

WOMEN VETERANS HISTORICAL PROJECT
ORAL HISTORY COLLECTION

INTERVIEWEE: Francine Ann Fisher

INTERVIEWER: Therese Strohmer

DATE: October 8, 2012

[Begin Interview]

TS: Today is October 8, 2012. My name is Therese Strohmer. I'm at the home of Francine Fisher in Greensboro, North Carolina to conduct an oral history interview for the Women Veterans Historical Collection at the University of North Carolina at Greensboro. Francine, would you like to state your name the way you like it to read on your collection?

FF: Yes, Francine Ann Fisher.

TS: Okay, very good. Well, thank you for letting me come and talk with you today.

FF: Sure.

TS: Why don't we start out by you telling me when and where you were born?

FF: I was born in Washington D.C. in 1951, November the twenty-fourth.

TS: [chuckles] November the twenty-fourth. That's right, we were talking about that. That's around Thanksgiving right? It falls on Thanksgiving every few years?

FF: Every couple of years falls right on—smack dab on Thanksgiving.

TS: Well, they cel—give you a real big celebration on that day don't they?

FF: Yes, they do.

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

FF: Yes, I have two brothers and one sister.

TS: Do you want to say their names?

FF: Yes, my sister is Alexandria Massemburg. She is two years younger than I am. Then below her I have a brother, William Fisher. He is two years under her and I have a brother that passed in 2004 named Andre Fisher and he was two years below the other one, and he was a Marine.

TS: Is that right? He was a Marine?

FF: Yes.

TS: Now, do you—what about your parents? Did you—what kind of—in Washington D.C. when you were growing up in the fifties and sixties—

FF: —the late fifties and early sixties.

TS: What kind of town was it then?

FF: Well, it was a little bit of an uproar because the segregation thing was going on. Nobody was really rich. We all just made it with what we had and we were happy because we really didn't know any better.

TS: What did your folks do for a living?

FF: My mother was an artist, so she got a job as a cartographic technician working for the United States Department of Agriculture. She did a lot of maps. My father bumped around a lot. He worked as a custodian, a cook, mail carrier, and those are the—oh, security guard.

TS: Yes? Now, did you—when you were growing up—You were in the city, right?

FF: Yes.

TS: So, did you have—you and your—since you and your brothers and sister were—you were close in age, did you do a lot of things like playing in the street, play—did you go to the park? How—what kind of things did you do for fun?

FF: We played. We were in the city but we were on the outskirts of the city but within the city limits, so we had fun. We couldn't really go anywhere because Mama was at work and nobody knew where Daddy was [chuckles], so we just played around the yard with our friends up and down the street and had fun. We didn't have much of anything. None of us had—did, so we all had fun.

TS: What kind of things did you do when you were playing around?

FF: We would have rock wars [laughs].

TS: Oh no, what's that? My goodness that doesn't sound so—
FF: Where we would pick certain sized rocks were the only ones allowed.

TS: Okay.

FF: Each side would get on a bunker on opposite sides of the street and once the war started we just kept on throwing rocks at each other until the first person started crying [laughing].

TS: Francine, [chuckles] that sounds a little scary.

FF: And that was fun.

TS: And you were the oldest right?

FF: Right.

TS: So—okay.

FF: We also played baseball in the street, football in the street, jumped double-dutch in the street because the street was the only hard area—asphalt covered area that we could use to play on.

TS: Now, did you—did girls and boys all play together when you playing like that or did you break off into—

FF: We did a little of both.

TS: Yes?

FF: We did a little of both. Sometimes we, you know, intruded on the guys and played stuff with them, and other times we just wanted to play Barbie or paper dolls and they didn't want to play those with us.

TS: No. Well, did you—how was school? Do you remember liking school?

FF: Yes, I used to love school because I was a avid reader. It was nothing for me to walk to the library about a quarter of a mile away every other day and get five books because I love reading so much because it took me away. Whenever I read something I became the heroine in the story or the storyteller but whoever I was I wasn't Francine and I really enjoyed that so—

TS: Do you remember how you got hooked on reading?

FF: Yes, when I first started reading. Back then they had Captain Kangaroo [children's television series that ran from 1955-1984] on television and some of the other cartoons and they would have words, and Romper Room all that. Some of them would have words on the screen, so by learning how to read I knew what they were saying and what they weren't saying and then on the news—when the news came on TV or when the newspaper—I was such an avid reader I would read the entire newspaper every evening—

TS: Is that right?

FF: —before Mama or Daddy could get to it because it just—it was just knowing that I could do it.

TS: Starting at about what age did you start doing that kind of reading?

FF: I would say about the third or fourth grade.

TS: So, you liked school. What school did you go to?

FF: I went to Plummer Elementary School in Washington D.C. From there I went to Souza—John Phillips Souza Junior High School, and from there I went to Anacostia High School for a month because that's when I found out I was pregnant and I had to switch over to a night school because back in 1967 they didn't have facilities for pregnant girls to go to school with regular people. They were afraid it was going to rub off, so I had to go to night school.

TS: Did you have—were your classes integrated at that time?

FF: Well, not by design. The areas that I lived in, it was a preponderance of African-American and maybe some Latinos, so it wasn't by design; it was by geographic location.

TS: That's [unclear], because that's how school districts are set up, right?

FF: Yes, yes.

TS: Now, you had said you remembered a little bit about growing up and there were some—there was some tension in Washington D.C. at that time.

FF: Yes.

TS: So, in the early sixties, like, when we had the—here in Greensboro when they had the sit-in at the Woolworth's, that—you would have been like nine years old. Do you remember hearing about that at that age or is that something you learned about, maybe, later?

FF: That's something I learned about later because at that time my world consisted of Washington D.C.

TS: Yes.

FF: And getting on the trolley car, paying the money, and then having to go to the back of the trolley car, or my sister and I would go downtown to where all the sites were, and of course, all the tourists, and we just be on our merry way, running up and down the steps of the Washington Monument and things like that and these bigoted people from the South, adults, would pick on me—my sister and I. I mean little girls; eleven, nine, you know, something like that, you know, just—

TS: How did they pick on you? Do you remember?

FF: Oh, "Look at that little pickaninny," and this, that, and the other. Or—I had very bony legs. I've always had bony legs. "I don't know how that little negra, negra," —I think that's how they say it—"walks on them sticks," and this that and the other, and, "Look at the other one. The other one is so black that if she closed her eyes you can't see nothing." You know, just—just inappropriate things for adults to say to children regardless of their ethnic—ethnicity.

TS: Right. How did you handle that as a little girl?

FF: Well, my sister started crying.

TS: Aw.

FF: I'm the oldest, so I held her. Scooped her in my arms and we ran about a half a block ahead and then, you know, just started walking. Then somebody asked her what was wrong, she told them. They wanted her to point out who did it.

TS: Aw.

FF: But we wouldn't do that because we weren't raised to do things like that. To handle things to the best of your ability, then if they become too much of a problem take them to Mama.

TS: Yes. That's really interesting. So, did it make you not want to go down to Washington D.C. to—

FF: There are a lot of monuments and things I still haven't seen because that marked me as a child.

TS: Yes?

FF: There are a lot of things I haven't seen. Now, I don't think I would have that same conversation with somebody today.

TS: I would hope not Francine.

FF: [chuckles] But, you know—but it marked me.

TS: Yes?

FF: It marked me and I just lost interest, you know. I don't want to be around stupid people.

TS: Right, right.

FF: But I do have plans to go see the Vietnam [Veterans] Memorial. I haven't seen that yet.

TS: Well, you should go see it for sure.

FF: I'm going to see that. I have been home about five or six times since it's been up and I've never gone down there.

TS: Well, you should take the time.

FF: I want to.

TS: Take the time. Now you—growing up—we talked a little about your growing up. So—so, as a young girl, and you liked reading—

FF: I loved reading.

TS: And you like—apparently you really liked school. Was there a subject that you liked in school?

FF: History.

TS: Okay. What did you like about?

FF: I loved history. Excuse me, because I learned how we got from here to now. I learned how important it was for one—how one person can make a difference. And like George Washington Carver, use the peanut and made about one hundred and fifty different products from one little simple thing that nobody even thinks about. You know, stuff like that. Or about the monarch; you know, with the Queen, her majesty, and you know, the royal things, the royal demeanor, you know. That was interesting. How we came to be in America was very interesting. Since, you know, none of us were originally—none of our ancestors were originally here, you know, so that was interesting. Just knowing where I

came from and knowing how things got started; words, inventions, or whatever, and how they had been improved over time.

TS: So, as a young girl growing up in Washington D.C, which is a hub of activity I would think at that time. Did you have a sense of, like, what your future might look like? What you could do in the future? What did you—what did you think? Your mother had a—sounds like a really great job.

FF: She did.

TS: How did—did either of your parents, like, encourage you for furthering education or anything like that?

FF: Yes, and about—let's see. About Mama and—it was something you said right there in the beginning but I lost track about—oh, my future. Could I see my future? Yes, I thought I was going to be dead because I was in school during the time—the Cuban Missile Crisis and every day we had drills to get under our desk, to hold our heads down—

TS: Francine—Francine is doing the duck and cover right here.

FF: Yes, yes, or if we weren't in the classroom, to get in the hallway and turn our head towards the wall, and duck and cover and hold our heads down. I kept seeing these movies on TV, like on the *Day the Earth Stood Still*, where this big monster in a spaceship came to Washington D.C. and they blew up all these things. Then on this scary movie they came to Washington D.C. and blew it up, and then on this one, you know, they blew D.C. up; the Russians, or you know, some other third world country or something. So, I said, "Dag," because D.C. is going to be the first place to go. [chuckles]

TS: Did it make you want to get out of that city? [chuckles]

FF: Yes, you can't always find a desk. Shoot.

TS: I never thought about it that way before; that that's—you're targeting your city that you're in.

FF: Yes, because we are going to wipe out the government. Then everybody'll be running around like little ants, you know.

TS: Because it was really impenetrable.

FF: It was scary. It was scary. And then when you come home, every evening [Walter] Cronkite, and your mama and daddy watching TV, and you know, everybody's waiting for somebody to push the button; whether on purpose or accidental, everybody is waiting for the button to be pushed.

TS: Do you remember watching, or do you remember anything or feeling about you or your parents, how they felt about John F. Kennedy as President?

FF: Yes, they loved him; they both loved him.

TS: Do you remember why?

FF: Because they said he was fair. Now, I was—I think when he died I was eleven or twelve.

TS: Right.

FF: But they said that he was fair. At least, you know, we would have a chance with him versus some of the Presidents that we had had before. So—

TS: What did they mean by have a chance?

FF: Had a chance to have a decent life, to have equal rights, to have a shot at the American dream, you know, because a lot of times people are selfish. They want the American dream but they don't want anybody else to have it, you know. Yes, but they thought they had a chance and I think they were caught up in that Camelot air, you know.

TS: Sure, sure. So, when he was assassinated, do you have any recollection of that day?

FF: Yes, I do. We were out of school that day. We were out of school for Thanksgiving so we were watching *Bewitched* on TV.

TS: Yes?

FF: Then all of a sudden there was a news break, "John F. Kennedy has been assassinated. The President of the United States has been assassinated in Dallas, Texas." Sisters and brothers, "Francine what does that mean?" And so, I told them that someone had killed him. So, all four of us sat on the edge of Mama's bed and cried, and cried because we heard so many good things about him and how things could be so much better. That we just sat there and held each other and cried. And after a while I turned the channel onto something else and then I just turned the TV off. Then Mama came home and then she was crying, you know. So, it was just—it was like a family member had been murdered.

TS: Do you remember the funeral march through Washington D.C.?

FF: I remember all of that. Yes, with the caisson, and little John-John with his salute.

TS: Yes.

FF: Yes. Oh yes.

TS: Well, so if you—if you thought that Washington D.C. was going to blow up [chuckles]—

FF: Anytime.

TS: —anytime, so what did you think about that you might be able to go over—any kind of future education; secondary school?

FF: I really didn't think I would be able to go to college because by that time Daddy had stopped coming back. All before was revolving door but by that time, you know, he had just stopped coming altogether and I knew how hard my mom was working, you know, taking care of the house, the taxes, the four of us, keeping us together and everything like that. So, I really didn't know what to expect. I didn't expect anything because I didn't know what was going to go on.

TS: Then you said you got—you were pregnant as a young girl?

FF: Yes.

TS: Then you had to go to the different—

FF: To the night school.

TS: Night school. How was that? What was that experience like?

FF: Well, it was—it was odd because at the daytime school you just carry yourself and your book bag and you go to school. At the night school you had to carry yourself, your baby, your book bag, your pocketbook, your—everything. When I first went there, I was just pregnant, but then after I had the baby I had to go back there until a specific time had passed and then I would be allowed back into day school, because at the night school they had a nursery. You would bring your child to the nursery when you got to the school at three o'clock. At seven o'clock everybody took the same lunch break. You would go get your baby and feed him and change him, then go back to your remaining classes for the night. It was just really very hectic, and I got married around that time.

TS: How old were you?

FF: Sixteen and a half.

TS: Okay.

FF: I got married. Then all of a sudden I was pregnant again. So, that was my chance, you know, not to be reintroduced to regular school. So, I'm pregnant and carrying Kim and my books, my book bag, my diaper bag, going to school every night. Then the next year I'm carrying Kim in one arm, Maurice in one arm, diaper bag, book bag, pocketbook, you

know. It just got to be too much for me, so around the middle of the eleventh grade I dropped out. I just couldn't take it. It was just too much of a strain.

TS: So, what did you do then?

FF: I took some menial jobs; counter work, made sandwiches for a living, stuff like that until I got a break, and they were having a nursing course but it was for [clears throat], excuse me, mothers with under a certain—there was a certain financial range. I signed up for that and after ten weeks I graduated as a nursing assistant from [MedStar] Georgetown University Hospital, and after—

TS: That's where you did your training?

FF: Yes, my initial training [clears throat]. Because I didn't know what I wanted to do but I knew I had compassion. I knew I loved people. I knew I wanted to take care of people, and if I learned how to take care of people at the same time I'm learning how to take care of my family and myself. So, that was great. That was in 1977.

TS: Nineteen seventy-seven that you graduated from the Georgetown—

FF: Yes.

TS: —University?

FF: Wait a minute, no.

TS: It had to be a little earlier.

FF: Nineteen seventy-one—

TS: Nineteen seventy-one.

FF: Seventy-one. I'm looking at the—

TS: So, you're about twenty years old?

FF: Yes. By that time my marriage was on the rocks, [chuckles]so you know, it was really good knowing I had a trade; something I could do.

TS: Was that one of the reasons that you took the class because you thought maybe you might have to support—

FF: Support my children.

TS: Yes.

FF: And because they had waived the cost of the class. That was a good factor too. I didn't have to pay for the training.

TS: You had to just do the work and get your education that way.

FF: Yes.

TS: So, then—so, what did you do after that?

FF: I worked in various nursing homes; hospitals. Around that time my uncle who went to Vietnam—I was the only one who that wrote him when he was in Vietnam. So, he told me about how it was over there and some of things he had been going through. So, I said hum, I've had this nurses training. Maybe I can go ahead and they can speed me through and I can go over there and ask for wherever he's stationed. But they wouldn't take me because my daughters were about five—four and five, or five and six and I refused to sign them over to my husband because he wasn't a very fatherly type and my mother, she was so stressed out. I didn't want to sign them over to her either. So, they told me just to come back in a couple of years and I did. I came back in '77.

TS: And so, was it that your children were no longer of an age where you were—you were so—so you were able to join with your children?

FF: No, at that time they were old enough so that if anything happened to them or anybody did anything or whatever, they were old enough to speak up for their self. They were old enough to know what was right and what was wrong.

TS: Did you have to sign them over to somebody?

FF: I signed them over to my mother.

TS: I see, at that time.

FF: At that time.

TS: So, what—you got interested in the—was it the army—was it your Uncle that was in Vietnam?

FF: Yes.

TS: So, that was one of the reasons that you got interested?

FF: Well, no, because I went down to the AFES [Armed Forces Examining Station] and I got tested and they told me I could pick any—with my scores I could pick any branch that I wanted. So, I sat and watched the movies[both chuckle]; the little—the little promotional

movies. I think what really got me was the way they were calling cadence when they were running in the [U.S.] Army, and then the [U.S.] Marines, they just looked like they were always mad, or you know, they always had a problem; they had an issue. The air force, they looked like they were having a little too much fun. It looked like, you know, like glorified boy scouts and stuff [Therese chuckles] And the Coast Guard, you know, five second blurb on them.

TS: How about the navy?

FF: The navy? Not a question. I don't swim very well. [chuckles] I don't swim.

TS: You didn't even think about that one.

FF: No. I don't swim very well at all and then to be out on some water for six or eight months; a year. No, no, no, no, no. So, I picked the army.

TS: Okay. Do you need to take a little break, or are you okay?

FF: I'm fine.

TS: Okay. So, you picked the army. Now, had your father been in the service at all or anybody else you knew besides your uncle.

FF: Yes, if I could just get these two photos for you. One is from my father and one is from my nephew—from my uncle.

TS: Okay, just a second. Francine is grabbing a—she's clearing her walls [chuckling].

FF: Yes.

TS: I can pause it for a second if you would like. Let me just do that Francine.

FF: Okay I am back.

TS: Okay, we are back now and Francine is showing me this really gorgeous picture. Who is this guy?

FF: That's my father.

TS: Well, he is very handsome.

FF: Thank you.

TS: Is this your mother over here then?

FF: Yes.

TS: Okay.

FF: And that was taken in '46 right before he got out of the army.

TS: So, he was in—Did he see any duty overseas or anything?

FF: No, he was stateside.

TS: What's your father's name?

FF: William Fisher.

TS: William Fisher? Very nice. And your mother?

FF: Jenny Fisher. This is my uncle reading my letter.

TS: [chuckles] And what's your uncle's name?

FF: Uncle—his name is Jacky Dowling.

TS: So, is he in Vietnam here?

FF: Yes he was. He's in his hooch.

TS: Oh, he's in his hooch. He's got a little Coleman lantern on the side.

FF: Yes.

TS: He's got a package that's your letter. Yes, lots of wood in there too.

FF: Yes, I want you to look at his eyes.

TS: So, he was airborne too. Okay.

FF: Yes. He used to ride in the heli—in a huey [first turbine-powered helicopter] and he had a picture of a great big mark right here and a shattered visor on his helmet from them flying too low over the Vietcong. Now, look at his eyes.

TS: Okay, yes.

FF: Do you see a difference?

TS: No, they are very similar. She is showing me a picture of another—a young boy.

FF: Graduated from high school.

TS: Who is this?

FF: That's him.

TS: Oh, it's the same—it's him. Yes.

FF: But look at his eyes.

TS: Oh, you mean this—the left eye?

FF: Both of them, and look at these.

TS: They're all—they're fuller in the smaller picture. Is that what you mean?

FF: He stayed zonked the whole time.

TS: Oh, you mean he's stoned in this picture? [laughing]

FF: Yes, see—look at the difference in the eyes.

TS: Okay.

FF: That's the only way—

TS: Well, I am apparently not technically able to— [laughing]

FF: Okay, to tell that.

TS: —to tell, alright, I see.

FF: But see how these are alive eyes and these are kind of dead eyes?

TS: Okay.

FF: But he said that's after he got hit with that shrapnel—

TS: Okay

FF: —in his forehead that was the only way he could make it every day.

TS: Yes, well, I've never had that kind of explanation [chuckling] through pictures before but that's interesting. I see what you are saying though.

FF: So, you can see it now.

TS: Yes, I can see it now.

FF: That's when he graduated from high school and that's after he had gotten shot in Vietnam; big difference.

TS: So, he was trying—

FF: Within about a nine month period.

TS: So, he was self-medicating for his pain?

FF: Yes.

TS: Okay. [chuckling]. [extraneous comment redacted] Well, let's talk a little bit then about joining up. And so, it was 1977, right?

FF: Yes.

TS: And you decided on the army.

FF: Yes.

TS: Now, what did your family think about it?

FF: Some of them wanted to talk me out of it and some of them thought it would be a good idea because I've always been independent because I watched my mom. If there's something has to be done she doesn't wait for somebody to do it or offer it. She does it. She takes care of it. So, I saw this as a good way for me to travel; as a good way for me to have a steady source of income coming in; a chance to meet people from all over and to take my children with me and let them see some of this country, and that's what I eventually decided. My cousin was supposed to go in with me on the buddy system. "Oh, come on, come on." She pumped me up, I'd pump her up. So, we took all the tests, the physical and everything, but there were two things that she couldn't pass. "Well, I didn't want to go no way. Francine, you're not going are you?"
"Yes I am. [laughs] Yes I am." So, I went in by myself.

TS: Well, there you go. Now, at first you couldn't take your children, right, with you?

FF: Not to basic.

TS: Right.

FF: And not to school.

TS: Okay, but after that?

FF: After that it depends on where you are.

TS: If there—it you can have dependents?

FF: If you can have your family with you.

TS: I see. So, your mother took care of them while you were going through your basic and your—

FF: AIT (Advanced Individual Training)

TS: —and your advanced training. Okay. So, tell me about—Now, had you had experiences about being away from home before that?

FF: Little baby experiences, you know, like going with the girl scouts to New York for the weekend, stuff like that.

TS: So, it was really the first long extent of time you had been away.

FF: Yes. Yes.

TS: How was that? Were you nervous about that?

FF: No, because I was excited. Because I knew I was going to learn a lot. I wasn't expecting the reception that we got when we got to the basic training center.

TS: What kind of reception did you get, Francine?

FF: We were called everything under the sun except for a child of god. Throwing our bags out—

TS: These are the drill instructors?

FF: Yes, picking on people for where they come from, how they talk, how they look, how they're dressed. Just, you know, stuff like that.

TS: How did you react to that?

FF: Shocked, shocked. I mean wow. You know, we're coming down here to train to become a part of the military and you are treating us like we're the scum of the earth. So, it was a little hard.

TS: Did you have second thoughts?

FF: No, because it was a little late; the bus had pulled off. [both laugh]

TS: They wait until the bus pulls off before they do that.

FF: The bus had pulled off.

TS: You can't back on of it. Well, do you—so, that was like your first impression of getting into basic training. How was basic training for you?

FF: Basic training was very interesting. There were long hours. There was a lot of hard stuff to learn in a short period of time. I went to an eight week basic because I've heard of people going to six weeks, twelve weeks and this, that, and the other, but my basic was eight and it was really strenuous. But the one thing I'll always remember, I was in my best physical condition when I was in basic. The best condition that I had ever been in my life, before or since. [chuckles]

TS: Well, did you have any troubles in any of the physical things that you had to? Did you have to run a lot?

FF: Yes, yes. I was the oldest one in my platoon.

TS: So, how old were you at that time?

FF: Twenty-six.

TS: Okay.

FF: Everybody else was nineteen, seventeen, twenty, and once the drill sergeants went over our information and saw I was the oldest person in the entire company they made me the guard—the running guard. When we were running in formation, when we came to an intersection I had to break the formation, run up to the intersection, stop traffic, wait till the whole company passed, let the traffic go back, run and catch up to the company, and then sometimes the drill sergeants made me run around the entire company until we got to the intersections.

TS: No wonder you were in such good shape.

FF: As far as sit-ups and push-ups, I built myself up but on the last day of basic training—oh, one more thing, we had to do our rifle—we had to practice shooting. One of the reasons why I've always been such a good shot, on those silhouettes that they have at three hundred yards, or whatever have you, I would aim right at the head and shoot it because I would put the drill sergeants face on or somebody else who had made me mad that

morning. But they would always get on me. They said, “Don’t shoot. That’s a small target. Shoot in the trunk; the trunk of the body, from the shoulders to the waist.”

I said, “Well, they might survive that.” [both laughing]. But that helped me, and I’ve been a good shot ever since because I still use that same basic principle.

TS: Had you shot a weapon before you went to basic training?

FF: No.

TS: No?

FF: But I used to go to the carnival every time the carnival came to town and shoot in the clown’s mouth. [Therese chuckles] Shoot the water in the clown’s mouth, you know, and try to pop the balloon or shoot the little duckies or whatever, you know.

TS: I’m sure if you tell a drill instructor he would really be impressed by that practice.

FF: Yes, and then on the last day, we had already marched in our parade and graduated, I saw the drill sergeant coming toward me. I said, “No, I know this woman is not coming towards me after she gave me all that misery.” So, I turned my back and started going the other way. She tapped me on my shoulder. I said, “Yes?”

“I just wanted to tell you the reason why I rode you like a horse was because I knew you could do it. All you needed was encouragement. I knew you could it.”

I said, “Encouragement? I said, “That’s like kicking somebody while they down; you know, like kicking a dead horse.”

“But I knew you could do it,” and she was just grinning. I had never seen this lady smile before in my life and she was just grinning and she was so happy. Like, you know, she had made magic happen. But little do she—does she know she made me almost into a maniacal sociopath [both chuckle] from what she kept doing. But I understood there some method to the madness.

TS: Not later, right; not at the time necessarily?

FF: Yes, because if she hadn’t rode me like a horse I probably wouldn’t have made it.

TS: You don’t think so?

FF: There were a couple of times I started to just throw it all up in the air.

TS: But was it that you were so mad and determined to show them that you did it. I see. You’re nodding. We can’t hear nodding on the tape, Francine.

FF: Yes, yes, yes.

TS: Okay.

FF: I wanted to prove them wrong.

TS: Sounds like you did. You had originally said that you went into—this was before we started the tape: that you went into the National Guard first, right?

FF: Yes.

TS: So, you were originally doing the National Guard?

FF: Yes.

TS: Okay, and so you went through your basic training, and did you get the expert then for your rifle, at that time, or was that a little later?

FF: I can't remember.

TS: At some point you got it.

FF: I got this one right before I got out.

TS: Okay.

FF: But I had gotten two other experts and I got two sharpshooters, so I can't really remember.

TS: Oh, that's okay. I know it'll say in your DD [Form] 214 [a certificate of release or discharge from active duty] ,also, when you got those.

FF: Okay.

TS: Now—so, mentally they were taxing you a little bit and physically you were feeling like you were in pretty good shape.

FF: They were taxing me there too, but at least I could see results.

TS: Okay. Was it—did you have men and women together in training? You did?

FF: Yes, as I—I don't know if I started this earlier or not: I came in on the end of the WACs [Women's Army Corps], and when we went to basic at Fort Jackson [South Carolina] we were assigned a male buddy and a female buddy. The men lived on the first two floors of the building. The women's—the women were billeted on the third floor but we had to have a male buddy and a female buddy. That's because they were slowly integrating the WACs into the regular army. So, I guess this was a test to see how we dealt with working that closely with men or even each other.

TS: How did it work out?

FF: It worked out okay; okay.

TS: What were some of the problems that you saw?

FF: Being in a foxhole—and the three of you are in a foxhole; you, your female buddy, and your male buddy. And so, you all are split three different—we're looking in three different directions trying to protect our space. So, my girlfriend, the other lady, she's watching her area; I'm watching my area. We turned around and he was watching our butts. So, we got so mad that we told him that if he didn't watch his area and do what he was supposed to do that both of us were going to shoot him because he had become—he had become a—not disability—

TS: Liability?

FF: A liability, thank you. Because if he's not going to be watching his area then he has no purpose here. [both chuckle] You know, "Oh, I'm sorry. I was just looking at ya'll," and this, that—

I said, "You're supposed to be looking out there."

TS: Right.

FF: You know? And after we told him, he said, "Well, you can't shoot me because this is a training exercise."

Said, "We could still bludgeon you to death with these rifles." [both laughing] But he knew we meant it.

TS: I think those rock throwings in the earlier years kind of—

FF: But yes, I mean, if you noticed the three of you and you're in a certain situation, you want everybody to, you know, be consolidated; be for the same cause; you know, protect each other's back. Not just two and then the other one is, [singing] "La ta da." That's not going to work. So, that's the only problem that I really had with the male buddy. They were pretty good, like, when you were running and if you got a little slow and started to lag behind they would pick you up on each side and keep running, let you catch your breath for a minute and then they would let you back down. So, that way you wouldn't have to fall out of formation. So, it had good points and bad points. [both chuckle]

TS: There you go. So, where did you go next, Francine, after that?

FF: I went home for about a month. Then I went to San Antonio, Texas to Fort Sam Houston to start my training for medical specialist. Originally I was supposed to go for clinical specialist which is one step above the classification of 91 Bravo. I can't remember the nomenclature right now for the—91 Charlie; I think it was 91 Charlie, okay. I was

supposed to go for that. After I was there for about two months I had just sent for my daughters and they came out. The reason why they could come to my school because it was a long school. It was over a year.

TS: Okay.

FF: So, I had just brought my daughters out there and they called me in the main office and said that I couldn't—I had to drop out of the clinical specialist course. So, I said, "Why?"
"Because you only have ninth grade scores in math."
I said, "What?"
"Well, you've got to have tenth grade scores as that's a prerequisite."
I said, "Didn't you all look at everything? Didn't you test everything? Wasn't, you know—didn't you dot all the i's and cross all the t's?"
"Well, we don't know how this happened."
I said, "Well, since you all don't know—" I was in the middle of pharmacology and I said, "Well, why not see if I make it through this phase and then decide?"
"Nope, we can't do that. It's written in stone."
I said, "Okay."
"Well, do you want to take the 91 Bravo?"
"No. [both chuckle] No. I didn't sign up for that."

TS: Right.

FF: So, I was in the National Guard. So, I went back to my unit and I told them what happened. They looked over the paperwork. "Well, we are sorry but somebody missed that," and this that and the other. [sigh] I wasn't happy with the way they handled things, so instead of continuing to deal with the National Guard I just went regular army. But that 91 Bravo, I had already finished that phase because that was a prerequisite to take 91 Charlie.

TS: I see.

FF: You know? So, [makes noise] I've already done that. But anyway, that's why I left; because I felt as though the National Guard didn't honor their contract. I was supposed to do such and such, such and such, such and such. They were supposed to do such and such, such and such, and such and such. But the only person doing any such and such was me.

TS: Right.

FF: So, they gave me an immediate release and went right to the regular Army.

TS: Now did you—all this time did you go back and forth from home to Fort Sam Houston?

FF: No, I stayed—

TS: You were at Fort Sam Houston the whole time? So, you had your daughters with you?

FF: I had just had them out there. I had them out there about a month when this happened.

TS: Now, where did you live?

FF: In a trailer park.

TS: So, off base?

FF: Yes, I found that the trailer parks were cheaper; much cheaper.

TS: Could you have gotten, like, base housing or anything or is it—your rank was too low for that?

FF: At that time I didn't have enough rank.

TS: Did you get any extra dependent source of income?

FF: Oh, I got separate rations [rations]. I didn't get a cost of living allowance. I got separate rations.

TS: Did you get anything for quarters?

FF: I think I did.

TS: BAQ [Base Allowance of Quarters]; BAS [Base Allowance of Subsistence]?

FF: I don't remember getting that.

TS: Yes?

FF: I can't—some things are like, "Bam," and then other things are like, "What?"

TS: It's okay. Yes. [chuckles]. So, you finished—so, you did your 91 Bravo, you were at Fort Sam Houston and you switched to the army, and so then what happened?

FF: Okay, I switched to the army. I came home—brought my daughters home for a while while I was trying to get situated into another company. I'm trying to remember. What company did I go to?

TS: Now, did you go to Fort Stewart or Fort Gordon next?

FF: Oh, gosh.

TS: Both of those are in Georgia.

FF: Right. Fort Stewart was the last thing I did before I went to Hawaii.

TS: So, maybe you were at Fort Gordon then?

FF: Where was I? I was someplace—

TS: Did you have to do any kind of advanced training for the medic or—oh wait, you switched over to communication, or was that a little later?

FF: Yes, that was after I had been a Spec[ialist] 4.

TS: Okay.

FF: For almost four years

TS: So, that's sometime later?

FF: After I had been a Spec 4 for three and a half to four years I saw a girl come in one day when I was a supply sergeant, she was a private; E1. I looked again, she was a Spec 4. Now, I was a Spec 4 when she was an E1. Now she was a Spec 4 and I was still a Spec 4. [banging]. Something got to give. No, no, no, no, no. And so, she came in and she was real nasty. "Well, I want this and this and that and you're going to do this."

I said, "Little girl, let me tell you something. I spent more time in the latrine than you've been in the military. So, don't come in here pulling your high box, okay." Come to find out they gave her AJ [Acting Jack], acting sergeant, but I had had my training and then that's when I got my real stripe. They put her back down to Spec 4, but I tell you. But anyhow, I'm sorry.

TS: No, that's alright, that's alright. So, you—

FF: I'm sorry I got off.

TS: You learned about—well, we'll talk about this then. So, getting promoted in the army, it depended on the job you had because how many slots were open for so many promotions, right?

FF: Yes, yes.

TS: Okay. So, you're learning that for the medic it's a pretty full field and there's not a lot of slots for promotion?

FF: And when they were going to promote they were going to promote guys, because whenever the flag goes up they wanted to have guys because guys can go into battlefield

situations at that time; not like now. So, you know, if there were going to be any they were going to be males.

TS: I see.

FF: You know? I said, "Oh."

TS: So, it just made it more difficult for you to be able to maneuver through this career field as a medic? I see.

FF: I'm trying to remember where I was before they sent—So, I talked to a recruiter or somebody and that they told me they had—that the communications field was wide open.

TS: Yes?

FF: Meaning that, like, it was five hundred medics for each one slot. But in the communication field it was, like, two for each one slot. So, I went for that.

TS: Well, I don't blame you there. Now, did you have—your first duty station, do you remember that?

FF: My first duty station?

TS: After all your training. Was that in Hawaii?

FF: No.

TS: That was—was that the one at Fort Stewart?

FF: That was Fort Stewart.

TS: Okay. What do you remember—that's in Georgia. Do you remember getting there? Where did you live there?

FF: In a trailer park outside of camp. I took my children. But I think I was a Spec 4 so I was getting separate rats.

TS: Okay. So, what kind of—what was your day—what was your day like for a job at that time? What did you do?

FF: I worked at the troop medical clinic. I was exempt for all the regular activities of my company. Excuse me while I smile. No PT [physical training], no CQ [charge of quarters] or fire duty; no nothing. I had, like, a regular job. The troop medical clinic opened at 7:00 [a.m.] and we closed at 4:00—4:30 [p.m.], and that's the time that—

TS: That you put your hours in? So, you were exempt because of that particular job that you had?

FF: Yes, because the hours—because they looked on there. I was in a maintenance battalion and they didn't really see where I could do a whole lot of maintenance. So, they made a deal with the troop medical clinic for me to go over there, and it was great. It was like working in a doctor's office. I did minor medical procedures, wrote sick slips; waivers.

TS: What kind of minor medical procedures would you do?

FF: Oh, gosh. Like I said, stitch you up, do a treatment. Like, if you were burned or something; do like a burn treatment. What else?

TS: Like, things that a clinic would take care?

FF: Right, nothing like a hospital.

TS: Not, like, a broken arm, but abrasions and those kind of things.

FF: For a sprain or something, put you in a sling, then write down how many days that we assume it's going to take before you can go back on full duty, you know, and things like that. We didn't do ingrown toenails; no. But there were a lot of procedures, I just can't remember them all right now.

TS: Oh, sure. You don't have to tell me all of them. Just, kind of, get a feel for the kind of thing that you did. Was it real busy?

FF: Yes—

TS: It was pretty busy?

FF: —because everybody was trying to get a waiver for something or another. It was—or to just get out of PT or whatever, you know.

TS: Did you enjoy your job?

FF: I loved it, I loved it.

TS: What was your favorite part about it besides getting out of these other duties? [chuckles]

FF: Talking to the people at the appointment desk at the main hospital. I would call—[noise in the background]

TS: Phone again?

FF: Yes.

TS: Alright.

[recording paused]

TS: Okay, we had to take a short break there for a little phone ringing and things. So, was talking about your favorite things that you liked. What about—is there anything that you—oh, actually you were telling me a story about how—what you liked best; what was your favorite thing. You didn't actually finish that.

FF: Oh, okay. I liked talking to the people at the appointment center at the hospital. They went back and told my Sergeant First Class that I was the best supportment clerk they had spoken to. I had all the information. I didn't get anything mixed up, and this that and the other, and to please keep me. That made me feel so good. And then, he put me in for my Spec 4 and one day I came to work, they said, "Come on outside." I came outside—there was a little swamp right by the troop medical clinic. They grabbed my ankles and my hands and did the one, two, three heave ho and threw me into that swamp. They said—while I was up in the air they said, "When you come down don't make a lot of movement because then the alligator will get you." I was so mad and I started screaming and hollering and he said, "Stand up."

I said, "What do you mean 'stand up'?" I stood up, the water came to mid-thigh. But I was so panicky, you know.

TS: I would have been the same, I think.

FF: And then when I came out the water they gave me my Spec 4.

TS: Like initiation?

FF: Yes.

TS: The alligator part would have made me very nervous.

FF: They said—I am up in the air coming down, "When you come down make sure you don't make any waves or make any noise." [both laughing] But I loved it. It was like family there.

TS: Yes.

FF: It was really nice.

TS: How long were you there?

FF: I was there for about a year.

TS: About a year? Now, was there anything that you did not care for at that particular place you were stationed?

FF: Yes.

TS: Fort Stewart.

FF: At Fort Stewart there were a lot of swamps. I lived in the next town because I couldn't get a vacancy at first right outside the post. There was a dirt bridge that connected the front of the trailer park to the back where I lived and the alligators used to sunbathe on that dirt thing. I really didn't like that because the kids would go and play and you would tell them not to mess with the things, and this that and the other. It was just very bad space to be in.

TS: Yes, a lot of anxiety about it I would think.

FF: Yes.

TS: Yes, I wouldn't like the alligators either. That would be no fun. Now, how—you talked a little bit about how you got along with some of the people ,where you made the appointments for the hospital, they treated you with really good respect, had high—felt really highly of you.

FF: Yes.

TS: And now, you're—and your superior put you in for a promotion. So, how were your relations with your peers as well as your other supervisors? Did you have any conflicts that were—

FF: I didn't know them. I didn't know the people in the company.

TS: No?

FF: Because I was always at the troop medical center—medical clinic. The only time I knew they were in the company was when I looked and I saw it had the nomenclature of the company. "Oh, you're in—yes, okay."

TS: So, you were assigned to the company but to the clinic so you really didn't participate in any activities with your company.

FF: Of the company.

TS: Was that the whole year you were there?

FF: Yes.

TS: So—but—so, you had—Did you feel that you were treated fairly at this place?

FF: Yes, it was like family at the troop medical clinic, and Sergeant Benton, he took of his people. You saw how they took care of me when I got my Spec 4.

TS: I guess so, yes. [both chuckle] Now, did you have—did you have, like, a dream sheet that you put in that said where you wanted to go in the future—

FF: Yes.

TS: —when you first signed up?

FF: Yes, on my dream sheet—well, we called it “putting yourself on the levee”.

TS: Okay.

FF: On the levee I put down Africa or Turkey because that’s where I wanted to go. My name came up and so all my friends going to Alaska, Germany. I said, “I don’t even want to look. Schofield Barracks, Hawaii?!” [laughing] I was trying my best not to grin and laugh and gloat because all of them were going to these cold, snowy, you know, nowhere places and I got Schofield Barracks, Hawaii on the island of Oahu where Honolulu is. I said, “Oh, my goodness,” and that’s where I went. At first I was a little perturbed. I said, “Well, this ain’t nothing like no Africa or no Turkey. But then again, there’s nowhere like Hawaii either.” [both chuckle]

TS: That’s right. It’s not Alaska.

FF: No.

TS: It’s not Alaska. So, what year was this that you were going to Hawaii then?

FF: I got to Hawaii in ’80.

TS: Nineteen-eighty, okay. And so, did—were your daughters able to go with you Hawaii?

FF: Yes, every place I was able to take them I took them.

TS: Where did you live for your housing there?

FF: I lived on post finally because I had enough rank.

TS: Alright, and how was your housing on post?

FF: The housing was great. I had a three bedroom, two bath house with a laundry room, patio, sliding doors, and it was great. I even grew all kind of exotic plants in the front of my house. I just looked at the picture the other day; all the exotic plants. Oh gosh, it was fun.

TS: Can we talk a minute about, with your daughters, now what about what ages are they?

FF: By now, they are in, like, the last year of elementary school, and—yes. When we went there they were in the last year and they were in the sixth—sixth grade. But while we were there they were in the seventh and the eighth grade. So, they went to middle school while we were there.

TS: How was it for them, you know, as—so your—are you married at this time?

FF: I married once I—after I been there for a while, but no, I wasn't married when I first went there.

TS: In Hawaii?

FF: Yes.

TS: Okay. So, you're a single mom and you've got two young girls?

FF: Yes.

TS: And you've got a full time job?

FF: Yes.

TS: So, how do you handle things like daycare; those kinds of things?

FF: For one thing my sister came out to visit me. She came to stay for a month. She ended up staying a year. So, she was very helpful, and then after she left they were that much older where they were able to handle some lesser responsibility. So—because—"Mama, you can't pay a babysitter for us. We can get that money."

I said, "Well if you can do the job, then you can get the money. Ya'll can split the money." I said, "You watch her and you watch her," [chuckling] and they would tell on each other too.

TS: Would they?

FF: Yes, they would. Yes.

TS: Did you—did they go to the school, then, on the post; post school?

FF: Yes, they went to the—for elementary—they finished elementary on the post on the school.

TS: And then in middle school in Hawaii?

FF: In middle school they were bused off post.

TS: Okay.

FF: I believe it was down by Pearl City. I don't know if any of these ring any bells or anything.

TS: Not for me. I did not get stationed in Hawaii.

FF: Okay.

TS: [chuckling] But I'm glad you did, Francine.

FF: Thank you, me too.

TS: What—Raising a—so, I just, kind of —so the topic of having a couple of girls in the military, and at this time you were a single mom. Were there any hardships to it at all?

FF: Yes.

TS: What kind of things? [background noise]

FF: I had to worry about keeping those wolves off of them because even though they were, like, thirteen, fourteen, fifteen, those other troops all they saw was, you know, young, young, young. So, that was kind of hard for me to keep them off of them.

TS: How would you do it? What kind of things would come up?

FF: I talked to them and I also talked to the guys when I caught them, because I would have little parties over at my house sometimes, like, once a month. I looked and one of the guys in my company is looking at my daughter. "What are you looking at?" I said, "Did you know that child is only fourteen years old, and most importantly that's my daughter."
 "Oh, I'm sorry. I didn't know who she was," you know. [chuckling]
 I said, "Okay, well, you better act like you know," because they were always trying to hit on them. They'd go down to the PX [post exchange], to the movie, to the pool, or wherever. But we had a pretty close thing were people would keep an eye out because I got to know the lifeguard. So, if there was anything funny going on he would let me know, you know. So, it was okay.

Oh, there's one thing I did hate. By me being a single mother, when I got off from duty I would stop at the commissary to pick up a couple of things for dinner or whatever. So, there was one loaf of bread on the shelf. I'm in my—this is before the camouflage, in my pickle; my green olive, drab uniform. I reach over to grab the bread. So, this woman with pearls, and lipstick, and you know, done nails, she's reaching too. And so, I snatched the bread because I've already had a long day, right, since 6:00 [a.m.] something this morning. So, I put the bread in my cart and she looks at me. "You can't do that. My husband is a captain."

I said, "You ain't no damn captain. [laughs]"

So then, "What is your name?"

And I did like that [smacking sound].

TS: You covered it up.

FF: Yes. "What company are you in?"

"Why you need to know? I'll tell your husband but I ain't going to tell you," and I went on and bought the bread and left and I laughed all the way home not knowing if it was going to come back to bite me or not. [laughing]

TS: Did it?

FF: No.

TS: Okay.

FF: But see, I would have been nice on a nice day but a lot of times the way people come off on you is the way that you come back at them. "Oh, oh, I was going to get that. Oh my goodness, here you can have it, you know."

"You can't do that. My husband is a captain."

TS: So, the attitude?

FF: Yes.

TS: Yes. Did you see that very often with spouses of higher ranking—

FF: Yes. Well, not necessarily of higher ranking.

TS: No.

FF: Even of the enlisted because the blank of houses we lived on there were four houses; there were four enlisted. I think I was the youngest enlisted. I was on the end. Then they had somebody with twenty years in, somebody with ten. So, they were always watching—the wives of them three would keep their heads together and they were always watching my house because I was single.

I came home my daughter was crying. I said, "What's the matter with you?"
She said, "Mama, Miss So-and-so say that everybody husband be over at your house."

I said, "What?"

"Yes, she said that everybody husband be there."

I went [knocking sound]. I said, "Why did you tell my daughter that stupid stuff?"
I said, "As long as you don't see your husband coming out of there don't worry about it."

She screwed her face up and this that and the other. "Well, we're not used to having single people. This is for married people; people who have families."

I said, "I have two daughters. No, I do not have a husband and I don't want yours," you know, shoot. [chuckling] But yes, there was a little snippiness because they looked at me like somewhat of a novelty. They had to get things through their husband. I got things through me; on my own.

TS: So, they had—did you have—was there a lot of tension for that or what just like an incident and most of the time everybody got along?

FF: It was a little bit of tension.

TS: Yes?

FF: And then it would just pass over till the next thing came. Then that would just pass over because they could see that I wasn't going to let anything they said or did break me because I had a right to be there. Push come to a shove, they just a dependent. But I was the real deal and I am not going to let anybody move me like that.

TS: Right. Now, did you—you got to serve in Hawaii?

FF: Yes.

TS: Did you have any—we talked about you had some special duty assignments overseas?

FF: Yes.

TS: Some training? Okay. Do you want to tell us about that, because that—did that happen while you were in Hawaii?

FF: Yes.

TS: Okay.

FF: Back to back. One year I went with one company, Golf[?] Company, and the next year I went with my own company. It was a joint military exercise.

TS: Tell us where it was at.

FF: It was in Korea.

TS: Right.

FF: The first year—I hope I get this right because I keep inter—Camp Humphreys and Camp Red Cloud. I think Camp Humphreys was the first year and—

TS: That would have been like 1981?

FF: Yes, and this was—it consisted of R.O.K. soldiers because each one of us was assigned a R.O.K. soldier; that's Republic of Korea.

TS: Okay.

FF: We're assigned a R.O.K. soldier, and you know, we were supposed to go about our day with them shadowing us, or whatever, so they could see what we do or how we do the equipment or whatever our job was. Then the next day we would shadow them and whatever, whatever. We also had notches for army. There were several different branches of military; [U.S.] Marines, the [U.S.] Air Force, that's all I can think of. And I think their navy or marines were there too. It was very educational. In the beginning, there was a communications problem, but you'd be surprised, hand signals and gestures go a long way.

TS: Do they? Now, what—did you have the same—were you still a medic at this time?

FF: I was still a medic and a communications specialist.

TS: Okay. Was that the kind of work you were doing when you went over to Korea?

FF: No, when I went over to Korea the first time they had me working in the orderly room; in the office. I wrote down all the different jobs I had while I was there.

TS: Oh, okay.

FF: They had me working in the office. So, I was a company clerk.

TS: Did you like doing that?

FF: Kind of sort of.

TS: What was likable about it?

FF: What was likeable about it? I get to sit in the office all day. I hear all kind of scuttlebutt going around. I would be typing up papers. I get to have a regular lunch hour. I didn't have to do PT. What else?

TS: Did you have good supervisors?

FF: Most, yes. I didn't answer to anybody except for the CO and the XO.

TS: And they treated you well and fairly?

FF: The Commanding Officer and the Executive Officer, those were the only two that I had to answer to. I made sure they were okay and they made sure I was okay.

TS: [chuckling] There you go. Now, did you—was there anything—is this—you are the clerk—is this in Hawaii or is this Korea or both?

FF: No, this was for the Korea exercise.

TS: Okay. So, that's what your role was at that time. Tell me about Korea. What was it like? What was your experience there? How long were you there?

FF: It was cold.

TS: It was cold?

FF: One time I was there for forty-five days, and the next time I was there it was either ninety or sixty days.

TS: Okay.

FF: I don't remember exactly. It was cold, because we ran PT in the morning and I was running it, and then all of a sudden I started getting pains right in the upper chest. So, I fell out the formation, went to sick call, and they said that I was—the tip—the top of my lung was freezing. I said, "How's that?"
 He said, "When you were running PT did you have your mouth open or close?"
 I said, "I had my mouth open so I could get more air." [chuckles]
 He said, "No." He said, "The air is too cold here. It doesn't have enough time to warm up before it gets here."

TS: So, keep it closed and breathe through your nose?

FF: And breathe through your nose. I said, "It's either breathe through my nose and walk or breathe through my mouth and run because I can't do it both ways." But when they—I never heard anybody say freezing your lungs.

TS: What did you do?

FF: I tried to breathe through my nose.

TS: How did that work out?

FF: It was okay. I wasn't running very fast.

TS: Okay.

FF: But I didn't fall out either.

TS: There you go. There you go.

FF: Okay. What else? I found out—I've always liked exotic foods, but oh gosh, have you ever heard of Kimchee?

TS: Oh, yes.

FF: I love it. I love it and they have some yaki mondu [Korean egg roll]. They have all kinds of good food over there. I know one day—one night my girlfriend and I, we left the post. We had to leave in pairs when we went into to the village. So, we went to the village, smelt this good food; we looked. "Oh, look at them big chicken legs. Wow, man." Now, it didn't dawn on us because we had been drinking. It didn't dawn on us that all the chickens we saw were about as tall as your hand, you know, and about that big. They must have been keeping the goods ones for dinner. So, we went on and ordered us a chicken leg a piece. This is the drumstick and that's the thigh.

TS: Okay, you're measuring it. Pretty big sizes she's showing.

FF: Yes, so we went on and got the chicken legs. So, we sitting on the curb—well, they don't have curbs, but sitting, you know, kind of on the thing that divides the street from the walkway, eating it. So, one of the guys who's stationed there came by. He said, "What are ya'll eating?"

"We got some chicken. You want a piece?"

He said, "No." He said, "I hate to tell you this." He said, "Ya'll over here for that training exercise?"

We said, "Yes."

He said, "You're not eating chicken."

We said, "What are we eating?"

He said, "I'm not sure. It's either a monkey, dog, or cat." We stopped eating and looked at the each other. Then we looked at the meat. Well, it tastes good and we wanted to finish eating it. [both chuckle]

TS: That didn't stop you?

FF: No, because we had to have—what was that? Soju [distilled beverage native to Korea]; sweet potato kind of liquor or something. That stuff was some kind of good. But anyhow, we went on and ate it.

TS: Is that were you got the bulgogi?

FF: Oh yes, with the bull—with the beef.

TS: Yes.

FF: Yes, because it's bulgogi, mugogi—

TS: What's the mugogi? Something different?

FF: Yes, it's—I don't know if mugogi—mugogi—I don't if that's dog or if that's cat but it was three of them; bulgogi, mulgogi and there was another gogi.

TS: Okay.

FF: But I can't remember. I don't know kind of gogi we had, but the way they had fried it and put all them seasonings on it, it was good so we went on and ate it. Then we decided we weren't going to eat anymore in the village. We were only going to eat at the mess hall.

TS: Yes?

FF: So we could identify—

TS: What it was?

FF: —what we were eating.

TS: Well, you still had Korean food that you could eat in the mess hall?

FF: Not really.

TS: No, I was going to say it was more Americanized food, isn't it? But you got your taste.

FF: Yes, yes, I still don't know and I don't think I ever want to know.

TS: What exactly it was, but it was good, right?

FF: Yes. They had fried it up. It was so crispy and golden brown and so much meat.

TS: Did you get to do any other extracurricular type activities?

FF: Not the first time I was in Korea. The second time I was in Korea—I've always liked M*A*S*H [television series that ran from 1972 to 1983], and I, you know—I just love it. They were playing the last episode and we were there in Korea.

TS: When they actually had it playing on TV?

FF: They had gotten it from the satellite.

TS: I see.

FF: One of the guys that lived in the Quonset hut, I think he was an E-6 because he lived by himself, had his TV right up in the middle. We were all like this, all the way around the TV watching that last episode. And what made it so poignant, we were in Korea watching the last episode of M*A*S*H that was supposedly being shot in Korea.

TS: Right.

TS: You know? It was amazing. It was fun.

TS: That's a pretty neat experience to have.

FF: Yes.

TS: Now, did you have in Korea—so, you're there for a few months, maybe, total. Did you go out on the economy for other things at all besides the food that you did that one night?

FF: Yes, Members Only jackets. A lot of them were made over there. At this time, they were really hot; Members Only. So, I got my daughters some Members Only jackets, two or three a piece with their name engraved over it because they did a lot of engraving. Got me a couple of sweat suits with my name and my nickname engraved on it.

TS: What was your nickname?

FF: Hollywood.

TS: Hollywood? How did you get that nickname?

FF: Well, it started in Texas. They had the dogs run through the barracks looking for drugs and, you know, whatever. As soon as they said everybody out, I grabbed my blankets and put in under my arm. I grabbed my drink, grabbed a book, got my sunglasses, went outside and did like this and put the blanket down, and while they were out there—

TS: [chuckling] Francine's kicking back here and—

FF: They said, “Dag, you act like you ought to be in Hollywood or something,” and it stuck. Because everybody is panicking, or they want to get back in, or you know, they’re anxious, like you said.

TS: Are they worried about what’s going to happen during the inspection? Yes?

FF: I said, “Well, might as well, you know, make the best of it; do the best that I can.” Shoot.

TS: Was there—the time you were in, did you see a lot of drug issues?

FF: Yes.

TS: Did you? Was it just something that was pretty common at that time?

FF: Yes, especially when people were frustrated with the system and they couldn’t seem to get anyone to hear them or to do anything about what was going on.

TS: So, it was like something that was easy to obtain?

FF: Yes.

TS: Was it?

FF: Even in Hawaii; even in Korean. I mean if you’re looking for something no matter where you go, if you are looking for it you can find it. Now, if you’re not looking for it you’re not going to find, but it’s been my experience everywhere I have gone they have had certain drugs readily available. Yes.

TS: Was that—because alcohol, I know, was pretty readily available too.

FF: Yes, and a whole lot of people suffer from a lot of alcohol—alcoholic issues because it is so readily available and it is cheap and it is legal. And it can take, you know, the cut off of a bad day. Buy a half a gallon, come home, every day have a couple shots off of it before you go to bed. Then you wake up in the morning, maybe have one or two before you start the new day. Then at lunch time come home, maybe have one, and then go back and finish the day out.

TS: Did you know many people that did it like that?

FF: Yes, closely. Either like that or something similar. They might have altered it a little bit, but just so they can keep on going. And it’s not so much, like, just military issues; a lot of them missed their family. You know, it could be anything. That was a quick—quick cure.

TS: Quick cure, like with your uncle in Vietnam.

FF: Because he said he wouldn't be able to get in another helicopter; another huey. But when he started doing that, he went on and got in it.

TS: Oh, I see. So, because the—he thought maybe he would have too much fear going in?

FF: He had too much fear going in.

TS: Did he?

FF: Because that was the closest he had come to death.

TS: Now, when you—when you were in—on this training exercise in Korea, did you have—obviously you had somebody take care of your girls.

FF: My sister.

TS: Oh, was that when your sister was there?

TS: Yes.

FF: For both times?

FF: No, the second time—what happened? I think my girlfriend—my girlfriend watched her. The one that I went to Korea with the first year, she didn't go the next time. That was my company so she watched my daughters for me because I had volunteered to go with her company because I wanted to see Korea.

TS: Right. Well, so you—you seem like you definitely enjoyed that in Korea, and so, was there anything overall in your time in the military that was particularly difficult physically?

FF: Physically? [pause] Not really, not really, because those little runs they had were baby boy runs. I used to just fall out for the hell of it.

TS: You used to fall out for the hell of it? What do you mean?

FF: Because I didn't feel like it.

TS: You didn't feel like running?

FF: Because I had been out partying all night until, like, 5:30 [a.m.]. Then we had to be in formation at 6:00 [a.m.] and I wasn't fault to do a whole lot of running.

TS: Did you have any kind of reprimand that you get for—

FF: Yes, they would make me come back that evening at 4 o'clock and do it.

TS: So, that's when you would have to do it? Better at 4:00 [p.m.] than at 5:30 in the morning or 6:00 [a.m.].

FF: I guess it depends on where your head is. But I had—I don't know if you are going to ask me about—you said physical; what about mental?

TS: Yes, mental. What about mental?

FF: Do you have that question?

TS: I do.

FF: Good. The most mental thing that happened, that gives me the most grief even to this day, is I was a victim of MST, military sexual trauma. There was this particular sergeant who had tried to become intimate with me two or three times and I kept, you know—you know how you try to be nice and let him know, you know, "It's nice you're interested but no, nothing's happening." But that wasn't good enough, and he also rode me like a horse. The more I told him no the more miserable he made my life.

TS: Was he, like, a direct supervisor?

FF: Yes. I was an E-5, he was an E-6. I was the squad leader in this platoon; his platoon. He was the platoon leader. He just made it so miserable for me; so miserable. I mean any dirty job he could think of he would either give to me or my squad, who—unfortunately they suffered because I wasn't trying to be intimate with him. He would always sneak up behind me and then when I turned around, you know, he'd be grinning. You know, this—this insidious thing. It made it just really bad. Now, he never actually put his hands on me because I think if he had I would have tried to kill him. But he just—he messed with my mind so much. It's hard to explain it; it's hard to explain it. But to this day I cannot have a relationship with a man because I just can't. I just can't, and it's really bothering me. I am going to see if I can talk to somebody up there about it because I don't want to be this way.

TS: Right.

FF: But I have this high startle reflex. If I don't hear you coming up behind me, then all of a sudden you are right there, then I automatically go into a fighting stance. I almost pushed my neighbor down the steps.

TS: Oh, because they ran up behind you? So, is there anything you've had any treatment for before? Not really.

FF: Yes, they have a couple of groups at the hospital, but the type of groups they're having they don't want you to talk about what actually happened. They want you to just use strategies to get around it and to live with it because it's not going anywhere unless you really work on it. Then I've heard of this other clinic where you talk about it, and then once you talk about it you get feedback. Then once you get feedback you see actual scenarios, or whatever, or this or that, where it's like a progressive type thing instead of just a stationary type thing.

TS: So, it will help you make progress?

FF: Yes, but at this point I don't want to be bothered. Lord knows I've had five husbands, so you know, I don't think that says anything. But it's just that he just made my life so miserable; so miserable, and then that smile. Then when I would complain to the first sergeant he would be standing beside me—

TS: Smiling too?

FF: Yes, and then the first sergeant would dismiss me and they'd be in there laughing.

TS: So, you didn't feel like you have any recourse?

FF: No, no.

TS: Did you try to get out of that squadron—that platoon I mean?

FF: I had already gotten out of the first one, because at first I was in Headquarters Company. I had a disagreement with my captain and the next day I came I was in B-Company and that's the company they were in. I thought I was a big girl; I could hang. Because it seemed like the more he did it the more I was determined, like I told you in the past, not to let it bother me or whatever, but it just got so bad. Like, I had a tattoo on my leg and when we ran PT we wore shorts. "Yes. I'm going to have to water that tattoo," or you know, just little sneaky, smurky stuff when nobody was around or directly in my ear. Or you know, so I couldn't prove anything.

TS: Right. So, you felt like he had all this power over you and you didn't have any recourse.

FF: No recourse, no recourse. I was so glad to see him go I think I would have ran around the quad naked. I was so happy to see—when he left, I tell you.

TS: How long did you have to put up with that?

FF: I had to put up with him for about a year, year and a half.

TS: That's a long time.

FF: And that's why I'm still having trouble now. I just don't want to—and the guys are like—you know, ones in relate—past—you know, relationships of late, “Well, I'll never do this,” or, “I'll never do this,” or “I'll never do this.” Then they do it. But—and about that military sexual trauma, I was raped by four guys—five guys. One held each wrist and each ankle and one was the participant at the time. So, I kept moving and squirming and, you know, whatever, but I think I got over that pretty good but I cannot stand for anybody to—

TS: Grab your wrists?

FF: Grab my wrist and to, like, hold it down.

TS: That's not a common thing people to do, is it?

FF: No.

TS: Okay.

FF: No, so—well, I guess some people in the heat of the moment they might do it. I don't know. But this person I was really close to—so, I told them—I said, “Don't grab my wrist,” you know. “Everything is fine just don't grab my wrist.”
“Why? What's going to happen?” [banging sound]

TS: Then he grabs it?

FF: And I knocked him half way across the room. I couldn't help it. It wasn't anything that I had thought about doing.

TS: Right.

FF: It was just instinct. So, who would do something purposely to somebody if you know it's going to cause them a problem.

TS: Right.

FF: But that's enough of that.

TS: Well, with—do you mind if I just ask you one more question about the rape? Did you report it? No? Same sort of situation where you felt—

FF: It was four of them.

TS: Yes?

FF: Yes. Four, or was it five? Five of them. So, who's going to believe one of me?

TS: Yes.

FF: Plus, I was someplace I shouldn't have been.

TS: Yes?

FF: I missed curfew.

TS: So, you thought you would get in trouble for that, too, and that would be a worst punishment?

FF: Yes. If you weren't out there, then—you know.

TS: Well, you—you know, today there is a lot in the news still about women having sexually—being abused in the military.

FF: Yes.

TS: Do you think that it's something that's not addressed properly by the chain of command?

FF: Excuse me. I think that depending on your chain of command, if you have a fair chain of command or people who are about the military, then possibly you can get something done, but if you are dealing with best buddies; they play golf every Saturday; they go over each other's house for dinner, then you're not going to get anything done. And matter of fact, they are going to turn it around so that it will be on you.

TS: Is it people within your own unit that are—or is outside your unit or does it matter?

FF: It doesn't matter.

TS: It doesn't matter.

FF: It doesn't matter. A violation is a violation.

TS: Yes.

FF: The violation from that sergeant was even more of a violation because he didn't—he abused his rank, you know, and you shouldn't do that. You don't do that to a—

TS: Right, and his commanding officer knew about it, too, right?

FF: I was directly under him. I couldn't report it to him. Then go to the first sergeant, him and the first sergeant are ace cum bum buddies.

TS: Right.

FF: I'm putting you to sleep baby.

TS: Oh no, you're not. I'm just making sure my recorder it working. It's all right.

FF: Okay.

TS: Well, one other issue that comes up sometimes is: so, you've talked about some issues of being a woman. What about as an African-American in the military? Do you have—were there racial issues, too, that might have come up? Yes? You're nodding.

FF: Yes, especially when I first came in but even towards the end of my time in, because we would get people—have privates from Tennessee, Alabama, and Georgia. By me being the squad leader, number one, ain't no woman going to tell them what to do, number two, ain't no black woman going to tell them what to do. I've run into some pretty hairy situations where I had to really pull my rank because some of those guys—we were given a detail for digging a trench. So, we went out there, I told them straight up—I said, "The sooner we get this done, I'm going to let ya'll go for the rest of the day. If we all work together it shouldn't take any time." I even helped with a shovel. I didn't have to. I could have stood there and watched them. I helped. So, I look; two of them sitting under a tree. [chuckling] So, I walked over there. I said, "Excuse me, aren't you a part of this detail?"

"Yes, but I ain't—" you know, "I ain't doing what no woman say." Or how did he say it? "A black woman"? Well, anyhow, he refused to do it.

So I said, "Okay." I looked on his shirt, got his name, wrote it down, wrote the other guy's name down. I said, "So, you're not going to do it?" I said, "You do know that I'm squad leader, right?" I said, "Okay, because we're going to finish in a few minutes and then we're all going to be off for the rest of the day. Your ass going to be in jail." [chuckling] They looked at me. I said, "Because I'm writing both of you all up." I said, "It's not about a woman telling you what to do, a black or whatever. It's about these stripes telling you what to do. I even got out there to help. I didn't have to help. But you're not going to disrespect me or make it—" you know, "put all that work on the other guys. No, no, no, no." So, I reported both of them. One got extra duty. I don't remember what the other one got. But I told them, "No." And it goes back to, [coughs] excuse me, that he didn't want to do what a woman told him to do, and especially not a black woman. I think we, kind of, got that taken care of.

TS: Yes? Did they stay in your squad?

FF: What?

TS: Did they stay as part of your work duty or was that—that was just an isolated—

FF: That was a isolated.

TS: —work thing. Was that very—

FF: Because they saw how they reacted to me they put them in another squad.

TS: I see. Was it an isolated incident or were those things common?

FF: That was an isolated incident. We had other little things that happened but it wasn't that common.

TS: That was pretty blatant, right?

FF: Yes.

TS: That was pretty much in your face.

FF: Yes, because most of the time people tried to be a little undercover with it. They try to—

TS: More subtle?

FF: Yes.

TS: But still—

FF: So, you can't get them with it but you—they get the point across.

TS: With those kind of things did you see any change over time with either—as a black woman in the military, in the army, what were your relationship with your peers and people that you supervised? Did they get better or did they stay about the same for the time you were in?

FF: They stayed about the same.

TS: Yes?

FF: They stayed about the same.

TS: Do you think the attitude towards women changed at all?

FF: I think that stayed about the same, too, because a lot of those guys whether they are from Alabama or Alaska have a problem with taking orders from a woman.

TS: This is in the late seventies, early eighties?

FF: Yes.

TS: Yes.

FF: I know they told me way back you got three strikes against you: you're a woman, you're black, and you're in this man's army.

TS: What did you think about that at the time?

FF: "I'm in it now. [chuckling] Yes, thanks." But I went on and dealt with it and it wasn't that bad. I mean, it's a—it's almost like a barometer of what's happening outside the service.

TS: Yes, I was just going to say: do you think it would have been any different in a civilian world for you.

FF: No.

TS: Has it been? Because you've been out in the civilian world longer than you were in the military.

FF: True. No.

TS: Do you have a chain of command you can go through in the civilian world to address those kind of things?

FF: Nine-one-one. [both chuckle] Shoot.

TS: That's right.

FF: Nine-one-one or 9MM; nine millimeter. [unclear] choice.

TS: Do you feel overall, then, that the military treated you fairly as far as pay, promotions, job opportunities, assignments; things like that?

FF: Yes, I do.

TS: Yes?

FF: I do.

TS: Do you think that it depended on who the type of person that was maybe in a leadership position of a particular platoon? Did that make a difference in how the whole attitude might have been?

FF: On how what whole attitude might have been?

TS: For an attitude about how you were treated. Just in general. Not even as a woman or as a black woman, but just as a soldier in the army.

FF: Okay, that same sergeant that rode me like a horse, Staff Sergeant Isaiah Stout. Everybody in the whole platoon, nobody could stand him; nobody. But he had his little favorites that we would get the extra picks, you know. But yes, nobody in the whole platoon could stand the man.

TS: So, it did matter who was in charge?

FF: Yes, so it wasn't just me and my issue. Nobody in the whole could stand him.

TS: Now, was there anybody who you'd say was like a mentor to you; who you really looked up to?

FF: Yes, Sergeant First Class James Fenton from the Troop Medical Clinic at Fort Stewart.

TS: What was it about him that was so—

FF: He was just, he was fair. He looked beyond color, sex, rank and what was fair was fair.

TS: So, being treated fairly was sometimes hard to come by? Sometimes you had a good person in there? Now, did you ever—were you ever in a position where you could mentor somebody else?

FF: I tried a couple of times, like, when a new girl would come to one of my units. I was in maintenance units twice and sometimes they'll pair you up.

TS: With somebody new?

FF: With a newbie, yes. But you can't—it's hard to do when somebody knows everything already. You can't teach them or tell them anything.

TS: They have to be receptive.

FF: And then I'm not going to tell you what it took me four years to find out. You've got to find out for yourself. [laughs]

TS: Some of that you've got to do yourself.

FF: Yes, yes. "Francine, show her how you have a method to get with the patient's about this that and the other." Nobody tell me. I had to find out the hard way.

TS: Well, why don't—you got the list of jobs you did. Why don't you tell me about that?

FF: Oh, okay. These are some—a list—I’m going to give you my two jobs I was trained for. Then I’m going to list everything that I did. Okay, I was trained as a medic.

TS: Did you work as a medic at all?

FF: Yes, at the troop medical clinic and even in Hawaii. Whenever we deployed they would call me in from the motor pool, from supply or wherever so I could go and give shots for deployment.

TS: I see.

FF: Okay, and the communications. [clears throat] Alright, now, I was a reporter for the DISCOM [Division Support Command] newsletter.

TS: What’s DISCOM?

FF: I’m not sure about the acronym.

TS: That’s okay.

FF: But it’s something has to do with headquarters.

TS: Okay.

FF: The CO made me his driver.

TS: How long did you do that?

FF: For about a year.

TS: Did you like that?

FF: Not in the beginning, but toward the end I loved it because I was exempt from duty. [both laugh]

TS: Any job where you could be exempt from duty you loved, okay. [both laugh]

FF: Yes.

TS: I got that now.

FF: Okay, supply sergeant.

TS: How was that?

FF: That was okay except for the people with ranks greater than myself would demand I give them things and then I'd have to sign for things, you know.

TS: They wanted things to disappear?

FF: Yes.

TS: Okay.

FF: And be on me, the PLL [prescribe load list] clerk.

TS: What is that, PLL?

FF: Yes.

TS: Okay.

FF: I would work, like, out of the motor pool ordering the, [clears throat] excuse me, ordering the mechanical parts for the jeeps, the deuce and a halves and stuff like that.

TS: Yes.

FF: Ambulance driver.

TS: Oh, yes? That doesn't sound all that—that would be—How was that?

FF: It was okay except the ambulance I was—this was in Korea, except the ambulance I was following I lost and I was lost in Korea.

TS: Oh.

FF: So, I just turned around—

TS: Were you by yourself?

FF: Yes.

TS: Okay.

FF: I was supposed to have an assistant driver but they weren't ready. So, I turned around and went back the way I came. Oh, [unclear] squad leader. But that's it. I said, "Get out of here."

TS: [chuckles] What did you do for the communications?

FF: They would have me do maintenance on the radios. Remember the radios with the cords?

TS: Yes, I do.

FF: Okay, the radios with the cords; do maintenance on them, adjust the frequencies. What else? Roll out all that cotton picking cable.

TS: The cable, oh goodness.

FF: Every time the infantry—I went out to the field once a month, every time the infantry went I went two days priors; two days early.

TS: Rolling?

FF: Rolling out the wire, attaching all the connections.

TS: Francine, I need you on camera because you are dramatizing it very well.

FF: [laughing] Thank you.

TS: She's doing the rolling, and the lifting, and the placing. It's very—

FF: I did it so much. Then after they leave I had to stay another day or two to—

TS: —bring it back down.

FF: —take everything down. I said get out of here. So, that was for the communications, but basically to maintain that crummy World War II equipment.

TS: It wasn't being modernized at that time.

FF: Because now, the guy—I talked to a guy. He said, "You would not believe the communications that they have now." He said, "You would not believe." He said, "They don't even have these M.O.S.'s [military occupational specialty] anymore.

TS: A completely different world, I'm sure.

FF: Yes.

TS: You were in pretty much the whole time that Ronald Reagan was President. What did you think of him?

FF: That as long as he had Nancy he was okay.

TS: Yes? What do you mean by that?

FF: That sometimes I might have been suspect of something he might have said, but by her being by his side or being there for him or speaking for him kind of made it okay.

TS: So, you think that she took an edge off of him or something in some way?

FF: I think that she was a good co-President.

TS: Okay, okay. What did you think about the—like, [President James Earl, Jr.] Jimmy Carter who came before him?

FF: I don't know. I don't think too much about Jimmy Carter.

TS: Is there anybody that you can say, like, "I really look up to this particular person that was either President or in a leadership position"? [pause] None?

FF: Because they're all men and they're all fallible.

TS: Yes. What about Colin Powell?

FF: He was okay. He was okay.

TS: There's—Did you have any kind of—like when you were going out and seeing movies and things like that. On the base did you that? Were you able to go the—you said you went to the club?

FF: Yes.

TS: Did you guys have bowling alleys and movie theaters?

FF: Yes.

TS: Did you do that very often or was there anything fun that you liked to do in that regard?

FF: I liked to go the PX.

TS: So you can steal bread from women?

FF: No, that was the commissary. [both laughing]

TS: Oh, the commissary. I'm sorry, my mistake.

FF: Okay, let's see.

TS: So, you like to go shopping.

FF: Well, my daughters loved to go to the bowling, to the movies, and to the pool. I went to the pool.

TS: The pool?

FF: I liked going to the pool because the head lifeguard was a friend of mine.

TS: Yes, you said that he—Was it a man?

FF: Yes.

TS: He looked after your girls?

FF: He looked after me too. [chuckles]

TS: Well, that's good too. That's good. Well, you were in when there were a lot of things going on in the army, like, in—the Iran Hostage Crisis ran through the time you were there. Do you remember? When—In Iran when the Iranians seized the [American] Embassy in 1979?

FF: Wow.

TS: And then near the end of your regular army service they had the Beirut bombing of the Marine [Corps] barracks—

FF: Okay.

TS: —in Lebanon; in Beirut.

FF: Okay.

TS: Do you remember that?

FF: Yes. Yes.

TS: Then we had the invasion of Granada.

FF: I thought I was going to have to go.

TS: Yes?

FF: But I think I got out a month or two before they went. No, before it was over. It only lasted [snap of finger] that long.

TS: Is that the one before—you would have been in a little bit longer for Granada, but Panama—you mean Panama? That was '89 in Panama.

FF: No, I'm talking Granada. Wasn't that '83, '84?

TS: Yes, it was '83.

FF: I thought I was going to have to go there.

TS: Oh, okay, but it was over before you had to? I see. It was too quick. What job were you doing at the time that you thought you'd have to go for that one?

FF: I thought I would have to go to support my company.

TS: But what job was it that you doing at that time?

FF: Let's see, what was the last job I did? Was it supply? I think it was Supply Sergeant.

TS: So, you got out—you went—you were in the regular army then until 1983. Yes, you said—I see now what you were saying. So, right around the time that women started to go into combat operations. So, you got out of the army. What made you—and you went into the Reserve—what made you decide to get out of the regular army?

FF: I listened to my current husband. I had gotten married within a year before that date. He got busted from a Spec-4 to a PV—PV1 [Private E-1]. He and I were arguing in front of the commissary and this captain came up and told him, "You can't talk to her like that. She's a non-commissioned officer."

He told the captain, "This is my wife. I will talk to her any way I want to."

And the captain says, "Not as long as she's in uniform you won't." He got very, very upset, and he decided he was getting out because he had lost all that rank. He kept needling me to get out and like a dummy I went for the okey doke.

TS: Yes? You sound like you don't—you kind of wished you hadn't done that.

FF: I wished I hadn't done it. I tell you because I wouldn't be in the situation I'm in now. If the wind blows this way, you know, everything could be over for me tomorrow. If it blows this way, okay, you got tomorrow, you know, the next day. It's just the uncertainty. But if I had stayed in I would have had my—they couldn't have taken my retirement from me. But no, because if I can make it ten years, I can make it twenty. And you know how I try not to do no PT. [both laugh]

TS: That's right.

FF: Shoot, I'll do it if I have to but I'm going to give it a good ole school girl try.

TS: Yes.

FF: Shoot.

TS: Well, did you enjoy the army?

FF: I loved it.

TS: Yes?

FF: I would never had a chance to—I've even been to Japan.

TS: Did you go on, like, vacation there or temporary duty?

FF: No, coming back from Korea.

TS: Okay.

FF: We fueled there but they wouldn't let us get off the plane.

TS: Oh, you landed in Japan. [chuckling]

FF: We flew parallel to Mount Fuji; parallel. And I did touch down.

TS: Yes.

FF: I couldn't get off the plane.

TS: Your feet were on the ground but the plane—the plane was on the ground. I got it.

FF: Yes. I tell you.

TS: Now what about—things have changed in many different ways and one is how last year they repealed the “Don't Ask, Don't Tell”.

FF: Yes. Yes.

TS: Now—So, when you were in they didn't even have “Don't Ask, Don't Tell.”

FF: And there were plenty of gay people.

TS: Yes? What were your thoughts on that at the time?

FF: What? That there were gays in there? I don't have a problem with it, as long—

TS: At the time you were in did you?

FF: No.

TS: No.

FF: A matter of fact, when I was in basic training on bivouac my best friend was gay. I didn't know it at the time. I had a cold; I had just got out of the hospital with pneumonia. She would not let me come out that pup tent to do my guard duty. She put on the hood and put it everything down like that to cover—to mask her face and walked my guard duty that night because I was so sick. Then about eight months later she wrote me a letter to my mama's house. "You might not like me after I tell you this, but Francine I'm gay."

I threw the paper down, called her in Sacramento. I said, "Anne? Anne, what? I mean, what difference does it make. You never approached me. You never looked at me sideways. You never made me uncomfortable. When I was in there dying, I couldn't even breathe, you pulled my guard duty in pouring rain." I said, "Uh uh." Said, "You going to have to come up with something better than that for me not to be your friend."

TS: How long did—how long had you known each other before she told you?

FF: About six to eight months.

TS: Yes, but she sent the letter to your mom's house so it wouldn't go through the regular army mail or something?

FF: No, I don't know about that, but she sent it to my mom's house because I don't think she knew where I was stationed.

TS: Oh, because you weren't stationed together anymore? I see. So, you think that the repeal was a good thing, then, that happened?

FF: I don't think it should have been an issue because people just like people with different religions want to serve their country; different faiths. Why can't people with different sexual preferences serve their country? What the—we're getting away from the main thing here which is serving the country. You know? You're all in the bedroom and under the bed and all that. That's irrelevant. Can you shoot a M-16? [chuckling] That's what I want to know. How far can you throw a grenade? Shoot.

TS: Yes, so then the other issue is with women in combat; that's really changed. What do you think about that? Is there any position that a woman should not be able to hold?

FF: No, if she's qualified. And I am glad. I am so glad because when I was in I felt like that was the last wall.

TS: Yes?

FF: That that was the last wall, because women were automatically exempt from battleground—from battle.

TS: Because, like, your experiences as a medic where you weren't—

FF: Yes, and then I'm looking at it like it's okay back when Napoleon was around you fought on a block of a field. You went this way, they came that way, and that was it. But now things are guerilla warfare style. The women can be way back here, and they can drop something way back there or whatever. You know, you've got to be prepared. You've got to be prepared. You've got to be ready. Just like they taught the cooks how to shoot, need to make sure everybody know how to shoot and what to do in case something happens.

TS: So, training is pretty key for that, you think?

FF: Yes, and if the woman is qualified I believe, then, she's the person for the job.

TS: Right, right. Now, you—so, you got out in 19—

FF: Eight-seven.

TS: Eighty-seven; you were in the Reserves up until then. How was life adjusting to outside the military?

FF: It was a trip because I didn't have that camaraderie, because with my buddies it was us against them.

TS: In the army, you mean?

FF: Yes, that camaraderie. We stuck together. We looked out for each other. We took care of each other. But then to come out into civilian—to come out into the civilian world, you better keep moving because everybody trying to stick you in the knife with—stick you in the back with a knife or stick you in the chest; you better keep it moving, you know. Ain't nobody trying to watch out for nobody but themselves. You know, people'll knock you down, you know, to—I tell you. But that's the one thing I miss more than anything; the camaraderie.

TS: Some people say there's a sense of being in a family.

FF: Yes, we were. In Hawaii, all of our families were back here in the continental United States. Which means anywhere from four to maybe eight thousand miles away. So, we were family. We had to make—we were family to each other. The thing about it, sometimes it was like we even had roles. By me being the oldest I'm like the mother, you know, and this one being young and just coming she's like the baby and these are our bad sons. It wasn't written or anything but it was like it—it was a family.

TS: Right, right. And you have—sometimes you discipline.

FF: Yes.

TS: And sometimes you have fun.

FF: Yes, yes. You can't come over to my house anymore if you are going to eat like a hog, you know, or whatever the case may be.

TS: Right, there are certain rules you have to—right. Well, you were in the army and in non-traditional fields, like, when you were in the mech—was it the mechanics?

FF: Yes, the Maintenance Battalion.

TS: Maintenance Battalion. That is really non-traditional. Where there very many women?

FF: When I worked in the motor pool and the supply room, no.

TS: There weren't very many women? Do you feel like you were a trail blazer at that time?

FF: Yes.

TS: Yes?

FF: Yes.

TS: Did you ever feel as though if you couldn't handle it then it would be a reflection on all women if you failed, or even all black women? No? Just you?

FF: Just me.

TS: But do you think that the perception was that if you—

FF: I think the perception for me was they would try to use it like that, but in my reality it would just be my failure or my defeat or my—

TS: Victory?

FF: Thank You.

TS: Achievement. Do you think it was the same for men though?

FF: No.

TS: How—

FF: Because it was so many of them and they just—you know, a dime a dozen. [chuckling]

TS: Well, if you're a woman and you go into the motor pool—

FF: Yes.

TS: —and the expectations for you to do the job are what?

FF: Much higher.

TS: And if you're a man and you go to the motor pool what's the expectation?

FF: "That knucklehead'll come around." Yes, and—because we would go in there, they would tell me to go get the part, and then they'd be doing like this and elbowing each other. "[mumbling]." Then I'd come back with the part. "Dang, that's the right part. How did you know?" Because they didn't think that I would be able to get the right part, or—

TS: Right, they didn't think that you could actually perform the job.

FF: Yes.

TS: So, when you did it was like, "Wow, what are you—" Yes, that's interesting. Have you used your veteran's benefits?

FF: Yes.

TS: Which ones have you been able to use?

FF: I've been able to use my clinic visits, my doctor's visits.

TS: So, the VA; you've had some experiences?

FF: I've been to the Emergency Room a couple of times.

TS: Have you ever gone back and used any of your educational benefits?

FF: I came in under the Montgomery G.I. Bill and I think that was like a 50/50 or something. I'm not sure how it was, but no, I didn't—

TS: You weren't able to use any of that. How about for purchasing a house; that part of the G.I. Bill?

FF: I still have my certificates.

TS: Do you?

FF: I got two certificates. I don't know. I don't have—now, all I have to do—

TS: We're doing the hand movement for money, can you hear it? There you go.

FF: Now, if I just had to give them my certificates that would be great. I would have a house. But I believe you have to have some money to back it up. [chuckles] The certificates are green.

TS: Can't turn that into cash though, can you?

FF: No.

TS: Do you think that—well, and also the post-traumatic stress disorder has been in the news too. Do you have any thoughts on that?

FF: I have that too. I just have so many labels. I look like an old piece of luggage with stamps everywhere. What do I think about post-traumatic stress?

TS: There is a lot in the news today with the men and women coming back from the Iraq and Afghanistan Wars.

FF: I would guess so. I would guess so.

TS: Did your uncle have, do you think, PTSD when he came back from Vietnam?

FF: It wasn't a thing then, but I would think that it was.

TS: Yes?

FF: That he did have it because after that he could no longer function unless he was high out of his mind, because that's how he self-medicated. But as far as the PTSD, yes, yes. I'm just glad they're finally putting a name on it; putting a face on it, because look all those years it took them to put a face on Agent Orange. You know—I mean, the stuff was just happening to beat the band, and they refused to acknowledge it. Finally, now they're acknowledging it. Now they are acknowledging this. But at the suicide rate, have you seen that; the suicide rate of these guys coming back or still over there? The mind can only take much; so damn much.

TS: Do you think your life has been different because you went into the military; into the army?

FF: Yes.

TS: How?

FF: It probably kept me out of a lot of situations and a lot of people that didn't mean me any good if I had stayed home; if I had not gone in. Because when I came back, those same people weren't doing very well.

TS: Now, if your daughters had wanted to go into the military what would you have said?

FF: I would have encouraged it. One of my granddaughters wanted to go but she just never saw it through.

TS: Yes? What would you say—what kind of advice would you give to a boy or a girl that might want to—young man or a young woman?

FF: Go in and make the best of it that you can. There's going to be a lot of things you don't like. There's going to be a lot of things that you love. But you've got to go in and handle it. You can't let it handle you. Might be surprised; turn into a lifer. [chuckles]

TS: Do you think there's any misconceptions that the public has about the military or the people who join the military?

FF: Yes, yes.

TS: What kind of misconceptions do you think they have?

FF: That we're not good for anything else. [pause] That's all I can think of right now.

TS: Yes? Well, when I came to your—when I came to your door I saw you have sign for a veteran; you have a flag emblem on there and a few other things. This question is on here but I've been wondering what you'd say: What does patriotism mean to you?

FF: Honor; honor. I honor my country. May not be perfect. It may not be the best. But it's my country. So many people have shed their blood, sweat, and tears to try to make this a decent place to live that I'm not going to just stand by and let somebody, some outsider, come over here and try to take over. This is my country, right or wrong.

TS: I don't have any other formal questions, but is there anything that we haven't talked about that you might want to add to the discussion we've had today?

FF: No.

TS: Nothing you want to tell anybody out there that might be reading or listening to your transcripts.

FF: Nope.

TS: Think we might have covered it all?

FF: Yes. [both chuckle]

TS: Well, Francine, thank you so much—

FF: Okay sweetie.

TS: —for letting me come into your home today.

FF: Yes.

[End of Interview]