldier, let's go do what we have to do." In other instances, it was very clearly "Oh, you're a woman. Oh, by the way, you're wearing a uniform." That sort of an approach. And in some cases it was clearly "Oh, we have to treat them differently. We've got to, you know, let them do this over here by themselves because they can't do it with the rest of the soldiers." That was an early phenomenon that faded over time, because the reality is, with the MP corps anyway, we both commanded training companies at Fort McClellan, and I know in my instance, every training cycle—

TS: Was it co-ed?

BP: Yeah, that's precisely my point.

TS: Oh, okay, sorry.

BP: Every training cycle, twenty five percent of the soldiers that we started with were women, and we graduated most of them. Not all of them, but then we didn't graduate all the males either.

TS: Right.

BP: And that reflected what we were sending to the field, the percentage of soldiers we were sending out to the active army and back to the reserve forces. So with the MPs, it's always—I think it's always—since the '70s, anyway, been a little different than it is for some of the other branches, because we've been so—I won't say heavy, but we've had a substantial number of women involved. It tapers rapidly, especially in the officer corps. I remember seeing in basic course, an officer basic course, students, that we would have anywhere from ten to twenty percent women in a given class, but by the time they went from second lieutenant to captain, that percentage would have dropped to about five percent.

TS: Less of them were staying in longer period of time.

BP: Right. For any number of reasons, yeah, which I'm not privy to, but any number of reasons were part of that process, you saw a very distinct winnowing, so that by the time women became field grade officers like Ellen, there were not very many in the MP corps. Maybe more in other places.

TS: Yeah, I was going to say, as a lieutenant colonel, were there many other women of your peers, that were at that rank at the time that you got out? Or the time that you actually were promoted, there were quite a few?

EP: Well, I mean, I thought there were—I won't say enough or plenty, but I mean, yeah, there were those that stuck to it. There was a—

BP: You had your five cohorts from OCS.

EP: Oh, yeah, they're—

BP: How many of those?

EP: Oh, gosh.
TS: Are those the ones that dragged you along to all these jumping out of planes schools?

EP: Yeah, yeah. Where are they now? [laughs]

TS: Yeah, where are they? Did they stay in?

EP: No.

TS: No?

EP: I forget—Lee-ann—

BP: Lee-ann made major.

EP: Yeah, and then she didn't— I don't—

BP: She didn't make lieutenant colonel.

EP: I don't think she made lieutenant colonel. Berry[?] got out, had kids.

BP: [Devire?] got out.

EP: [Devire?] got out.
BP: And who's the other one?

EP: Laura Mooney. She got out, working for Schneider Trucking. [laughs]

TS: So you're the only one from that cohort that stuck it out.

EP: Yeah, come to think about it. But you know, I don't necessarily see that in—I just think the military police would be a lot better with proportion women—

TS: So they were in other fields, then? Besides the military police?

EP: The women?

TS: The women that you were talking about earlier, they were all in the military police?

EP: They were all military police, I'm sorry, yeah, they were.

TS: Oh, okay. Well, I wanted to ask you both about having—since you spent basically your whole careers together, how common or unusual was it to be able to be stationed together for the whole time, pretty much, except for that little jaunt you had in Germany, I guess, right?

BP: We managed to stay together—well, let's put it this way. Out of, I think the roughly ten permanent change of stations that we made after we got married, counting all of our schooling and that sort of thing, we made two of them, that I remember, together, and that was coming back from Germany the first time and coming back from Germany the second time.

EP: But, what interrupted that was schooling and deployments. So you really can't—

TS: It's hard to gauge. But you ended up kind of being together.

EP: During the tour, yes.

BP: The army always worked to make sure that we ended up at the same place or within the legal limit of what was given—there were certain rules in Germany, you could live a certain number of miles apart and still be considered together, or joint, right.

TS: Okay. Well, did you find that the army had a really good support system for couples, for that?

EP: I think—well, to me, I thought it was adequate, as far as the system and getting together. Now, again, with family and whatnot, I have no idea what gyrations they go through there with the family, and that's probably even harder.

TS: Right, with dependents and that sort of thing. Well, did you—

EP: Family members, they're not dependents. [chuckles]

TS: Oh, is that right?

BP: That's right. Politically correct, right, family members.

TS: Well, thank you for correcting me on that, I actually didn't know that.

EP: It's a negative—

TS: Is it?

EP: "Dependent" is kind of—yeah, they determined that to be a little negative.

TS: Is there any other terminology that I've been using—

EP: No, no, no, go ahead!

TS: Probably so! So, well, one thing I was going to ask Ellen was—that I hadn't asked you yet, when you think about the word patriotism, what does patriotism mean to you?

EP: Well, funny you should ask. For me, along with our way of life and all that, it means a lot to me that whoever you get elected, president or whoever's in charge, that you support that person through good, bad, or indifferent. To me, that's part of patriotism. They are serving the highest you can in this nation, and that oh, by the way, we voted them in, or they worked themselves in, and we owe them the loyalty—and not saying you agree with everything, but whatever we do, we do together. I mean, it's—

TS: Are you kind of talking about the current political climate?

EP: Well, that and you know, when we go to war or whatever, you know, yeah, you may not think it was the smartest thing, but what you do is you support those that represent you, that they did the best that they could in determining what should have been done. Because they don't do it in a vacuum, there's lots of people that said yeah, yeah, look at this, look at that.

TS: Oh, so you mean, so like the decision to go into Iraq with Bush and, okay.

EP: Yeah, yeah.

TS: See, I'm getting into the specifics.

EP: [laughter] Or presidential policy or whatever, I'm not saying you need to agree with everything, you don't have to.

TS: Right. But once the decision has been made, you're saying.

EP: But you—if you still disagree with the policy, you can do it in a more patriotic way or non-critical as far as, you know, to me, I just think that part of being patriotic is supporting and having loyalty to whether your nation or those that we put into office or in leadership.

TS: But some of those that would be on the other side of that might say "Well, you know—"

EP: Constitutional right—

TS: Or just that they disagree with the fundamental reasons going behind it, and so what kind of steps can they take to try to pull that back, you know, what can they actually do, they see themselves as maybe being patriotic in protesting or things like that, so there's a—

EP: Yeah. As long as it's done in a—

TS: Respectful?

EP: Yeah, yeah. Really. [pause] Because otherwise, what is patriotism?

TS: That's the question for you to answer.

EP: Yeah, I mean, I kind of mentioned what I thought being patriotic was, but—and it's, I guess it's, you know, if the military, you know, if the nation needs you to do something in support—then you support it somehow. I mean, I don't know how else you get around that.

TS: So when you're a young girl growing up in Wisconsin, and now, some years later, you look back on the experiences that you've had, do you think that—do you think the military environment helped you become a more independent person, or were you pretty independent—we kind of talked a little—touched a little bit on that at first, but—your sense of independence, is it any different than it was when you—

EP: I think I'm more independent. For sure.

TS: Yeah. Do you think that's because of the experience that you've had in the military?

EP: Yes, yeah, I do. There's a lot of things that—decisions have to be made and, you know, there's not a whole lot of people around to say "Huh, yeah, you need to do this." Ultimately, it's your decision, which the military puts you in that position.

TS: They give you a lot of responsibility.

EP: Yeah, there you go.

TS: What's that, Bruce? I'm sorry.

BP: Out there all alone and unafraid.

TS: [chuckles] That's good. But you're given a lot of responsibility for whatever job that you had, so you have to stay with that. Well, we pretty much have covered, I think just about everything. Is there anything that we haven't covered that you want to add?

EP: Not at this point, but you know, like I said, once we get through the transcripts and all that, I can kind of piece together and say "Oh, I said this, but this goes to this." [laughter]

TS: Get the names and things.

EP: Timeframe and—

TS: Yeah, okay.

EP: We'll spare the names.

TS: Well, thank you very much, and thank you, Bruce, for coming in on the end here.

BP: My last tag-on.

EP: I'll also talk later on about donations and stuff.

TS: Okay, yeah, we'll figure out—

EP: We definitely need to go through that. Not today.

[End of Interview]