WOMEN VETERANS HISTORICAL PROJECT

ORAL HISTORY COLLECTION

INTERVIEWEE: Linda Caulder Smith

INTERVIEWER: Therese Strohmer

DATE: March 11, 2015

[Begin Interview]

TS: Today is March 11, 2015. My name is Therese Strohmer and I'm at the Bladen County Library in Elizabethtown, North Carolina, with Linda Smith to conduct an oral history interview for the Women Veterans Historical Collection at the University of North Carolina of Greensboro. Linda, could you state your name the way that you'd like it to read on your collection.

LS: Linda Caulder—C-A-U-L-D-E-R—Smith.

TS: Okay. Well, Linda thanks for meeting with me today. Why don't we start off by having you tell me a little bit about when and where you were born?

LS: I was born [7 July 1955] in Bladen County. I mean—I'm sorry, I was living in Bladen County, but I was born in Lumberton, North Carolina, and I lived in a small community outside of Dublin, North Carolina, and the mailing address at the time was Tar Heel, North Carolina.

TS: So communities are, kind of, real close together.

LS: Right.

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

LS: I have a twin sister.

TS: You have a twin sister.

LS: And a younger brother which is five years younger.

TS: Okay. And what did your parents do for a living when you were growing up?

LS: My mother was a seamstress and my dad was a tractor mechanic and shop supervisor of Clark Tractor and Equipment Company.

TS: In the area that you lived were you, like, in town, were you more rural?

LS: We lived out in the country.

TS: Out in the country.

LS: Yes.

TS: Did you have a farm at all?

LS: Yes. We—As children—My mother was the oldest of sixteen children. My grandfather had a farm, and when my parents were working public work, us children had to work on the farm.

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

LS: You name it, we did it. [both chuckle]

TS: What did you enjoy the most about it?

LS: The freedom.

TS: Yeah.

LS: I like outside. I like animals. The freedom of that. The work was hard. We had a tobacco farm, and peanuts mostly, and then as we got older other things came in, but when we were younger my grandpa didn't say that "you were a woman and you couldn't do that." He said, "There's work on the farm and it all needs to be done," and we did it. And at the time he did not have a tractor, so we had to do everything by hand. And then I remember having to ride on the back of the wheel to plow peanuts so—to help get through that. Then when I was in high school is when he finally got a tractor and it got easier.

TS: Yeah.

LS: But we worked on a farm until I left and went in the military.

TS: Did your cousins help you out on the farm, then, if you had all those kids?

LS: The cousins that were near. [both laugh]

TS: Were there very many?

LS: No. A lot of them—A lot of them left and went out of town but we had a young man that lived next door and we would basically sharecrop with him. His kids would help grandpa and we would help him.

TS: Okay.

LS: And as children got married and went on it was one less person, but then by the time I left and went in the military my grandparents were older, and then they got to the point where another man would sharecrop their farm.

TS: So you grew up as a young girl, like, in the sixties, then.

LS: Yes.

TS: And what kind of things did you do for fun?

LS: Very little. [both laugh] We had to work on the farm.

TS: Right.

LS: And then after the farm our free time was on mostly Sundays and we went to church, and we were allowed to go to ballgames and things like that, but my dad would not let my sister and I play any sports.

TS: Oh, he wouldn't?

LS: No. When we were in eighth grade we were allowed with[?] mom, who'd played ball, and when he found out that we were playing ball we had to stop.

TS: Oh, no.

LS: Yeah. And then we wanted to be cheerleaders, and when he saw the cheerleading outfit hanging on the line we were no longer cheerleaders.

TS: It was a little conservative in that sense of paying attention to those kinds of gender roles.

LS: Yes, conservative but very strict.

TS: Yeah.

LS: And since he was a tractor mechanic and it was a rural area and most of the families farmed, he knew every farmer and their children, so it made it hard on us when we got to dating age.

TS: Oh, yeah.

LS: And since we were twins we were never allowed to date single. If she had a date I had to go and if I had a date she had to go.

TS: How did that work out?

LS: It didn't, I rebelled. [both laugh]

TS: Did you? How did you rebel? What'd you do?

LS: I refused to—She had a date one time, and we lived on this dirt road, and there was a curve in the dirt road that there was a lot of trees and I—and I got out of the car, and I thought I was going to sneak back home and get in the house through the kitchen—but when I was sneaking in the kitchen he was there; my dad was there.

TS: Your dad. And then what happened?

LS: Well, I was in a lot of trouble.

TS: Because you left your sister.

LS: Yeah—Well, I let her go do whatever she wanted to do. But then after that I think he realized that it was not kosher for that and we were allowed to date single but we always—in farming season, and nine o'clock you had to come in, and by ten o'clock that was our curfew, so by the time we got home and showered and everything we couldn't go anywhere, except on the weekends.

TS: Yeah.

LS: And then on Sunday nights we had to be in at nine o'clock because school was the next day.

TS: Through church, did you have any, like, dances or anything that you got to do?

LS: We were not allowed to dance.

TS: No dancing.

LS: Not at church.

TS: Yeah. No. [both chuckle]

LS: Not at church. We could dance at grandma's house and stuff like that.

TS: Okay.

LS: But every once in a while at church we were like GAs.

TS: What's that?

LS: It's like the girls will be GA's [Girls in Action] and the boys would be the RA's [Royal Ambassadors] and we were—we could go there and do bible studies, and have, like—I remember a couple times we could go to Dublin [North Carolina], which had a little pizza place, and we had, like, a little pizza thing. That was a restaurant, but that night went and had pizza and we were allowed to do that.

TS: What did the GA and the RA stand for? Was that just—

LS: My mind just went blank.

TS: Oh. [both laugh] That's okay. That's one of the things we can fill in if you think of it.

LS: Yeah, my mind just went blank.

TS: That's just what you're categorized as.

LS: Right, right.

TS: That's interesting. Well, how was school, then? Did you enjoy school?

LS: Yeah, I did. I enjoyed school because it was time away from the farm, but I also enjoyed coming back to the farm because I knew that I had certain things that we had to do. We had to bring in wood for the winter; we had the woodstove for a while and then we had a gas stove. And all of our food, practically, was from the farm, from the cows, and I remember in the fall after the first frost Grandpa would kill hogs and we then had to stay home from school for the hog killing. And then after that he would slaughter the cattle and we'd—It was the same thing. And we always had chickens so we always had our chicken and our eggs and stuff like that there.

And in the wintertime I remember them going to a hunting camp for a week to two weeks at a time and whatever they killed they came back, and then around the farm there was always squirrels and deer and things like that. Basically we just went to the grocery stores for the staple type things; the lard and sugars and stuff like that.

TS: You did a lot of canning too.

LS: Yes. Canning, freezing. All summer when we weren't on the fields with the tobacco and stuff like that—When we'd get through with the tobacco, we would have to go up to Grandma's and we'd shell peas and butter beans and put them in the freezer and can it. And hog killing, we would always have to make our own sausages, make our own pork

chops, or whatever came from it. And when I actually left and went in the military, I had no clue how to go to a grocery store and buy meats because we never bought it.

TS: Right.

LS: I had—

TS: Pulled it out of the freezer or something

LS: Right. So I didn't know how to—what was the best meat for this or this—for that.

TS: Oh, right. That's interesting.

LS: Yeah.

TS: So you had to learn a new system for that.

LS: Right, right. Sure did.

TS: Yeah. Probably didn't taste the same either.

LS: No. [both chuckle] No, it didn't. No, it did not.

TS: That's interesting. With your schooling, was a particular teacher or subject or anything that you really enjoyed?

LS: I enjoyed history.

TS: History?

LS: I enjoyed history. There was a teacher, an English teacher, that I had, that she enjoyed traveling, and she had combined Tar Heel High School, the school I went to, with Elizabethtown High School and set up a senior trip, and my goal at the time was to go on the senior trip. And my mother knew about it and my dad knew about it and he—my dad did not want me to go, had said, "No, you're not going to go."

My mother said, "Go."

But the English teacher, when she talked to her, she says, "If you travel, everywhere you go, look at that area that you're at and accept that area for what it is, and not what you would like it to be." And that started my traveling fever.

TS: Yeah.

LS: And it was a Bahamas trip, and when I came back—

TS: That was for your senior trip?

LS: My senior trip.

TS: Oh wow, you went to the Bahamas?

LS: Right.

TS: That was pretty nice.

LS: And when I came back—and it was over the Easter holiday so the school—we were out of school when the schools—between the two schools they let us have the extra days off for traveling to go—and my dad refused to let me stay home. He said I couldn't stay home.

TS: What do you mean?

LS: I couldn't go back to my mom and dad's house. I had to stay at my sister's, which had already married, and I stayed with her from April, which was the Easter holiday that we went to the Bahamas, until I graduated.

TS: He wouldn't let you come home?

LS: No.

TS: Was he was just mad about you going there?

LS: He was just that strict.

TS: Yeah.

LS: He was really, really strict. And when I was in the tenth grade I had—I got my driver's license—my learner's permit, and from the tenth, eleventh, and twelfth grades I drove a school bus, and that's how I got my monies—my extra monies—and we were paid, like, every twenty-eighth school day. And I drove—first time—The first year, the tenth grade, I drove for, like, Dublin Elementary. Then the second year the principal, Len King[?]—he was an awesome man, very good educator—he thought that I was responsible enough to also drive for the elementary school and transport the students over to the Tar Heel High School, and I did that in the eleventh and twelfth grade.

TS: Oh, what time did you have to get up to do that? Pretty ear—

LS: About six-thir—It was no different—

TS: No.

LS: —from getting up and driving the school bus than working on a farm. [both laugh]

TS: That's probably true.

LS: To us, that was—that was just the way it was.

[Speaking Simultaneously]

TS: But you got paid for.

LS: Right, got paid for it and it was a little bit of money in your hand.

TS: Yeah. Well, now, growing up in this community, a few of the things going on in the world were, like, [U.S. President] John F. Kennedy was assassinated; we had the Bay of Pigs [Invasion]—

LS: Right.

TS: —a little bit before that. Were you aware of anything like that going on in the world?

LS: Yes, because my grandpa—the one that we worked on the farm with—every day before he even did anything he watched the morning news and then at—in the afternoon he would watch the late news and he would let us know about that. And he would—He would let us know that these are things that we should know about. And then when I was in high school with the history, through Vietnam, I was really drawn to that and what I could find on the newspaper and the library and stuff like that, and the courthouse.

TS: Right.

LS: And one of my aunt's brother-in-law, he got killed in Vietnam, and we were there for that funeral. And then my uncle, his wife's sister, had a son that got killed in Vietnam and we were there for that funeral. So those things sort of piqued my interest to try to learn what was—what was under there: What was in Vietnam? Why were we there? John F. Kennedy. And I remember even in elementary school, I think it was, like, second, third grade—I can't remember exactly—Martin Luther King [Jr.]. Everybody just closed everything down for that, and that piqued my interest.

TS: When he was assassinated?

LS: When he was assassinated.

TS: Do you remember what you thought about all that? Any kind of feelings of being scared about things?

LS: Scared because in this rural area there was a lot of racial tension. And I still remember blacks could not go to a restaurant that the whites did; they would have to go through the back door. They have a little place here in Elizabethtown that's well known for the hamburgers called Melvin's Hamburgers [& Hot Dogs], and I remember blacks just going to the back and knocking on the door and asking the guys that were playing pool to go get their hamburgers for them. White Lake is a big area here that everybody went to that was very segregated. The whites went to White Lake and the blacks went to Jones Lake [State Park], and the only blacks that were there were the cooks, or the domestic-type people. They very seldom came to town except on Saturday, for the blacks to do whatever they needed to do.

And when I was in high school, that's when—No, no, middle school. Seventh or eighth grade is when segregation was there and then the blacks could come to our school.

TS: It started to be integrated in—

LS: Right.

TS: —middle school.

LS: In middle school.

TS: What did you think about that at that time? Do you remember having any thoughts about it?

LS: I don't think I had thoughts about it. I think it was just the elderly people in the community that did not want it to happen.

TS: Oh, okay.

LS: That they didn't want the blacks to go to—and even now very, very few blacks go to a white church and very few whites will go to the black churches. But I remember as a child—not a child, as a teenager—friends of mine in high school, I went to their black church and had service with them, but I couldn't let my parents or my grandparents know that.

TS: They would have been upset about it.

LS: They would have been upset about it.

TS: Yeah.

LS: And even at—retiring in 1994 and I came here—and my children grew up in the military so they had friends of all races, creeds, colors, whatever you wanted to know—and they could not understand why when they went to church here there were no blacks there,

there were no Orientals, there was no other children. And I was the type of parent that when my children played sports everybody could come to my house and play in the yard. And a lot of the families—the white families didn't want the black children in my yard.

TS: Even in later years?

LS: Even in the 90's.

TS: Yeah.

LS: And I remember talking to my children about it, saying "You do not ever discriminate between the white or the black. You be with the friends that you want to be friends with." And the ball team would come over, because the little boy next door, he was on the football team, and my youngest daughter, she was in soccer, baseball, any—cheerleading, anything that she could get into she was into. And my oldest daughter was mostly in basketball and baseball. But the teens would come over; I was the go to—the house that everybody went to to play.

TS: Right.

LS: Because we—

TS: The after game—

LS: Right.

TS: —collection point.

[Speaking Simultaneously]

LS: We lived two blocks from the school.

TS: Okay. Very Convenient.

LS: Yeah. And then I was also a strict parent so I knew that if my children were in eyesight I knew where they were.

TS: Keep them around.

LS: Right. Keep them around, keep them happy, and I wouldn't have to worry about where they're going, when they're coming back, because there's so many back roads in the rural areas around here that who would know where they were at.

TS: Right. It's true. Hide in open spaces.

LS: Yeah, that's it.

TS: Well, you're growing up, then, you have this interest in history and you're, kind of, a little bit confined and constrained maybe by your dad a little bit; what you can do.

LS: Yeah, yeah.

TS: And so, what did you think, as a young girl, about, like, your future? What did you think was out there for you?

LS: I thought that I would be able to go to college, and then Bladen Community College had just started when I was, like, middle school, high school, and I thought that I would be able to go there, but I didn't know what I wanted to do. I just knew that I did not want to marry a farmer, live on a farm; I just knew that it was just not for me. And late in the seventies—early seventies, early seventies—my mother went to work, and she'd been working at this plant for years, and she went to work on a Monday and the doors were closed and the business went under. The ladies that worked there, there was no more insurance, there was no more retirement, there was nothing, and she been working there for, like, twenty-something years.

Then my dad, he worked at Clark Tractor and Equipment Company, and he had a heart attack, and then when he—when he went back to work—and the people that owned it were elderly people, and they had sold it and they closed it and now that's where the—there's a gas station there and the Food Lion grocery store is there now. So that was another business that their insurance and everything was gone.

TS: Neither your mom or your dad had—

LS: Right.

TS: —any insurance.

[Speaking Simultaneously]

LS: And—Right.

TS: What happened to all the pension—Did they have anything for that?

LS: When the—When a business like that closes the doors all that's gone; they were not allowed to have it. My mom continued to work at other jobs and my dad did, too, but it was not the buildup of monies. So I knew in high school when all this was happening, I knew that I—they did not have the money for college. My sister's grades were a lot better

than mine so I knew if there was a scholarship anywhere—and at that you time you didn't even hardly talk about scholarships, there was nothing around—that she would go before I would go. And then the summer of the eleventh grade she ran away and got married.

TS: [chuckles]

LS: So then I—

TS: She eloped?

LS: She eloped, yeah.

TS: Okay.

LS: And that last year I think my dad was disappointed that she had eloped and that's why he was so strict with me on my senior year about going on that trip.

TS: Trip.

LS: But probably in the ninth grade I kept looking at the Vietnam issue and the military issue and I—a lot of my research in school was on the military and I started really looking at what I wanted to do, and it was the military, and I knew it would end up being the military after that because, like I said, I did not want to marry a farmer; live on a farm anymore.

TS: You saw that as your only future if you stayed?

LS: Right. If I stayed I would end up marrying a farmer or living on a farm somewhere and I didn't want that.

TS: Did that already, right?

LS: Yeah.

TS: Yeah.

LS: Yeah. And probably in the eleventh grade I knew that I wanted to join the air force because of what I knew of the army in that time in Vietnam. I knew what was going on over there and I didn't want to be that close to anything like that. But I did not know what the air force had but it seemed—it seemed and it looked better—easier than I had worked all my life and I didn't want—

TS: It seemed easier.

LS: Right.

TS: Did you have any recruiters that came around, or how was it that you—

LS: In the twelfth grade—

TS: In the twelfth grade.

LS: —the recruiter came around and I—he came by my house and talked to my parents, and my dad was totally against it; women did not join the military, and not his daughter. I was not going to join the military. And my mom was, like, "Linda, whatever you can do, do. Better yourself or get out of the situation from farming because you"—She was the oldest of sixteen and she'd farmed and did something all her life.

TS: She was the oldest.

LS: Yeah. And even when I went to the Bahamas she said, "Linda, if you—if you can just travel this time you can just go ahead. Go do what you want to do." And I knew after the recruiter—when he came—after he did the interview with my parents and he came to the school the next time I told him I was going to go in and I went down and we [went up?] from there.

So when I—The day that I was supposed to go, my mom let my dad know that we were going to go, and I had to leave Lumberton—the bus station—to go to Raleigh for my physical, and my dad refused to go and he wouldn't—he wouldn't go, and he wouldn't—See, at that time I was already living at my sister's, but I stayed at my mom's house for two nights before I went just to be with them.

TS: Right.

LS: My dad refused to talk to me. Did not want anything to do with a woman in the military and refused to talk to me and did not go.

TS: That must have been very difficult.

LS: I don't—I don't know if it was difficult or I don't know that I was just so relieved to know that I was going.

TS: That he wasn't going to stop you no matter how he felt.

LS: No. No, I was too determined.

TS: Well, maybe by then you were used to—

LS: Yeah.

TS: —his stubbornness about—

LS: Right.

TS: —what roles you should have.

LS: Right. And see, my dad—my dad—There was twelve children in his family and there was—he was the oldest of only three boys, and I think that he just thought that women had other things to do in life than to join the military. And he did not—did not acknowledge, or say "thank you" ever, even before he died. But I did overhear him talking to one of his best friends after I retired, that how proud he was of me and what I had done.

TS: But never said it to you.

LS: But never said it to me. Never.

TS: Just sounds like his temperament, maybe.

LS: I think it was the temperament and the way that they were raised during that time. Women were only allowed to do certain things and that was what he just assumed that I would do.

TS: Right. And you had a younger brother too.

LS: I had a younger brother.

TS: And then the twin sister.

LS: Twin sister.

TS: When you were thinking about the service, and you said you decided on the air force and not the army, but how about the, like, Marine Corps—

LS: The Marines?

TS: —or navy?

LS: No, I didn't consider that. At that time I had looked at it but I hadn't considered it. It was either army or the air force and I knew that I didn't want to be, during that time, like, Vietnam.

TS: Right. When did you graduate from high school?

LS: Seventy-four.

TS: Seventy-four.

LS: And the Vietnam era actually ended in '75.

TS: Yeah, so it was just right at the end.

LS: Yes.

TS: Did you know anyone that was in the military? Was there history in your family at all?

LS: My dad was army.

TS: Oh, your dad was. Okay.

LS: My dad was army. I had several distant cousins that were in there, like, World War I and World War II and stuff like that, but I didn't know it until after I started doing the genealogy research.

TS: Was that after you joined the air force?

LS: After I joined the air force.

TS: Okay.

LS: And at that time, even though we only lived a few miles from one of the ladies that did join—and she was older—I did not know that because we were always working and she was already gone.

TS: Right. And then you found out about it later.

LS: I found out about it later, yeah.

TS: Was that a cousin?

LS: No. No, it was just a—someone that lived a few farms over.

TS: Oh, okay.

LS: Yeah.

TS: Had gone and joined. Essentially you joined because you wanted to get away.

LS: Right. Didn't—Did not want to farm anymore. [both chuckle]

TS: And did you think about travel or education or any of those kind of things?

LS: At that time mostly travel—

TS: Travel?

LS: —because of the teacher that I had met in high school. She was my English teacher in the eleventh and twelfth grade and she was always going and encouraging people to go and to get out. And then after—It wasn't until after I was in the military that education became important to me.

TS: Okay.

LS: And then during the military I would go to—on my lunch hour—they had a lot of courses at lunch and a lot of courses on Saturdays and at night. And I took my time and did that. Not in the beginning but as I got older, that education became more important.

TS: As you saw—

LS: Yeah.

TS: —saw that it was helpful.

LS: Right.

TS: Well, how about your sister and your brother? How did they feel about you joining?

LS: My sister was already married, and after a while she did join the air force.

TS: Oh, your sister did too?

LS: She did. And at the time, on her last day of basic training she fell out and had a seizure.

TS: Oh.

LS: In basic training. And they discharged her because of her seizure, but later on, I think six months to a year later, they found out it wasn't a seizure; that she was hypoglycemic and her sugar dropped so low.

TS: Oh, okay.

LS: And the morning that she supposedly had a seizure or [unclear], she actually ate pancakes and syrup and stuff, so the hypoglycemia just put her out.

TS: Oh. And did she learn about that later?

LS: She had—Well, she was already out.

TS: Yeah.

LS: But she knew that she had a medical issue.

TS: I see.

LS: Instead of a seizure it was hypoglycemic.

TS: How long after you joined did she try it?

LS: About three years; three years after.

TS: Three years after.

LS: And my brother, he was going to join and he put in for a guaranteed job, which at that time I didn't know that I could do.

TS: Right.

LS: But he did and when he went to Raleigh for the physical and his recruiter told him the guaranteed job was not available, he had to go somewhere else, and he refused and came home.

TS: Oh, really.

LS: And he told—The recruiter told him he had to. He said, "No." He says, "I don't have to. I can call someone—"

TS: Right.

LS: "—and get a ride back from Raleigh." And he didn't go.

TS: Because they—

LS: Right.

TS: —were, kind of, messing with him on what he was going to do. Okay. Let's talk a little bit about what you did when you went in, then, in '74. What was that like at basic training?

LS: Compared to living on a farm it was a breeze.

TS: Yeah. [both chuckle]

LS: I was used to getting up early in the morning.

TS: Yeah.

LS: I was used to working all day long, and not only in the summertime working on the farm but also in the wintertime with—we had to pull peanuts, we had all this—so I was used to the early morning stuff and I was used to being hollered at. [both chuckle] And to me it was more—When I—When basic was over I was like, "Well, if this is all that there is then I won't have any problem."

TS: Was there anything that was hard at all about basic training, even emotionally or being away from home or anything like that?

LS: No, because I think I was so emotionally ready to get away from a strict life and a—And I felt—I guess I felt at that time that I wanted to branch out and my dad and my grandparents living on the farm was more they had a control over me; you can't go here, you can't go there, you can't do this. And I think it was a relief, if that makes—

TS: Sure. It makes sense. It was like a burden lifted.

LS: Yeah. Right.

TS: And now you're free to do what you want.

LS: Right.

TS: Your choices are your own choices.

LS: Right.

TS: So when you're going through the basic training and the physical things that you did, was that hard at all?

LS: No.

TS: No?

LS: Because back on the farm we had to do everything that the guys did. We knew how to shoot rifles and everything and guns before we ever left the farm because in the fall we—squirrel hunting and things like that so we all—we all knew how to do that. We did—

[Speaking Simultaneously]

TS: Your father allowed you to do the shooting—

LS: Right, right.

TS: —when you were younger?

LS: We all had to do what everybody else did, and in that time if you knew that there was a gun behind the door you didn't touch it. If you knew there was a gun anywhere in the house you didn't touch it because that was everyday life.

TS: Right.

LS: You may need it for a snake, you may need it for whatever—food.

TS: Right.

LS: So we knew as children to never touch a weapon.

TS: You weren't playing around with them.

LS: No. No. The only time we used them as a necessity.

TS: So that was okay in that part of the training.

LS: Yeah.

TS: Well, we talked about this before we turned the tape on, though, but you had mentioned you had to do a few things before you were actually able to get into the air force.

LS: Right.

TS: You want to tell about that.

LS: When I went—When I left Lumberton I went to Raleigh and I was weighing in; I didn't weigh enough. And what my recruiter did, he went to the grocery store and bought bananas and I would eat a banana and drink a glass of water, and eat a banana and drink a glass of water, until I hit ninety-eight pounds, and when I hit ninety-eight pounds and they could log it in on my entry physical, that's when I was allowed to go in. It was miserable. [both chuckle]

TS: I can't imagine.

LS: It was miserable. And even—I like bananas but there was a long time that I was just so—

TS: You didn't want to eat any.

LS: No. No.

TS: Well, I've heard that banana story a few times from a number of different women and different eras too; in the fifties.

LS: And who would have thought?

TS: I guess it worked at some point to get weight on and they just kept doing it. That's interesting.

LS: But I had always been small, and I remember in high school—If I would have known about the bananas it would have probably been better, but I knew about mayonnaise sandwiches.

TS: Okay.

LS: I would eat mayonnaise sandwiches to put a little bit of weight on because I was always so small. And even to the point that when I drove the school bus they had to—my school bus they had to take the seat out and move it up to where I could reach the pedals. But with all that, if I would have known about the bananas I think that would have been better for me.

TS: Help you out a little bit. Well, did you have barracks living—

LS: Yes.

[Speaking Simultaneously]

TS: —in the basic training?

LS: Open barracks.

TS: How was that? Open bay with the fifty women or whatever?

LS: It was—I didn't have an issue with it, because there was a lot of times on the farm that we would all just jump into a mill pond together, and I remember as a child at my grandparents' house they didn't have running water, so in the middle of the day my grandma would have a tub and she would fill a tub of water and set it out in the sun, and when we came home from the farm—working—the only cover was a quilt that she had on the line and she would have that to where we could—and there was three and four of us kids at a time in a tub running around buck naked.

TS: Cleaning up.

LS: Yeah, cleaning up.

TS: So that wasn't any—

LS: No, that was no big deal because—the only thing, now I look back, as a child was—oh my God. What did the last child think when they saw all that dirty water. [both chuckle]

TS: That's right.

LS: None of that—None of the basic stuff bothered me.

TS: Yeah. You didn't have a guaranteed job? You had said before that you weren't aware that you could get one.

LS: Right. And if my recruiter told me about it I don't remember, but I know when they handed out orders for us to leave basic mine was to Chanute [Air Force Base] Illinois for a jet engine mechanic.

TS: What did you think about that?

LS: I thought, "Great."

TS: Okay.

LS: Because the last year that I was a senior at Tar Heel there was a Mr. Gillespie[?]; he was the auto mechanics teacher. And it was the very first year that they would let women—or girls—go into the very basics auto shop, changing oils, changing tires and things like that, and the guys could go into home economics to—basic baking and cooking and stuff like that. Mr. Gillespie thought it was great that I went there because he was—he thought—he was my teacher that taught us how to change a tire, change oil, rebuild an engine, so he thought that was great.

TS: Yeah.

LS: And I had no clue. I was just hoping that I would—could pass. [both chuckle] Could pass the school.

TS: How was it?

LS: Academically it was okay. I didn't do as well as I wanted to do because I also felt at that time that I had freedom and I could do more than study.

TS: Sure.

LS: Physically I had never been—it was in the wintertime and I had never been in such cold—

TS: Oh, right.

LS: —in all my life. And there was one time that we were marching back from school and we had to put these things over our face. The only thing we had was just our eyes and a place where we could breathe because the cold was so bitter and I was not used to the cold.

TS: Right.

LS: North Carolina to San Antonio, Texas, to a bitter, bitter cold.

TS: Chicago and that cold.

LS: Right, right.

TS: The wind there too.

LS: Yeah. And other than that it was okay.

TS: Other than that. So you made it through the school all right?

LS: Made it through the school, and then I got orders to Dover [Air Force Base], Delaware.

TS: Okay. What kind of planes were you working on?

LS: [Lockheed] C-5 engine. And the thing about that, that was at the very end of the Vietnam era, and once I got there we were established in and everything—if you go back in history, in Vietnam they were bringing—the nurses were bringing those babies out of Vietnam and the back of the door on the C-5 flew open; the hydraulics had messed up. And then I remember that all the C-5s were grounded and we had to go over all those things to try to determine what had happened and that it wouldn't ever happen again.

[On 4 April 1975, a Lockheed C-5 was participating in Operation Babylift, in which American caregivers were paired with South Vietnamese orphans. During a flight from Tan Son Nhut Air Base to Clark Air Base in the Philippines, the locks on the rear loading ramp failed, causing the cargo door to open explosively, which in turn caused explosive decompression. The plane broke into four pieces upon impact and fuel caught on fire. Out of three hundred twenty-eight people on board, seventy three children died]

TS: After that crash?

LS: After that crash.

TS: Bringing the orphans out?

LS: Right. And then after that—I was so small that even in the shop the sheet metal guys made me a little cart, and my toolbox—I would take my toolbox out of the locker and they made it to where I could just slide it onto my cart that they made me with wheels and that was because I could not lift it.

TS: Right.

LS: And then after all that, all the little cricks and crannies, I would have to go up into those areas and do it because some of the guys were too big to be in those areas and I could. But about eighteen months before then, I started having back problems and I went to the doctor, and after I think two or three visits with the doctor with my back and he asked me, "Well, what kind of job are you doing?"

And I said, "Jet engine mechanic out on the C-5s."

He says, "What?" He couldn't understand it. So he came back in with a chart, he said, "Linda, you do not weigh enough to be a mechanic."

And I panicked. "Well, what am I going to do?" I figured I was going to be discharged.

TS: Right.

LS: And he said, "Well, let me fill out this paperwork," and thank God he was the doctor that I got.

TS: Right.

LS: But he filled out the paperwork that I could not perform the job because of my back and it would only get worse. And he said he would set me up another appointment for a week later, and when I went back to him a week later he said, "We can cross-train you and these are the jobs that you're allowed to go in. It would be an optometry assistant, a mental health assistant, or a dental assistant." And he says, "Which one of these would you choose if you had a choice?"

And I put down that I would be dental assistant first, mental health last—I mean second—and optometry third, and within a month's time it came back that I could cross-train into dental assisting.

TS: Okay.

LS: And I thought I would have to leave Dover and go to—back to San Antonio but I didn't. What they did is processed me out of the C-5 jet engine shop and when I went to the

dental clinic on the next time—the next day, I was [unclear] in my old military greasy uniform and they started processing me in and gave me, at that time, one of the white dresses for the dental clinic. And all of that was on-the-job training.

TS: On-the-job. So you didn't have to go through a—

LS: No.

TS: —special training for it?

LS: No, it was all on-the-job.

TS: They just trained you.

LS: And from the on-the-job training, Dover at that time had too many entry-level dental assistants, and I had been to Dover I think eighteen months and I got orders to—I talked to—talked to my supervisor and he said, "Well, no, there's other people here that's been here longer."

And I said, "Well, I would really like to leave."

TS: Right; go somewhere else.

LS: And I think that the travel instinct came in. And so, I went one day at lunchtime and went into the area[?] and put out for orders to go overseas.

TS: And did you care where you went?

LS: No, didn't care where I went.

TS: You just said overseas.

LS: Just wanted to go.

TS: Well, before you go there I want to ask you a couple things about when you were working on the C-5 engines. Did you think that it was difficult? I mean, did you feel like it was too stressful for you?

LS: No.

TS: Okay.

LS: No, and that reverts back to the farm because, like I said, Grandpa did not distinguish male or female. If something needed to—After he got the tractor, if something needed to be done on the tractor, and whoever was closest, that's what they did. And the boys—The bigger boys was there, my uncles and stuff like that, but I—it was not difficult. I

did—My first supervisor, his name was Sergeant Shandling[?], he was an old type fellow that didn't want women in the air—

[Speaking Simultaneously]

TS: Okay. How did that go?

LS: He would try to send me off to the orderly room to get a left-handed screwdriver, which he was about—he didn't know that I knew better.

TS: Right. What would you say; how would you react to it?

LS: I'd say, "Okay, I'll go." I went over there and took a break, and went and got a soda and walked around, talked to the people, and then came back and said, "Well, the left-handed screwdriver that you're talking about is actually here in the box." But he thought he was trying to be funny, I guess.

TS: Right.

LS: But he wasn't funny.

TS: How about the rest of the guys that you worked with?

LS: They were good. Everybody was good because, I think, when I got there a lot of the guys from Dover were from the class ahead of me, and then later on the class behind me, so I knew—I knew several people there and we all worked in the same shop. One of them might be working over in the electrical shop or the hydraulics shop or something like that, which is a different area in our bay where we did the repairing of the engines. But after that it was—we were all—went to school together.

TS: Right.

LS: So that was fine. Only some of the older gentlemen that were there—They didn't—They didn't have any older women in the military, just young ladies were there.

TS: Right, because they didn't really go into those kind of jobs—

LS: Right.

TS: —until the seventies.

LS: Right.

TS: Well, what—It's interesting that they made you the little cart and—special for that because I've heard about that kind of thing happening not just for women but for men, too, where they said, "Well, the women can't lift it."

LS: Right.

TS: And they would have it—like a little demonstration and the men couldn't lift it either. They all got—

LS: Right.

TS: —carried it together. And so, whose idea was it to get you the cart?

LS: There was an older gentleman there, he was—he was a civilian guy, he was an older gentleman, and he was from Nova Scotia and he was on my team, or I was on his team, and some of the sheet metal guys that were there, we were talking about it one day and this older gentleman said, "Well, why don't you make Linda a little cart?" And without question they all did. And they measured the toolbox and where it would fit on it just perfect and the next thing I knew here—there it was. And then even when my back was bothering me and we were getting our tools out in the morning some of them would just slide it on for me.

TS: Yeah.

LS: And after that. So Sergeant Shandling was the only one that didn't think women should be in there.

TS: But you had a lot of support from the other guys, then, too.

LS: Yeah, I did, because, like I said, we were all in—at Chanute together. Either the class before or the class behind me and we were all—

TS: So you went through that training; they knew you could do it and all.

LS: Right, right.

TS: Okay.

LS: And they knew—they knew that the women were there.

TS: Right.

LS: If they passed the school they knew that the women there, they could do—they could do the job.

TS: They could do it right. Okay, so you put in for overseas.

LS: Right.

TS: And what'd you get?

LS: Bitburg [Air Base], Germany, and Bitburg, Germany was up on the—a mountain, and Spangdahlem Air Force Base was down in the valley.

TS: Right.

LS: So Bitburg and Spangdahlem more or less trained together and different things like that. And first thing I did was go to MWR [Morale, Welfare, and Recreation] and travel. Every opportunity that I could travel in Europe I travelled.

TS: What year did you get to Germany, '76?

LS: Seventy-six.

TS: Seventy-six.

LS: And came back in '79.

TS: Okay.

LS: I was only supposed to be there for a year and I kept extending and then finally the third time they said, "You can't extend anymore."

TS: [chuckles] Yeah.

LS: And then when I was over there as a dental assistant I started working with an oral maxillofacial surgeon and anything trauma—at first—at first we thought that it was—I was just going to be in there for when they pulled wisdom teeth and stuff like that, but anything after that, if there was trauma over there, I was with him. And I was put on an identification team with him because he was the surgeon—the oral maxillofacial surgeon—and if a aircraft went down he had to identify by teeth. And I was put on his team, and when I was put on his team I had to go into the OR [operating room].

So there was this, again, on-the-job training to go into the OR, for sterilization and things like that. A lot more strenuous than just in a—in the oral surgery section. And I got my OR training there, and when I left there, I guess because of the OR and what I did with the oral surgeon, I went to Wilford Hall Medical Center [currently named Wilford Hall Ambulatory Surgical Center, San Antonio, Texas]; I was in the oral surgery clinic.

TS: Okay. Well, let's talk about Germany for a little bit. You're traveling.

LS: Yes.

TS: And you're single.

LS: Yes.

TS: Right? Were you single? Maybe you weren't.

LS: I was single.

TS: Okay.

LS: I was single there.

TS: Okay.

LS: Until [both chuckle]—Until—This guy hated Germany.

TS: Yeah.

LS: Hated Germany. And I knew that I was going to be leaving, so him and I conjured up to get married so he would follow me, and once we got to San Antonio we divorced.

TS: Oh, really?

LS: Yeah.

TS: So that was to get him out?

LS: Right.

TS: He wanted to get out.

LS: Right.

TS: Well, that's interesting.

LS: You haven't heard that one before, have you?

TS: No.

LS: [laughs]

TS: Well, I've heard about people marrying for other reasons.

LS: Okay.

TS: But not that one. [chuckles] That's interesting. How did you like Germany, then?

LS: Loved it. Not only for the traveling, but also for the beauty of the country. And when I traveled there, went into Switzerland, and I thought Germany was beautiful but Switzerland was even better; even better; much, much better. And then after I left Germany, I missed it; I missed it. And I even got adapted to the cold, which I didn't think—

TS: [chuckles]

LS: —didn't think that I would do.

TS: Yeah.

LS: So I guess from Chanute to Dover, by the time I got over there I'd adapted pretty well.

TS: What would be, like, some of the places that you went besides Switzerland and traveled around? You traveled a lot of places in Germany itself?

LS: Yes. I went to a lot of the little towns, to the Oktoberfest, down to Munich, down to Dachau prison camp, a lot of the historical things. Paris, Switzerland, Spain, Holland.

TS: Did you do any of the volksmarches [a form of non-competitive fitness walking that developed in Germany]?

LS: A lot of those. Every time that—Just about every weekend that I was not on call—dental call—I was going somewhere; going somewhere. And this is funny. It's not funny.

TS: [chuckles]

LS: It could have been detrimental. But you had to get your license over there.

TS: A driver's license.

LS: Driver's license. Well, I never got my driver's license but I always drove.

TS: Oh.

LS: [chuckles]

TS: That's interesting.

LS: I would always—everywhere I wanted to go I'd borrow a car and go. Nobody never knew that I didn't have my driver's license over there. So for three years I never had my license in Germany.

TS: Why didn't you get the license?

LS: I just—I guess time.

TS: Yeah.

[Speaking Simultaneously]

LS: I just figured that—

TS: You were too busy traveling to get your license.

LS: Yeah. I just—I just felt like that every weekend I had to go somewhere, because I knew from growing back up in a small town I may never get that opportunity again. So I was always traveling, always going somewhere, always going—if I couldn't drive there, MWR had a trip, and then if MWR didn't have a trip one of the dentists would be going somewhere or say, "Do you want to—Do you want to hop along this weekend? Do you want to go here? We're going to this winefest; we're going into France for this thing; we're going to—" so it was always travel, travel. And I just didn't—And see—And at that time also, because I did not go to school and it was all on-the-job training, you had to have a certain—your level three or your level five or your level seven, so even during the week I was always studying. And I don't think it was just—to me it just wasn't a priority but I knew that I could do it.

TS: Right. So you're having a really good time.

LS: Yes.

TS: Now, you're traveling—you kind of mentioned this a little bit but—mostly by yourself or sometimes with groups when you're doing the trip tours?

LS: The MWR tours, a lot of us, and then after a while from the MWR tours it was just a group of people that was always trying to go and they say, "Hey, we're going here; do you want to go here? MWR's got this tour going, do you want to go on that tour?" And we would always look at our calendar to see if it was a three day weekend or someone was off call or something that we would always go. And usually it ended up, like, on three day weekends that we could go and be there and back.

TS: Did you have, like, a 9:00 [a.m.] to 5:00 [p.m.] kind of job?

LS: Yes.

TS: And then off on weekends.

LS: And off on weekends except when you're on call. But you knew—The call schedule was made out so many weeks ahead of time and you knew.

TS: So you could plan.

LS: Right, you could plan ahead of time.

TS: What about your living conditions. Where'd you live?

LS: In the barracks.

TS: You lived in the barracks the whole time?

LS: The whole time.

TS: How did you like that?

LS: It was fine. There was—When I first got there the barracks for the women were up way, way past the hospital, and when one came available in the hospital then we could move down, so just the—to get the shuttle or borrow someone's car that was difficult but it was okay. And when I first got to—my barracks was—you slept four to a room. You had two bunk beds, so you really didn't have a lot of privacy or—and then everybody—it seemed like everybody was on a different shift in there and even though you were trying to sleep, someone was always coming in. Someone was always wanting to wake this one up to go to work or wake this one up to go somewhere.

TS: Kind of disruptive.

LS: And then after a while, like I said, when available; people from the hospital barracks were leaving, going home, and one came up available and then we moved down. I moved down to the hospital barracks and that was two people.

TS: Was that better then?

LS: Yeah, two people.

TS: Was that more like a suite or was that still like the barracks?

LS: It was—It was a barracks but it was just right across the street from the hospital.

TS: So a lot easier just to go to work.

LS: Right. Right.

TS: Okay. Well, how are you enjoying your work? It sounds like you were.

LS: Yeah, I was, and it wasn't—it wasn't hard because I—back on the farm.

TS: Yeah. [chuckles]

LS: The hardest thing—

TS: I'm getting this theme. [both chuckle]

LS: The hardest thing for me was to take the time to study because I wanted to travel.

TS: Right. You were just having a real good time enjoying.

LS: Right. Because I may have never gotten—

[Speaking Simultaneously]

TS: Had that chance again. Yeah. Now, you joined in '74. You had to re-enlist at some point in Germany, is that right?

LS: Yeah. Yeah. I knew that I was going to re-enlist.

TS: Yeah.

LS: I knew that I was. I had no idea at that time I was going to stay in to retire.

TS: Not yet?

LS: Right, no. I—Retirement was not even on my radar. It was nowhere near [unclear]—

TS: Yeah. You were just having fun.

LS: Yeah.

TS: Yeah. That's great. So you said you were really kind of sad to leave Germany.

LS: Yes.

TS: And then you ended up—

LS: In San Antonio, Texas.

TS: Oh, back in San Antonio.

LS: At Wilford Hall.

TS: And so, that's a much bigger, kind of—

LS: Much—

TS: —working environment, I guess.

LS: The oral surgery clinic there was in the main hospital and the clinic was bigger than the clinic at Dover, Delaware and the clinic at Bitburg. And there you had a lot of residents coming in; doctor—dentists, training to be oral surgeons.

TS: Okay.

LS: And it was more or less like a—Even though it was part of dental it was more or less like—and the distance between the main dental clinic and the hospital, you were inside the hospital and it was only for oral surgery and trauma from—any trauma from the neck up. Children with cleft palates and things like that. That was more of—you were a clinic so many days, you had OR so many days. Clinic meaning not hands-on dental assisting but surgery-type assisting—

TS: Okay.

LS: —for different things like that.

TS: I forgot to follow up with you when you were saying about being on the one team for body recoveries. Did you ever have to participate in that?

LS: Once.

TS: Once. In Germany?

LS: In Germany. We had a plane crash that hit the side of a mountain and we had—and then the guys had to secure the area and the only thing that we could find was a jaw bone about the size of my thumb.

TS: Do you actually go to the crash site?

LS: No, they would—they retrieved it and brought it to us.

TS: Okay. I see.

LS: They retrieved all that information and brought it to us and—

TS: But then you had to do the—

[Speaking Simultaneously]

LS: Identification.

TS: —the work on that. And the size of a—

LS: My thumb. There was three—There was three teeth in there; three teeth in there.

TS: You were also overseas when—Well, I don't know what part—You came back, like, when the hostage crisis was occurring.

LS: Yes. And that—I came back and I was at Wilford Hall.

TS: Okay.

LS: And—

TS: Oh, and then you had the Shah [of Iran, Mohammad Reza Pahlavi].

LS: Yeah.

TS: Is that where he came to—because he came—

LS: I can't remember, but I remember—I remember watching this news for several, several days.

TS: Right.

LS: And you were, like, stuck to the TV, and it could have been because everything that happens in your area.

TS: Yeah.

LS: And I know—Then the Iran [hostage] crisis, I had left—I went to a training—NCO [non-commissioned officer] training, and I was at—and I had went to Albuquerque for that school for so many weeks.

[The Iran hostage crisis occurred from 4 November 1979 to 20 January 1981, and was a diplomatic crisis between Iran and the United States, where fifty-two American diplomats and citizens were held hostage for 444 days, after Iranian students belonging to the Muslim Student Followers of the Imam's Line took over the U.S. Embassy in Tehran]

TS: Okay.

LS: And while I was in Albuquerque that's when the Iran crisis was over.

TS: When it was over.

LS: Yeah, when they were finishing up with it, because I remember everybody, even in the class for NCO training and everything, was just—it was talking more about that—

TS: Than the class.

LS: —than the class.

TS: Well, because that's when [U.S. President] Ronald Reagan was elected and the transfer between the two. I was wondering, too, because—something in my head—and I probably should not just throw this out there on tape—but, like, the Shah came to the United States.

LS: Yes.

TS: And I thought it was in Texas but maybe it wasn't; I don't remember when it was.

LS: I can't remember. But I would have to go back in history.

TS: Yeah, I know, now I'm going to go home, I'm going to have to go look that up. [both chuckle] I was, like, that would be interesting to be at the place where he was and it was very disruptive.

[In October, 1979, President Jimmy Carter allowed the exiled Shah of Iran to enter the U.S. in order to receive medical care. After surgery in a New York hospital, he was transferred to Wilford Hall Medical Center.]

LS: Yeah.

TS: Now you're back in San Antonio.

LS: Right.

TS: And you're at this big hospital, and you're not traveling like you did overseas. What are you doing for your off time now?

LS: I'm traveling to little communities.

TS: Okay.

LS: Going into Mexico; going into—Poteet, Texas, is out in the middle of nowhere, absolutely nowhere, but they had a huge flea market. Austin, Texas; went there a lot. Fredericksburg, Bandera. Every weekend still—

TS: So you're still moving.

LS: Still traveling, still having a good time. I may not get there again. But then, because of the clinic there, I was on call more.

TS: Okay.

LS: So I couldn't travel as much.

TS: Quite as much. What's a typical day there?

LS: In the clinic?

TS: Yes.

LS: If you're—If it's surgery days you have to be there for surgery and you're in the OR all day, and you may have any kind of trauma; any trauma. One particular trauma in the OR, I remember a guy from Shaw Air Force Base tried to commit suicide and when he pulled the gun up at his chin the pressure from pulling the trigger caused it to come from the side so his face—half of his face was literally gone. And they kept him—they air-evaced him to San Antonio, to Wilford Hall, and when he came in it was in—it was at night so the team was called in and we went in and did reconstruction surgery on him. And I stayed there for three years. And I left and went to Eglin Air Force Base [Florida] and went back to San Antonio, and that guy was still there.

TS: Oh, you're kidding.

LS: And they just transferred him back—they transferred him totally out of Shaw and back, but they had to—we had to reconstruct his whole jaw, his mouth, his eyes, so each ENT [ear, nose, and throat], optometry—everybody was involved. And when I left the first time and I went back there, he—the orbit [socket] of his eye had not been fixed. And I

was also—When we did surgery we had to do bone transplant from one cadaver—freeze-dried bone or something that I would have to order from the University of Miami. But I ordered bone for his jaw. The bone for his eye had not come in because he had not healed enough.

TS: To set it in there.

LS: Right.

TS: Okay.

LS: And he had a patch; he had a patch. Then we had to do the cheekbone, and then after that I left and then came back, but when I came back his whole face was back to normal.

TS: Oh.

LS: Skin grafts were back to normal. He had a glass eye but he was so self-conscious with the glass eye—he was so used to the patch that he kept the patch on. And he—When they transferred him there and he was actually an in-patient that could work, he was doing mostly record pulling for clinics and stuff like that. But during that time we had all kind of surgeons in there; like I said, ENT, optometry. Everybody was in there because he was such a mess; he was such a mess.

TS: It took them, like, four years or so?

LS: I think it was, like—By the time I left—left, came back, it was a total of, like, five or six years that he was still there.

TS: Oh my goodness.

LS: Now, what happened after that, I don't know.

TS: You don't know, right.

LS: I don't know.

TS: Interesting.

LS: But when we did the OR, when we did those type surgeries, we had to go to the main OR and work and we had—we were slotted so many ORs. But then when we did just regular wisdom teeth we did them down in the clinic. So you were either in the clinic doing wisdom teeth or pulling teeth for braces or whatever, or the main things you were up in the main OR.

TS: In the main OR. Did you enjoy that type of work?

LS: Yes.

TS: Yeah.

LS: I totally enjoyed surgery.

TS: Yeah.

LS: Any type of surgery, because everybody's different. Everybody's personality's different, everybody's demeanor's different, and you just get so used to these things and you get—sometimes you get close to your patients. This one particular guy, even though he was suicidal, ended up—you got to meet his wife. His wife had—was actually pregnant when he tried to do that. His baby was born at Wilford Hall and after a while there come the wife and the baby, and then there was a second baby and different things like that, so you just—And then cleft palate babies. You're trying to fix your mouth for this poor little baby that can't suck right. Cancer patients that have cancer and you're trying to get bone from cadavers somewhere and then after a while their body rejects it. You get the flat part of the back down here and reconstruct it with that and so that's another surgery. People that have—Their teeth are gone and they wear dentures. We would go in and take skin from their thigh to put into their mouths so their dentures could fit and their teeth were not flopping all around.

And then at that time it was very—it was in the very, very infancy [of the] program to where you could put—do the implants, and they were trying to see what—how the implants would work. Sometimes the implant would work and sometimes the body would reject it.

TS: Very interesting.

LS: Several things like that we did.

TS: Yeah. How are you feeling about your treatment in the air force for promotions and maybe training?

LS: Well, promotions, it was hard—it was hard—and—because it was at the end of the Vietnam era and they weren't—they weren't promoting a lot of people after that. And then when you started promoting again and then you had a quota, a lot of people wanted to come in medical; a lot of people wanted to come in those high jobs so when they got out they would have something to look forward to. And then [Operation] Desert Shield/[Operation] Desert Storm, then they started promoting again quickly, and then after that the pay was up and down and the promotions was up and down. And I didn't have enough forethought that I could have done a lot better but I was just so busy.

TS: You were just—

LS: Busy.

TS: —doing your thing, right?

LS: Yeah.

TS: When did you start thinking about making it a career?

LS: About my twelfth year.

TS: Yeah. [both chuckle]

LS: Because at that point I was, like, "You know, dang. I've got twelve years in."

TS: It was, like, '86, then.

LS: Eleven, twelve years in and I just—Why waste it? Why waste it? And then I said, "I just might as well go on." And at that time—at that time I was going to school at lunchtime, going to school at night, had two children, I had to—and I wanted better for my children.

TS: At what point did you get married the second time? [both chuckle]

LS: When—At Wilford Hall when I went to the NCO training I met a guy there that was in school.

TS: Okay.

LS: And he was in NCO training and he was from Eglin Air Force Base, and we kept communicating back and forth and we just figured, "Let's get married."

TS: Is that how you ended up in Eglin?

LS: That's how I ended up at Eglin, because he was in security. He was a security policeman and his demand there was a lot greater demand than at Wilford Hall.

TS: I see.

LS: And got married and then they transferred me to where he was at.

TS: Okay.

LS: And then I had—I had my first child at Eglin, and then after he was re-assigned as an instructor for the security police academy at Wilford Hall Medical Center—

[Speaking Simultaneously]

TS: Oh, you went back[?]

LS: —San Antonio—I went back to Wilford Hall. Same clinic, same job, and he went to instructor for the security police.

TS: Did you have two children while you were at Eglin then?

LS: I had one child at Eglin and one child back the second time at Wilford Hall.

TS: At Wilford Hall. What was that like, then, to go through a pregnancy in the military at that time? This is, like, in the eighties, right?

LS: Shannon was born in '83 and Amber was born in '85.

TS: Okay.

LS: And at that time it was easier for women. The job was easier for women and it was just that as long as you could do—I felt as long as you could do your job they always—and I didn't have a lot of morning sickness or anything like that so I didn't have that type—

TS: You weren't off work a lot.

LS: Right, right. And the only time that—and I worked right on up until I had the children. I guess every—all the women did unless they were put on bedrest or something like that, but I worked up until the day I had the children.

TS: Nobody was giving you a hard time about it?

LS: No.

TS: Did you have any maternity outfits at that time?

LS: Yes.

TS: You did?

LS: We had the white ones.

TS: Okay.

LS: The white uniforms and then the blue—dress blues; they finally had the maternity uniforms for that. But I didn't see any BDUs [basic dress uniform] for—until after my

children were born, that I saw the pregnancy BDUs. Now, did they have them on the flight line and stuff, I don't know.

TS: But they weren't necessarily around when you were—

LS: Right, right.

TS: Because you didn't really use them too much, right? You had the whites mostly.

LS: The whites. And working at—And working at Wilford Hall, the second pregnancy, there was no flight line or anything there, it was mostly training. Now Eglin, the security police—now, my husband at that time had women that were pregnant in security police and they did have—they had more or less, like, the dress blue uniforms instead of what the BDUs and stuff the military had. And those ladies were put in more or less, like, office-type positions in the security police area.

TS: To not do the active—

LS: Right.

TS: —patrolling and stuff like that.

LS: Right.

TS: To keep them away from, maybe, fights.

LS: Yes. But with me in the medical field now—

TS: Didn't really change.

LS: The only—The only thing that changed was OR; standing in the OR. And after you get so big in a pregnancy you can't get that close to an OR table.

TS: [chuckles]

LS: So it was more clinical.

TS: Right.

LS: Clinical type stuff.

TS: Interesting. Well, how was it different being married in the military than being single? Other than just regular married life, was there anything different about the military aspect of it?

LS: To me, no. No, because—

TS: Not like trying to coordinate.

LS: No. And at that time I think there was so much emphasis on the women in the military also that they really tried to have the men and the women together if at all possible.

TS: In their joint assignments?

LS: Right, in their joint assignments.

TS: But, like, day care, things like that.

LS: Daycare, I had to have three different babysitters while I was—while they were younger children. They always stayed on the base for daycare, but, like, if we had to go out in maneuvers and things like that, or training, I had—usually it was someone in my office, their wives or something that were not in the military that would babysit, or my husband's squadron that he did that some of the men's wives would babysit. But I had to have three available people that could watch my children if something happened.

TS: Okay. Did you do any special training or going on TDY [temporary duty] while you had your kids, besides when you would go to the Gulf War, before that?

LS: We would—We would have to do—Wilford Hall, no. At Wilford Hall, no. Eglin, no. But once I left there, then we did.

TS: Where were you at next?

LS: Well, I went back to Eglin.

TS: Oh, okay.

LS: Went back to Eglin—No, I went to Eglin and went back to Wilford Hall.

TS: Wilford Hall and then you went to Tucson.

LS: Then went to Tucson.

TS: About what year was that?

LS: Seventy—Eighty-six.

TS: Eighty-six, okay.

LS: Eighty-six, '87. And then from—

[Speaking Simultaneously]

TS: You and your husband both went there?

LS: Yes. [chuckles] When he was an instructor for the security police academy he became an alcoholic. He was—Well, he was an alcoholic before then and I didn't know what that was. I knew that there was people that drank.

TS: Right.

LS: And when he told me he was going to go to AA [Alcoholics Anonymous] I'm like, "Well, what is AA?" because I had never heard of it.

TS: Right.

LS: And he had a problem with drinking and I didn't believe him. I was, like, everybody drank. What's the deal? But when he was an instructor at security police academy he had a big inspection coming and the morning that the generals and the colonels were there he had a nervous breakdown and he locked himself into the office. And he was the instructor that was supposed to be showing these people around. Well, he lost his job—he lost his job at security police—and could no longer be around weapons or have access to weapons as readily as he could security police.

TS: Right.

LS: And they wanted him away from that environment. And he got a job where he could work in, like, orderly rooms and stuff like that and he went and he did, and he was handing out—That's when we—They moved him to Tucson, and because we were married I went to Tucson with him. And after we got there and he was—he was a people-pleaser like most addicts are, he kept on doing his job and he applied for first sergeant duty and he became a first sergeant.

TS: Now, what field was he in then? Was he still—

LS: He was a first sergeant but he would go to—one of his assignments was, like, the environmental—the roads.

TS: Okay.

LS: Things like that. And then after we had divorced he was a first sergeant in a hospital. He was a first sergeant and things like that, but he became a first sergeant.

TS: How long did you stay married, then?

LS: Amber was born—we divorced—She was—Two days before she was a year old we divorced.

TS: Two days before she was a year old, okay.

LS: Yes.

TS: Now, did it have to do with the alcoholism?

LS: Yeah, it did, because—

TS: Okay. You didn't even recognize it but then it became—

[Speaking Simultaneously]

LS: I knew—

TS: —something was going on.

LS: —something was going on, and when he lost—when he had his nervous breakdown he lost his job at Wilford Hall; he was in a transition area. He had to go to work but they had him in a transition area; they were trying to figure out what to put him in. I was very pregnant with Am—with my youngest daughter Amber. And the clinic commander wanted me to stay there and he said, "Linda," he says—and he was more—wasn't talking to me then as an employee or military, he was more like a father figure advice.

TS: Right.

LS: And he said, "I've seen it many times." He says, "Please stay here where you're secure," and I wouldn't, because he was my husband.

TS: Right.

LS: And then he had to go see a psychiatrist because they were trying to figure out the deal. And then after a while I had to go see him because I was the wife, and even the psychiatrist told me, he said, "What are you going to do?"

I said, "What do you mean, what am I going to do? He's my husband."

And he says, "Usually it don't work out." And I was one of those gung-ho mothers— that oh, no, no, no, I've got—I've got a toddler and I'm getting ready to have another child. And I said—And he told me, he said, "Usually it doesn't work out." But he says, "He needs—He needs help, and I would suggest that you go with [unclear] AA

programs with him, they have Al-Anon [program for the relatives and friends of alcoholics]."

And I'm like, "Well, what in the world is Al-Anon?" So after a while everything that we did was AA and Al-Anon, AA and Al-Anon, and—until we left San Antonio.

Got to Davis-Monthan [Air Force Base, Arizona] and because of his rank I was put in his housing; the housing area for him. And we were there a month and he left. He got a place off base and left me.

TS: With the kids.

LS: With the kids on base.

TS: How long, then, did you stay at that base?

LS: Not quite two years, because the tension with him and me and the children, and one time he wants to come back, one time he doesn't want to come back, and him calling me, going to commit suicide on Mount Lemmon, and don't want to help with babysitting because he's going to go to a AA meeting, and he's going to one AA meeting lunchtime, two or three at night and stuff like that, trying to get his life together. I talked to the commander and he said, "Linda, you're not here long enough. I can't do it." And then—

TS: To transfer?

LS: To transfer. And his commander evidently talked to my commander and they said, "She's—Let her go. Let her go. Let's try to get her going." Well, they found out that I was from North Carolina and they found out the sa—that I—that Myrtle Beach was there. And they asked me, they said, "Linda, do you want to go to Myrtle Beach?"

I said, "Yes. I'm gone. Get me there." And I left, and within a month's time from the time I got to Myrtle Beach he got orders to Korea.

TS: Oh, really.

LS: He got orders to Korea. And then from there he went his way and I went mine.

TS: Pretty much over then, yeah. When did you get to Myrtle Beach then? So that would have been eighty—

LS: Eighty—

TS: —seven, '88?

LS: Eighty-seven, '88 timeframe, and I stayed there until I went to Alamogordo [Holloman Air Force Base, New Mexico].

TS: Until '92?

LS: Yeah, with the transition into Saudi Arabia and stuff.

TS: Okay. Well, let's talk about that then. You're—You've got—Single mom.

LS: Single mom.

TS: Raising two little girls and you're at Myrtle Beach.

LS: Yeah.

TS: On the beach. How are you enjoying—you're back in the South.

LS: Back in the South [chuckles] and close enough—and close enough, because my parents live right here in Tar Heel, that's my—close enough to where if I needed them on the weekends and we were on maneuvers and stuff my mom was here and my family was here. And close enough that if I knew that something was coming up I could leave several hours early to get them here and then go back and be where I needed to be. And had a lot of help; a lot of help with them.

And when Desert Shield/Desert Storm kicked off we didn't know—we didn't know what was going on, but their dad knew something was going on and he called me one time and he—Still he did not take the initiative with the children, and in the summertime he wouldn't take the children on a visitation. I would take the children to his parents' house in Georgia and then go—my mom and I would go back and get them, so there was always that communication with his family. And he called me one night and he said—It was all on the news, all the troubles over there, and he said, "If something happens," and he says, "and Myrtle Beach is slated, what are you going to do with the children?"

I'm like, "What am I going to do? Nothing. I'm not planning on going anywhere."

TS: [chuckles] Right.

LS: But I knew, after it was all over with and things transpired, I was over there and I knew. I said, "Well, no wonder he's asking me that because he could never go." Because when he had his nervous breakdown they would never put him in—

TS: To be deployed like that.

LS: To be deployed like that. And I had just finished my M16 [rifle] training one morning and went to the clinic dirty and everything and the supervisor said, "Well, you're off the rest of the day because you had training. Just go ahead and do whatever." And—excuse me—I went and got my children from daycare and getting ready to eat dinner and I got a phone call, "We're being deployed Monday and you've got so many hours to be here to do this."

I said, "So many hours? What are you talking about?"

"We're being deployed somewhere. You need to go."

TS: How long did you have to get ready?

LS: Two hours.

TS: You were going to deploy in two hours?

LS: I had—I had to be at the shelter—

TS: Okay.

LS: —where we were going to be deployed and I said, "Well, what's going on?"

TS: Right.

LS: "Well, we can't tell you."

And I said, "Well, how long are we going to be there?"

They said, "Make sure you have availability for your children." My mom was working at the time so I called another babysitter, and I had two babysitters and they were friends of mine. One of them—One of them, the husband was being deployed and she was going to keep the children. And my mom was working and I told my mom, I said, "Mama, we're going to be deployed. We have to be ready in two hours."

She said, "I cannot get there in two hours."

I said, "I know, I've already got the babysitter." She said that she would pick them up the next day. So I got everything together and I got the children to the babysitter, I came back and I handwrote things for my mom; this is my check number, this is—Thank God, all the time I was in the military I kept my checking account at a bank here in Elizabethtown and the ladies knew—

TS: You and your mom and everything.

LS: Knew all of us.

TS: Right.

LS: And I said, "This is the babysitter's name, this is the number. They'll be at school in the morning, pick them up from school." So her and my brother did and—but when I got to the shelter, to where they were checking everybody to process us and everything, I had to get all my shots. See, everybody else knew that they were going to be deployed but I didn't. And the reason I got deployed, one of the girls that worked in the OR—I wasn't going over there as a dental, I was going over there as OR—her boyfriend was over there and she found out that she was pregnant, and she wanted to go and be with him because we didn't know what was going to happen, and one of her friends said, "She can't go, she's pregnant."

And when they did a pregnancy test, they found out that, "Oh, yes, she's pregnant. You cannot go." And since I had OR training they called me.

TS: So you filled in for her.

LS: I filled in for her.

TS: Was it a different unit that was going but you—

LS: No, it was the hospital.

TS: Same—Oh, the same—

LS: Same—

TS: But you just weren't slotted to go originally.

LS: Right, I wasn't slotted to go. At that time some of the people from Nellis Air Force Base [Nevada] was going to come with our hospital and go. They were already there filling in areas and stuff, and we knew that they were going to go somewhere but we didn't know where, and when her pregnancy test came back that she was pregnant I got slotted to go.

TS: What did you think about all this? I understand that you're just getting prepared to do it probably; don't even have time to think about it.

LS: That was it. And they said you could only have seventy-some pounds of stuff that you could take with you, and I had not—I didn't have all what they had.

TS: You didn't have all the gear?

LS: No. I had all the gear because we had exercises on deployments and stuff like that out in the field, but I didn't have all the personal stuff. I just had to throw things in—

TS: Oh, to be prepared to go.

LS: To be—Yeah.

TS: I see.

LS: And then when I was going through they gave me all the shots, all the gamma globulins shots, then they had the base lawyers—my mind's blank. Anyway, they had all the legal forms for me to sign, and they had one of the runners take that legal form, and when my mom picked the children up the next day at school all the legal forms would have been there for her.

TS: Yeah.

LS: To take the children and to put the children in school and things like that.

TS: Well, do you want to take a little break because you've been talking for a long time.

LS: It doesn't matter. [chuckles]

TS: Why don't we take a short break here? I'll pause it.

[Interview paused]

TS: Thank you for letting me take a little break. [chuckles]

LS: You're welcome.

TS: You're starting to talk about when you are getting deployed to—for the Desert Shield—It was Desert Shield first right?

LS: Desert Shield then Desert Storm.

TS: Okay. How many days before you actually left?

LS: We left the very next morning; we left before daybreak.

TS: Oh, because you were this last minute fill in.

LS: I was the last minute person.

TS: The other people had, like, more time to prepare.

LS: Right, right. And I had two hours to prepare and I left my children with—

TS: Wow.

LS: —a babysitter.

TS: Okay.

LS: And my mother and brother picked them up the next morning at school and kept them while I was gone.

TS: Now, you said they were eight and ten?

LS: Eight and ten.

TS: Eight and ten. Now, did you even get a chance to say goodbye to them?

LS: When I dropped them off at the babysitter.

TS: That was it?

LS: But I did not tell them that I would be gone for a period of time because I didn't know, and I just reassured them that Grandma was going to be with them and pick them up the next day. And because there were so many deployed from Myrtle Beach at the air force base, the teachers and everything were aware because they went to school on base.

TS: Right.

LS: And to transfer them from Myrtle Beach to Dublin was easy.

TS: Okay.

LS: Because they knew what was going on.

TS: They knew that this was the process going on.

LS: Right.

TS: Okay. Where did you then go the next day? Where did you end up?

LS: We left Myrtle Beach and we stopped in Torrejón [Air Base], Spain.

TS: Okay.

LS: And had the plane serviced. And we still didn't know at that point where we were going, or what was happening.

TS: Oh, really? Okay. When was this? It was, like, early—

LS: Right. It was August—the end of August and September timeframe.

TS: Had [President] George [H.W.] Bush said, "This [aggression] will not stand," yet?

LS: No. No.

[Speaking Simultaneously]

TS: None of that had come on TV?

LS: None of that.

TS: Oh.

LS: None of that.

TS: This is when they're just building up on the—

LS: Right. That was just the initial build up and—

TS: Interesting. Okay.

LS: When we serviced—got serviced in Torrejón and we'd left, they had some huge tent and we were—and we could take a nap there if we wanted to but everybody was so pumped up and what was going on, where are we going that—the little canvas cots—no one slept. And we were in—after we left Torrejón we were in air, and they made an announcement. I think we were, like, two hours out—two hour—maybe two hours out, and they announced—someone announced in the plane—the commander or someone in the plane announced that we would be the closest hospital to Kuwait City. And there was no air force hospital there but we had—we had to build our own hospital—do our own hospital—but there was some support team there, security police; different people there that was already there.

We landed at King Fahd Air [Force] Base at about 8:30 in the morning, and it was blazing hot. There was no trees, no nothing nowhere. All there was tents, several hundred tents. And then it was so hot that they did not want us to get out and do anything so they took us to our tents and they said, "Stay in the tents and when—We'll come around and get you, and when it gets cool at night we'll put our tents up." And they said, "This is where the hospital's going to be. We're going to put so many tents for the men, so many tents for the women." And there was no ice for water, there was nothing—MREs [Meal, Ready-to-Eat], we were eating MREs—and the water, they had the water there but it was, like, sitting out in the hot sun because that's all you had.

And we put our tents up and then they divided the tents between the enlisted and the officers, and then the enlisted, there was—we had—so we wouldn't upset anybody we measured the tents and we got a fifty-two inch living space with the canvas cots, and that was our living space.

TS: Fifty-two inches?

LS: Fifty-two inches. Then we had to have a show—We did our shower tent. We did our bathroom tent. And our shower tent, we had—at that time we—buddy-buddies—we had to have a buddy and we could go in and we could shower while our buddy was listening

for any Scuds [surface-to-surface guided missiles] or anything like that going off or alarms going off, and then when I would finish my shower then my buddy would go and do her shower. And the shower tent was a huge tent and it had PVC pipes and the water was coming down from that, and the water just ran off into a pipe out into the desert.

And you stood there and it was horrible sometimes because it was women's hair; they lose their hair and everything, it clogs the drain and you're standing ankle deep in this water. And you're trying to stay clean and you're just trying to—and some—the wind would blow so hard that by the time you got back to the tent your hair was nothing but white talcum. So that was an adjustment.

TS: Right.

LS: And then after everybody was—everybody got that ready we started to—we had to walk away from the tents—out away from the tents and set the hospital up. We set the hospital up, and because the security police was more or less for the flight line and things like that we had to take turns guarding the hospital after we put it up and we was—it seemed like forever, probably a week to two weeks that we had to secure the hospital and do sandbags. We had the sandbags up all around the hospital so if they hit anything the shrapnel would not go into the hospital and the patients or anything. And then from that—

TS: I'm sorry. What was the hospital made out of; what kind of material?

LS: Tent.

TS: Just tent.

LS: Just tent.

TS: It was just a tent.

LS: Just a tent.

TS: Was there air-conditioning units or anything like that?

LS: The only—After the hospital was up and we got all the support there we did have the air-conditioning. We did have—Before we got the hospital up and before we could get the morgue—the chow hall, we used one of their freezers for the morgue in case—in case we needed it.

TS: Just had it set aside.

LS: Set aside—

TS: Okay.

LS: —for that. But then once we got the hospital totally set up and we had the air-conditioning we also—the lab—the lab needed the ice machines for their blood so we didn't—at that point we were happy because we could get ice.

TS: [chuckles] Yeah. Right.

LS: The ones of us in surgery, we could get MREs and we would put our MREs up on the tent to where by the time we ate we were okay, and then we got the bright idea—our autoclaves in surgery, we would ask family—

TS: What's an autoclave?

LS: It cleaned the instruments.

TS: Okay.

LS: To sterilize the instruments. We could send letters home to people—send us a canned this and canned that—and when they would do that we would have our own little dinner in there and we could warm our—we wouldn't close it totally but we just keep the door to where it would heat it up and we did a lot of stuff there. And we had to—The hardest part was your buddy system because your buddies always weren't on the same shift as you were, and we had to take these tablets, these—what they called p tablets [Pyridostigmine bromide (PB) tablets were an anti-nerve agent pill used during the Gulf War as a pretreatment to protect military personnel from death in an attack with the nerve agent soman] and you would have to take them and then come to find out it had—for anthrax. And then if you were—it affected you to where if you were happy, every muscle in your face was just happy.

TS: [chuckles]

LS: But if you got depressed or sad or anything, your eyes watered, your nose—everything was coming out. Your—I mean, it was just—

TS: That's from these tablets that you had to take?

LS: I think it was from the tablets. Then the bathrooms were these porta-potties that were way out in the sun; a hundred and thirty degree weather in a porta-potty. That was just miserable. And I always thought that the army guys, next of us, they were in better shape because they had the holes and they would just bury it and we had the hot—

TS: Yeah.

LS: —porta-potties that were just stewing all day long.

TS: Right.

LS: But—

TS: Now, were you thinking, "Well, this is better than the farm," at this point?

LS: No, at that point, no.

TS: [chuckles]

LS: But before I—My mom called my dad that night—

TS: Right.

LS: —that I called her and told her I was going, and he was working on a job in California at a Frito-Lay plant.

TS: Your dad was?

LS: And he said, "Well, she knew that when she was going in." And that was—that was said—that's all that was said about that.

TS: Yeah.

LS: "She knew that when she was going in." And I think it was happening so much while we were there; we had to get a place to sleep, we had to have a hospital, we had to do this, and we knew we had to do it. It really didn't—I didn't think of that.

TS: You didn't really think about it until—

LS: No.

TS: Did you think about it at all while you were there?

LS: No.

TS: Like, being in danger?

LS: No—Yes, being in danger, yes, because every time we would have an alarm go off we were running for the bunkers and putting our gear on and everything. It came to light—and see we didn't have a lot of—we had TV but we only had to go to a certain tent for the TV and we didn't have the news like the people back here had the news.

TS: Right.

LS: So they knew more of the news—

TS: Build up?

LS: —than we did; we just—we were just hearing and listening to what's going on and we were—a siren came off that a Scud was coming, and I remember running like crazy to this one bunker, and as I just begin to put my gas mask on I see this big, huge explosion; big, huge explosion. Well, I didn't know it until the next day when we went to the tent and that's when they blew up the barracks in [Naval Support Activity] Bahrain.

TS: Oh, okay.

LS: And we figured since we were between Bahrain and Kuwait City that that's what it was.

TS: How far away was that?

LS: Well, when we went shopping and when they let us into town we went to Bahrain. Twenty, thirty miles; twenty miles maybe.

TS: But clear desert between you and—

LS: Clear desert, nothing there, and it was at nighttime so everything at nighttime was all lit up.

TS: Was that when some of the service people were killed?

LS: Yeah.

TS: In that barracks.

LS: Yeah.

TS: It was a Scud missile.

LS: Yeah. Whoever blew it up.

TS: Right.

LS: Whether it was American or Iraqis, I don't know. And then at nighttime when it—when the actual Desert Storm kicked off and I was working day shift, but at nighttime they had people coming around to every tent waking everybody up, "It's going to start at such-and-such a time. Don't use your flashlights, don't use no lights. It's going to start." It was time. We were all—Our energy level was just tripled. And when it starts, on the flight line you can see two by two aircraft go. These big, huge afterburner fires and two

by two, two by two. And that was just unreal, just to see that. Just the roar in the middle of the night hearing the—hearing it going off.

And then the next day as they were coming back two by two, two by two, you could see if they were okay; they made it back. But when you saw one plane, you knew that one plane was down, and that happened, and it was a pilot, and he actually—he was actually a pilot from Myrtle Beach that I knew, because working in the dental clinic and then doing the physicals and stuff.

TS: He didn't make it?

LS: He didn't make it. And then, like I said, we would go into Bahrain. The women were looked upon like their women and we couldn't go into some of the stores unless the guys went with us. We couldn't go into, like, a Dunkin' Donuts—not a Dunkin' Donuts—Dairy Queen. We had to stand outside while the guys went in and bought our ice cream and brought them out. Things like that.

TS: What did you think about all that?

LS: Thank God that I was not from that country. Thank God that I live where I do. And I remember women [chuckles]—I could drive in Germany, but women over there—

[Speaking Simultaneously]

TS: Unlicensed. [both laugh]

LS: Women over there were not allowed to drive and we had one guy that had to take some type papers to Riyadh [Saudi Arabia]. He could drive but I was sent as shotgun, so if anything happened I had to destroy the papers and why I did that in the hospital, I don't know. Why I was tasked to do that I don't know, and to this day it's mind-boggling.

TS: Well, a lot of people when they're deployed they do a lot of jobs they—

LS: Do other roles.

TS: Yeah, that you're not trained for.

LS: I was—I could carry my M16.

TS: Yeah.

LS: And I could protect him. And I could destroy these papers which—what type papers I don't know, but I couldn't drive a vehicle.

TS: Yeah. [both chuckle] Fire the weapon but get your hands off that steering wheel.

LS: Right. So we went into Riyadh and we were in this embassy-like thing and it was, like, you look at these people and they were clean. They were extremely clean and here you were—I mean, even though you had a bath—and a shower—a shower, it was just unreal because the dust just kept you dirty; kept you dirty.

TS: Yeah, I heard that you never got rid of the sand.

LS: No.

TS: You kept seeing it all the time. What was the most difficult thing about the initial time that you were there? How long were you deployed?

LS: We came back in late March; my group came back in late March. I guess when it was all over with Desert—

TS: Six months?

LS: Seven—About six, seven months.

TS: Okay.

LS: When it was over with and Desert Shield was over with we were taking down the tents. We knew something was coming, and we knew we had all these blankets for transport patients with—and we were sitting there tearing up IV bags and letting it run into the desert, and burying these pills which I figure if we were over there to help Kuwait, why not—They said we can't do that because the embassy's got to do this, that, and the other, and we were destroying everything. And one of the guys from the orderly room came around and said, "You, you, you, and you, go back to the barracks and we'll let you know when you get there. Get all your stuff together." And when we got our stuff together we were standing in front of the—I say barracks but it was a tent—standing in front of the tents, he says, "You're going home."

And they come by with a bus and they took us to the flight line and when we came out and went to Germany—flew into Germany and then came on—came on in home.

TS: You went home before the rest?

LS: Before some of them, yeah. They started slowly doing that and I think most of them were single parents or children and stuff like that.

TS: I see. Did you have a lot of casualties that came through your hospital?

LS: A lot of—Most of the casualties were our own people. Sprained ankles.

TS: Injuries.

[Speaking Simultaneously]

LS: Injuries from [unclear]—

TS: Accidents.

LS: Stuff like that. We heard of people that would commit suicide and stuff like that but we didn't—

TS: Didn't necessarily have anything come through yours.

LS: No, no. We had some appendicitises and things like that. What I would call minor things. We never had any—When we—If we did, we were taken to where we would take our group, over to the ship [United States Navy Ship] *Comfort* and [United States Navy Ship] *Mercy* and we would transport them over there. And even our guys that needed to be taken out of there, we would take them over either to the *Comfort* or the *Mercy*.

TS: Okay. So those were, like, the big equipped hospital ships.

LS: Right. The ships hospitals. And when the Iraqis—Some of the Iraqis did come through and they detained them on the flight line, and they were not injured, but they were taken over to a holding area in the flight line and I—we were not—

TS: Some prisoners of war?

LS: Right.

TS: I see. This whole idea of having women so close to the war zone, was that even something you thought about at all?

LS: No.

TS: No.

LS: No, because, like I said, I went to Riyadh with this guy and then we would take some of the guys—the army guys—medics—that needed to have equipment taken up to the forward operations area [unclear], in Iraq, and the hospital—some of us were tasked to go on the—take the helicopters and drop off the supplies to those guys and then come back, and even though you saw right up at the FOL [forward operating location], you knew what you were there for and it didn't—I don't ever think that it—the women in the

military part like that, it didn't—I just always felt—Like my grandpa said, "If you're going to eat you better do the job." Whether it was male or female, we never distinguished between that.

TS: And like your dad said, you signed up for it, right?

LS: Yeah, and that's what he said.

TS: [chuckles]

LS: And see, at that time I knew Vietnam was coming down so I didn't think ever in my lifetime I would see another—

TS: Well, some of the complaints, like, in the post criticism, I guess, of it had to do with women becoming pregnant while they're deployed to try to get out of getting there.

LS: It's ironic. I got deployed because a woman was pregnant. [both chuckle]

TS: That's right.

LS: Here in the United States.

TS: That's right.

LS: How ironic.

TS: Yeah. But that's what some of them said.

LS: Yeah.

TS: And that the complaints about single mothers, why should they have to go, or they should definitely have—on both sides of the controversy there. Did you ever have any thoughts about how people perceived women in uniform that have children?

LS: No, not initially, but now that I'm retired I look back and I say, "Well, even—Out of all that clinic at Myrtle Beach, why did a single mother go?" But at the time, no, I just figured it was my job and that's what I had to do.

TS: But you were the qualified person.

LS: Right. Yeah.

TS: Right.

LS: Yeah. I figured, well, whatever job I had is what I had to do. Like taking supplies to—with the helicopter, taking this—going with this guy—

TS: Right.

LS: That's just—

TS: Riding shotgun.

LS: —yeah—what I was supposed to do. And I didn't look at it as a male, female type thing to where the women were treated any different, and I guess that was because of the way I was raised.

TS: Well, did you have any personal difficulties being away from your children or your family or anything like that?

LS: I did. I did, but because I was a single parent I had to be there with them all the time. I had to be responsible for them the whole time. But then I put in the back of my mind that I knew that my mom and my dad and my family—my relatives—my mom, like I said, she was the oldest of sixteen and my dad there was twelve so I had enough family to be there for them. My oldest daughter had some problems. Separation anxiety. And her school counselor in Dublin got together and she would draw little things, she would send them to me and things like that. That was difficult because I wasn't there to be there for them.

And then the oth—the other thing is when, since I did not have enough time to prepare for this, and you were only allowed to take so many pounds with you, when I got there they didn't—they had, like, a little BX [Base Exchange] for everybody; if you ran out of stuff you could get it there. But they didn't have the things there for the women. The—I think the manifest that they had was all from the Vietnam era, and there was not a lot of women over in Viet—there was women there, but not close enough to—they didn't have all the personal things that a woman needs.

TS: Personal hygiene.

LS: Right. They didn't have those items there, so what was girls going to do in our tent? If we got any personal items it was like a community-type thing. You use it as needed because—

TS: You shared.

LS: We shared everything. And other than that I think they—guys were more equipped only because of history repeating itself.

TS: Right. Because they didn't really—

LS: Right.

TS: —think about it and it was really the first time 40,000 women were deployed—

LS: Yeah.

TS: —at the drop of a hat and that hadn't happened before.

LS: Right. And then as we were taking the P [B] tablets, we saw a trend after a while that all of our women, our cycles quit.

TS: Oh.

LS: It just quit. We didn't know if it was stress, we don't know if it was the medication, we don't know if it was this, that, or the other; we may never know. But after a while every woman's cycle just quit. And then we had a head nurse, she was—she was wonderful. When we first got there we had this bathroom tent and it had three toilets facing this way, three toilets facing that way, and nothing in between to separate anybody. Nothing. And with this medication that you're on when you had to go, I mean, you had to go, like, right now. There was no waiting around, you just had to go.

And she had got to the point—because there was a lot of people who—over there who worked at Bechtel [Engineering, Construction & Project Management]—this company called Bechtel. They were civilians that worked over there and their civilian families were there, and she had contacted them and some of them—when we were allowed to leave you could go to a Bechtel compound and you could have your hair cut by these women and things like that. But she had got it to where they knew some people and through the military they got it to where we could hang up PVC pipes again around the toilets and we—she went and bought us shower curtains. Even though it wasn't a wall—

TS: Had a little privacy.

LS: —the shower curtains behind us and on each side of us so we could have privacy. And it was because of her that we did that, otherwise who knows how long we would have been there.

TS: Right.

LS: And then I remember one time we were allowed to leave, back again to go into Bahrain toward the Bechtel compound, and they had, like, a huge compound and they had, like, a private beach and we were allowed to go there and have, like, hot dogs and hamburgers and stuff. And I think with her being the head nurse, she looked at things like that and she looked out for us that way, where otherwise we would have never had that opportunity.

TS: A little more maternalistic—

LS: Right.

TS: —and caring for the—

LS: Right.

TS: —troops, I guess.

LS: Right.

TS: Yeah. So what kind of lessons do you think you took back with you from that deployment?

LS: Don't—From the time I saw that bomb blow up those barracks in Bahrain, don't ever take anything for granted and don't dwell on stuff that doesn't mean anything because it could be gone in a split second. And there was a couple times that—when a Scud would hit or get hit they would take us out to these areas and you could pick up little pieces of this and little pieces of that. Huge holes—craters in there. And just the thing that life could be gone in a second of—and for what? For what? In a country that we have no—What did we gain? It's not going to change over there. I don't think it'll ever change over there. Sort of like Vietnam. What did Vietnam gain; what did we gain; what did our guys gain from coming over there?

TS: So war and the costs of war has a little more personal meaning.

LS: Yeah. Before I wouldn't have even thought about it, even though I was interested in the history part of it and especially Vietnam. But at that time when Vietnam was going on, you didn't—you didn't know the long term effect. You didn't know this, that, and the other and it came to—more into light after Desert Shield/Desert Storm. And I look at it now, all the guys over there in Iraq and all that and it just—are we going to have a continuous presence there to keep it down? I don't know.

TS: Good questions. Well, when you got back from your deployment what—how many months—you went, like, in August and you came back—

LS: The end of March.

TS: Okay.

LS: And then July they announced—We had a commander's call [mandatory gathering in which a commander speaks to his or her people regarding pertinent current or upcoming information] and they announced that the base was closing.

TS: Oh, that's right. Okay.

LS: And—

TS: This was in Eglin—No, this was Myrtle Beach.

LS: No, Myrtle Beach.

TS: Myrtle Beach.

LS: And in August I left—I left Myrtle Beach to go to Holloman [Air Force Base, New Mexico] in Alamogordo.

TS: And you had told me something before we started the tape, about how you picked that area, or you tried to get into that—

LS: Well, when they told us—commander's call that we were going to close the base and we had to be out and that the base was going to be closing in December, they had a team already set up from the Pentagon to come down to the education center at the base for us to choose where we wanted to go. And they gave me five choices. One was Boston, one was Wyoming, one was Alabama—one or two in Alabama—and one Colorado. And I didn't want to go in the cold. [both chuckle] Did not want to go back up in the cold because I was used to the summer again.

TS: Right.

LS: And then I had just before went in there, one of the girls stationed in the same clinic with me, she came out—They had already—She came out and she said, "Well, I'm going to Holloman."

And I said, "Where is Holloman?"

They said, "Alamogordo, New Mexico."

I said, "Well, my sister lives there."

So when I got there to make my choice I asked about Pope [Air Force Base, Fayetteville, NC] and they said, "Well, Pope is not in our command so you would have to release you from our command into Pope's command." Seymour Johnson [Air Force Base, Goldsboro, NC] and Shaw [Air Force Base, Sumter, SC] was the same thing, a command would have to release you from it.

And I—And it—And I remember Pat saying that she was going to Holloman. I said, "Well, what command is Holloman in?"

"Same thing we get—Same here at Myrtle Beach."

I said, "Can I go there?"

And the guy from the Pentagon told me, he said, "Well, check back with me tomorrow around lunchtime," and he made an appointment for me to be there at lunchtime.

And I thought, "This guy's just blowing smoke." Is he really thinking I'm serious? And when I went the next day it was—it was for Holloman.

TS: And you wanted to go because you wanted to be close to your sister.

LS: Because of my sister, yeah.

TS: Yeah.

LS: And then when I left and went out there, when I got there she had already had an apartment for me because house—base housing was not available at the time for me; I had to wait till a unit came open. She had an apartment for me and she had—the school, if I didn't want to put the children in the school on base she had the school addresses and everything. She had a lot of it planned—

TS: She did a lot of research. [chuckles]

LS: Right. But when I got there I found out that the school was close to the dental clinic and I could drop them off.

TS: The one on base?

LS: On base; I could drop them off on base. And then the youth center on base was walking distance from the school so if I had to work late they would go over to the youth center and I would pick them up at the youth center. And then after I had been there I think, like, six months base housing came available.

TS: So that wasn't too bad then.

LS: No, it wasn't too bad. It wasn't bad.

TS: How were your girls doing with this new station, someplace different?

LS: I—At that time I thought—I thought that they were okay with it. I thought that—Because they knew that their aunt was going to be there.

TS: Oh, okay.

LS: That they had that excitement that they were going to see their aunt. And she'd spoil them because she's never had children, so they were excited about that. But I did not know until after I retired that they—the oldest one, had affected her more. She really did not like the fact of moving from base to base and losing her friends and being away from her friends.

TS: How old was she for this last move?

LS: Middle school.

TS: Yeah, okay.

LS: Middle school.

TS: Yeah. Tough time to—

LS: Yeah, yeah, middle school. And then before I moved on base—I'll tell you how I met my husband. Before I moved on base I was still living in an apartment, and every day I would come home the laundry was full, and I got to the point I had to do laundry. Either I was running out or the children were running out, so I went uptown to do laundry, and I think I had, like, six loads of laundry. I was livid. And I was taking the laundry out and putting it into the dryer and sitting at the dryer with this guy reading a book. And he told me, he says, "I'm getting ready to take my stuff out. If you want the dryer you can use it." And we—And I had a book, and we started talking, and he was retired military and he wanted to know what the procedures were for retirees to get a dental appointment on base. And this was, like, September—late September.

And I told him, I said, "Well, you know they've deployed and every time we do maneuvers or we have training exercise it's easier for the retirees to come in."

And he said, "Do you mind if next time you let me know?"

I said, "Well, give me your phone number and I'll let you know." And in January I called him. I said, "We're going to have an exercise this week in January. Come that week and just check in and if they have—since the military are not there, they'll work you in." And he did. Didn't hear nothing from him—nothing—from September until January.

And I think the first week of February he called me and he said, "Linda, I want to thank you for getting me an appointment," he said, "and I really appreciate how your little daughters were and I wrote a letter to thank them." He says, "Is there any way I can thank you?"

I said, "No." I said, "Just procedures."

"Well, can I take you to dinner?"

I said, "You can but I've got two children." I said, "I'm a single parent with two children."

He said, "Well, bring them along." And from that point on we ended up—got married. At a laundromat.

TS: That's a good story. [both chuckle] That's a good story.

LS: A laundry—

TS: What's your husband's name?

LS: Jeffrey.

TS: Jeffrey, that's right.

LS: And he had—he had retired from the army.

TS: Okay.

LS: And he retired from the army and he worked with Hughes Aircraft [Company] on a lot of black projects, and they had a project going on at White Sands [Missile Range].

[A black project is a highly classified military or defense project]

TS: So that's why he was there?

LS: That's why he was there.

TS: He was just there temporarily; that's why he was at the laundromat?

LS: But he was at the laundromat and he—this project—he didn't know how long it was going to last, but he was actually living in Las Vegas but he had an apartment—

TS: To go to.

LS: To go back and forth because of him having to go to Hughes and then ba—Raytheon [Company] bought out part of this from Hughes Aircraft on these projects that—some radar something; black project something.

TS: You didn't want to know.

LS: Yeah.

TS: [chuckles]

LS: Area 51 type—

TS: That's it.

LS: —type stuff. And who would have thought?

TS: Yeah.

LS: And he's—You hear horror stories about step-dads. Both of my girls will tell you it's not true. And their dad—their dad, he had a massive heart attack when he was forty-five. Had very recently retired, and he worked something like a Guardian ad Litem for a court system, and every day he—they lived in Florida and he would go to the Gu—he would go to the Gulf and he would surf, and then he would come home and he would jump in

the pool. Well, one hot—he went to the Gulf to surf and when he reached down to pick up his surfboard he had a massive heart attack and died on the beach.

TS: Oh, my goodness.

LS: So yeah.

TS: So they lost him pretty early.

LS: Yeah, they lost him pretty early.

TS: Yeah.

LS: So they know, and they look at him they—and I've never, never asked my children to call him Dad or anything; his name's Jeff. So they knew distinctly—and I always made sure that they knew his family, even though he was an alcoholic and all these things about alcoholics.

TS: Right, their father.

LS: Right.

TS: Right.

LS: He would—They would give him, like, a little sobriety coin; they still have some of those sobriety coins that he had.

TS: So they stayed connected—

LS: Yeah.

TS: —to his family.

LS: To his family, yeah. And even if Jeff and I happen to go to Atlanta, they have a fit. "You're going to come here. You don't get a—" And it's just—

TS: Very welcoming.

LS: Yeah. And his family was, like, "Even though you and him cannot get along, and there was issues there, that's you and him, that's not us."

TS: Right.

LS: It still worked out for the well—and his step-dad, he was—and his dad, were both military. One was [U.S.] Army, one was [U.S] Marine [Corps]. Jeff was army, and I'm air force, and their dad was air force, so there's military issues all through that.

TS: Yeah, lots of tradition.

[Speaking Simultaneously]

LS: And my dad was army.

TS: You have good tradition there then. Well, the last base, then, at Holloman, how did that work out for you?

LS: When I got there I wasn't hands-on clinic anymore, and they didn't have an oral surgeon; they would send them to William Beaumont [Army Medical Center], the army base in El Paso. And because I had a lot of clinical type stuff from Wilford Hall with clinics I was—did the data automations type stuff. Just send the information from the clinic to the Pentagon; all the statistic type stuff there, and I ended up doing that there.

TS: There was a lot more paperwork.

LS: Oh.

TS: [chuckles]

LS: Yes.

TS: Not pleasant paperwork apparently.

LS: No. But it wasn't long because when you're there a year and a half you're six months out and you're doing all your retirement stuff so it wasn't—it wasn't bad and it was more or less like a transition type thing. You look forward to that transition; you look forward to the retirement part.

TS: Yeah, so you were ready—

LS: Yeah.

TS: —by then, to get out.

LS: Yeah.

TS: You knew you would get out at your twenty [years].

LS: Right.

TS: Well, one thing I forgot to ask you about is, did you have any kind of mentors along the way to help you through, like, your training or just navigating the air force?

LS: The—When I was at Dover, and one day I was in the flight line and the next day I was in the dental clinic, a Dr. Antonio[?], he asked me, he said, "Well, what are you doing in here in the uniform for the flight line?"

TS: Oh, right.

LS: And I told him—And I went and got my uniform, and he taught me not as an assistant but as a doctor teaching a doctor. And every day he would drill me on—I had to start off on on-the-job training—"Well, what size of the teeth is this," and as he was doing the things he says, "This is what we're going to do and this is why we're going to do it."

Then when I got to Germany the doctor over there that worked in oral surgery, even in the OR and the identification where we had to identify them he would say, "This is why we're going to do it."

Then I was in Wilford Hall. This resident, he was there, he was doing some training for oral surgeon, he was stationed there, and he started out—One of my jobs when I first got there was to get all the doctors' packets together and get them going and doing the things, having them in the OR at a certain time, this, that, and the other. And he got to where him and I were close, and then when he had already left and went to Davis-Monthan [Air Force Base], well, at that time when my husband's issues came up and he had a mental breakdown, they David-Montham in Tucson, Arizona is where we went, so he knew me there, and when he found out that I was coming there he recommended—he asked the colonel if I could go work with him because I had worked with him, and he was a mentor there.

TS: That's nice. So you did have people looking out for you along the way.

LS: Right, right. If they had not—And even when I was going through the difficult time with the children's father, of him wanting to commit suicide, this, that, and the other, and he would—every morning in the clinic he would say, "Well, Linda, how was your night last night?"

And I told him I—At one—At one point it got to the point every night I was getting these calls, "I can't do this and I'm going to drive the car up to Mount Lemmon. I'm going to cut the brake lines."

One morning he said, "Linda," he said, "play his game." He said, "Tell him," and he says, "I'm going to tell you the exact words to tell him. Tell him to go ahead, that you've already got his insurance policy made up and the children will be taken care of." Well, lo and behold, when it came around again I heard him—I heard—I heard Dr. Tanaka[?] say, "Tell him." And just never—After that he never threatened or never said that he was going to commit suicide.

TS: After that?

LS: After that. And it was like a—it was like a breath of fresh air because I wasn't getting these phone calls.

TS: Right.

LS: I wasn't—

TS: You had a little emotional release from it.

LS: And then—And he was the type person that—a people-pleaser—and he had to be the top of this and the top of this and the top of this, and with all that stress—I think I would have made rank if I hadn't have been so stressed during that time.

TS: Just because you had so much going on in your personal life.

LS: Right. Yeah. So much stress of raising two children and having these children here, there, and yonder and no one there.

TS: Yeah.

LS: It felt like I was thousands of miles away. I didn't want to be back in North Carolina and I didn't want to be there by myself.

TS: Right. Well, do you think your life is different because you joined the air force back in 1974?

LS: Yes. Yeah.

TS: What ways do you think it's most significantly had—

LS: It made a better life for myself and my children. For my children. Because I would not have had the educational opportunities, because at that time my mom and dad had lost their jobs and they were working this job and that job and all their retirement was gone. And around at that time we only had the—Bladen Community College had just started and that was—

TS: Do you think you're any different?

LS: Yeah. Yeah, I'm a stronger person. Stronger, more determined than I—than I was before, even though I was determined towards my dad. I think that was rebellion. [chuckles]

TS: Well, you certainly seem to have a streak of independence about you that—

LS: And I think that's it, because I look at it now after talking to women that's been here and there and—"I can't do this without my husband. I can't—What would I do?"

I said, "You never know until that day happens." And I said, "When that day happens and the shock is over, you realize how strong you are; how determined you are." And it's come true in a couple friends that I have.

TS: Yeah.

LS: One lady that—a massage therapist—everything was dependent on her husband—this, this, this—and then all of a sudden her husband retired and—January, February—four months later he had a massive stroke and he's basically on one side he's—she's taking care of him. Which before is like, "I can't do this. I can't go to the bank, I have to have him there with me, I—"

TS: Whole new world now.

LS: Yeah, and now she's saying, "Linda," she says, "you remember those words you told me?" She said, "How true; how true."

TS: Yeah. Well, now, we talked earlier, when you're growing up, about issues of, like, diversity and race and things like that. You talked about how it had—with your children and coming back here it's different; they had a different experience. Do you think that for your own life it changed you at all; your thinking?

LS: It made me better—a better person because I was always—I grew up in an era when the black did this, the black did—it—they were—they went to these restaurants and that was it. They only worked at these jobs. And, fortunately, when I was in the military some of my best friends that I still keep in contact with now are black, Asian, Hispanic. I mean, it—where before when you're taught that as a child you just assume that and then later on in life you realize, well, that's just not the way life is. That's just not the culture that we're in and—

TS: It can be different.

LS: Yeah. And now I look at it—is you have been raised that way but you have a choice. You can change. We talked about that my sister and I were never allowed to play sports. We were never allowed to be cheerleaders or anything like that. Well, my determination when I had children was my children's going to do what I didn't get to do.

TS: You said earlier one played a lot of basketball, and the other one, I forget what you said she did.

LS: Basketball, soccer, cheerleading, and all—the all stars, the county park, the church ball teams. And see, we were never allowed to do that. If we went to the ballgame in high

school my mom had to go with us. We had to sit with my mom, and what teenager wants to sit with her mom?

TS: [chuckles] Yeah, true. Okay, you got out in '94. We went through a period where gays and lesbians weren't supposed to be even talked about and they were kicked out, and then just as you got out the "Don't Ask, Don't Tell" was implemented, I think.

LS: After that, because—

[Speaking Simultaneously]

TS: Ninety-six, maybe? I thought it was '94.

LS: Yeah, '94, but when I was—as a matter of fact I was a supervisor of two young men at Davis-Monthan and at that time it was gays are not allowed.

TS: Right.

LS: And they went to a party on a weekend and they were both gay and some pictures were taken. Well, on a Monday morning one of them got really frantic and came to me and told me that some pictures were taken at this party and he was gay. And he told me, he says, "Well, what do I do?"

And I told him, "As your supervisor, in the way the policies are, I have to take you to the commander," and I took him to the commander and within a few weeks he was gone. Well, his friend, in the clinic, same thing happened. He had been at the same party but he had kept his mouth shut and he didn't tell anybody. And within a short period of time he was out. Those were the only two times. At that time you had to follow the protocol. And I knew in Saudi Arabia that there were some girls there that were gay, and I knew that a lot of them stayed in the same tent together. And they were my friends; I had no problem with them. They—As a matter of fact, one of them lived in Whiteville[?]. No issues with them, no—I'm at the point that—in my life if you want to do, and you can provide and you do your job the way that your job's to be done, why not.

TS: When they got—Just a few years ago said they got rid of "Don't Ask, Don't Tell".

LS: Right.

TS: And so, you can be openly gay, is it—so that's okay then, you think?

LS: That's fine. If you can do your job and you can do your job the way that a job should be done, who cares what he's doing?

TS: Yeah. What did you think when you had to turn the young man in that came to you?

LS: I was heartbroken because they were friends.

TS: Yeah.

LS: I wasn't only the—I wasn't only the supervisor but they were friends.

TS: Yeah.

LS: And they knew; they both knew. But unfortunately—or fortunately at the time, I don't know, because I don't know what happened to them after they left.

TS: Right.

LS: They were discharged.

TS: Right.

LS: But as workers, they were good; I couldn't ask for any better.

TS: Yeah. Well, we hear a lot about sexual assault; military trauma.

LS: When I was in Myrtle Beach the supervisor there was a black guy, and I was a single parent with two children, and it became obvious that in the clinic that everybody knew that he was trying to cause issues with me. And when I first got st—

TS: Issues regarding, like, harassment?

LS: Harassment.

TS: Okay.

LS: And it got to the point that even some of the doctors would comment, "Well, why are you—why are you in here and he's doing that? Why are you—Why is he always got his head poking in this door, and why are you—When you go to lunch why is he always wanting to know where you are and where you've been?" and stuff like that.

And for a long time I thought the reason I was sent to Saudi Arabia was because of that, but it wasn't. It was because I had the OR training.

TS: Yeah.

LS: And when I came back and they announced that the base was closed he had already—he was already processing out because he was retirement age. But that was an issue at the time.

TS: How did you handle it?

LS: In the beginning I was afraid. I was afraid because I—at that time I lived on base and I was afraid that a single parent with two children—and I was—and at that time I was close enough to retirement is I don't want—

TS: You don't want to make any waves.

LS: Waves, no waves for anybody, because I was looking further down the line to benefit me and my children for retirement age. And it was difficult for a time; it was really difficult for a time. And my fear when I came back was that he would still be there and—but when I came back he was processing out for retirement, because he knew—when we got back he already knew that the base was closing. And see, when we got back we knew something was going to happen but we didn't know the base was going to close that fast.

TS: Well, did you see it happen to other women too?

LS: Yeah. The Sergeant Shandling in Dover, harassing the women there, and I think he—I don't know if it was like a sexual harassment thing or he just did not want women, period, to be—

TS: Right. But that's part of sexual harassment, too, I think.

LS: Yeah.

TS: Well, how about the issue of PTSD [post-traumatic stress disorder]?

LS: The only time that I had any issues with that is when I came back from Saudi Arabia and because—and I relate it to when I was putting the gas mask on and hearing the bombs, hearing that big explosion. We got back and I was like a—something at North Myrtle Beach. They were having like, a shag [dancing] thing; something there; fireworks or something.

TS: Oh, okay.

LS: And they were—And I knew it was fireworks; that's what we were going there for.

TS: Right.

LS: To take children to—by the water, and when the fireworks started to come off I just hit the ground, like—and I was the only one that hit the ground.

TS: Right.

LS: It was like, "What's going on?" And I—And I remember looking up like this and everybody looking at me like I was crazy. What in the world? And then I knew that there was something there, but then when I knew that it was something there I didn't—

TS: You were a little better then?

LS: Yeah.

TS: Yeah.

LS: But I didn't know why I hit the ground.

[Speaking Simultaneously]

TS: At first. It was just a reaction—

LS: Yeah.

TS: —from that.

LS: Yeah.

TS: Well, what would you say was your most memorable experience in the air force?

LS: Memorable?

TS: Yes. Most rewarding, may be another way to put that.

LS: Getting the training that I did. The training for the OR, the training for—When I came out—When you go through your six months of processing out, they did this transition period to where they would send you to classes in order to transition from active duty to retiring. When I came back—When I came out they had me in five different jobs that I could do; five fantastic resumes that I could do. One was data information, one was office manager, one was dental assistant, dental hygienist, and OR. And I would have never been able to do any of those if I would have not went in.

TS: Did you do any of those when you got out?

LS: Yes. [chuckles]

TS: Did you?

LS: I was somewhere, my husband had already left, and got here because the children had to be in school. So he had—we left with the children with the RV and parked it at my mom and dad's house to get them in school. And I left Holloman and somewhere between Holloman—No, somewhere between Alabama and Georgia I got this phone call from this strange person and it was one of the dentists here in town. Said that he—my sister-in-law had went in as a patient of his and told him that I was retiring and I was dental assistant and a dental hygienist, and asked me could I start to work. He needed someone; someone had quit or somebody was on matern—something was happening.

TS: Right.

LS: And that was on a Friday.

TS: Yeah.

LS: On a Friday. And I was at his job Monday morning.

TS: Oh, you're kidding.

LS: Then—

[Speaking Simultaneously]

TS: How long had you been retired?

LS: [both chuckle] Yeah. Two days. Saturday to Sunday. No, actually, because I—

TS: You got processed.

LS: Out processed.

TS: Yeah.

LS: And every time he would have a patient—he was a general dentist—but every time he would have a patient, they had wisdom teeth or something that would go out, and he had to do it instead of sending them to an oral surgeon. He was shocked that I knew—

TS: So much.

LS: And then one day I was in there and a lady came from the hospital and she's talking and I said, "Well, I worked in—"

She said, "I work in the OR." She says, 'We're in desperate need of OR techs."

And I said, "Well, I got trained in the OR," I says, "and when I left the military I got resumes to hand out for the OR."

She says, "Well, can you bring one by the hospital tomorrow?" And I did, and shortly after that I worked in the OR here in this county.

TS: Yeah.

LS: And it's such a small hospital that every other day I was on call.

TS: Yeah.

LS: And every other weekend I was on call. And Columbus County has a bigger hospital, much bigger, and they had an opening and I applied for one over there and I think in—I was on call one weekend in six months.

TS: [chuckles] Yeah. You wanted to—

LS: Right. And see—

TS: —have a little bit of that retirement.

LS: Right. And see, when I was here at this county hospital my children were in high school. One of them was finishing up middle grade, one of them was in high school, and they—every day was—because of the two years difference there was the sports here, sports there, practice here, practice there. And sometimes I would pull into the driveway, because it was such a small hospital, they'd say, "Mama, the OR just called back," or either my beeper was going off. "The OR called back." You would get through [unclear] the middle of the night, one o'clock, you would—from the partying and they had one little bar-like thing. Somebody got shot, or either you would get called in the middle of the nights, "We're having to do an emergency c [caesarean]-section." And so, that time was not there.

TS: Right.

LS: And my husband was working at DuPont [Electronics & Communications Tech] at the time and we may have one weekend a month that the whole family was together, but these children needed—

TS: More cohesiveness with everything.

LS: Right. So then I—that's when I switched over to Colum—to Cumberland.

TS: Was it hard to switch from the military to the civilian world?

LS: It was more of a slower pace in civilian in the beginning.

TS: Okay.

LS: And the dental clinic was a little different. When you worked with one dentist here, there you worked sometimes up to fifteen in the clinic there and it was one right after the other; specialty this, that, and the other. And it was slow; it was—in the beginning it was, like, the days just drug.

TS: Yeah.

LS: And the military is so busy, it was so busy, and I think that was because you only had worked with one dentist.

TS: Right, and it wasn't constant—

LS: Right.

TS: —flow of people coming through all the time.

LS: Right.

TS: Would you recommend the military to any of your daughters ever, or did you?

LS: I did. But the oldest one definitely did not want to go in. [chuckles]

TS: I was getting that kind of idea. I would have been surprised if you said she wanted to.

LS: She was—She said, "I don't want to leave my friends." And one of the opportunities came up when my husband was here before he got—Well, he wasn't working at DuPont. One of the guys that he worked with at Bechtel—not Bechtel—Raytheon, and the project was in California, and they wanted him to work on a project and he actually left and went there. Well, I knew that we weren't moving and he would just—We had an agreement—He and I had an agreement that we would—once a month he would come here and then there would be two months that I would go out there and every third month—fourth month—he would come here for, like, a week.

And the girls assumed that we were going out there; they assumed that we were going to California. And I had these parents and these children call me solid for one week. "Amber says that you're moving. Can—And she wants to live with us."

TS: [laughs]

LS: "Shannon says that you're moving. She wants to live us." And finally, we just said, "No, we're not. We're just—This is something that we have to do."

TS: Right.

LS: And they were okay with that.

TS: Yeah.

LS: My younger daughter, maybe. She might, but then her school and stuff like that kicked in.

TS: Right, but she would have been more open to it.

LS: Yeah, she would have been more open to it.

TS: Do you think it's something you would recommend to any young person?

LS: I have. Several times I've recommended it to them and especially if—education-wise.

TS: Yeah.

LS: If you don't have the means to get your education. And would always—And I've always told them, "Don't go to be a bomb-loader if you're going to come out soon, or you're going to retire and come back here, because there's no bomb-loading positions here. Go into a job that you know that when you get out you can transition and go into the same job."

TS: A skill. Earn a skill.

LS: Right.

TS: Well, did you consider yourself a trailblazer at all?

LS: In what way?

TS: Well, 1974, you're a ninety-eight pound woman working on engines of a C-5 right?

LS: Trailblazer, determined? [both laugh]

TS: Same difference.

LS: Yeah, yeah. Yeah.

TS: Well, I mean, how many women were in the shop you were in at that time?

LS: I think by the time I left there was three.

TS: Out of how many?

LS: The shop was huge. I think when we had formation sometimes like a hundred and fifty.

TS: So—

LS: Yeah.

TS: Pretty unique to be the—

LS: Right.

TS: —one there. And it sounds like you had a good relationship except for that one sergeant.

LS: Yeah.

TS: With that.

LS: Yeah.

TS: Would you consider yourself?

LS: Yeah, I would.

TS: Yeah?

LS: Yeah.

TS: You probably should. [both chuckle] You probably should. Now, have you used your veteran benefits for the GI bill, mortgages, or education?

LS: Only that I wanted to further my education so I used it for that. I haven't used it for mortgages or anything.

TS: Hasn't come up for anything like that. What about the VA?

LS: I use the VA.

TS: Yeah.

LS: When I can.

TS: For medical?

LS: For medical. I can't use it for my heart because the federal VA does not have a cardiologist that can handle my issue.

TS: Oh, really? Okay.

LS: As a matter of fact, when I was going through my retirement physical they said, "Linda, when did you have your heart attack?"

TS: Oh.

LS: I said, "I have not had a heart attack."

"When did you have one?"

I said, "I have not." So we went back, and when I came back from Saudi Arabia I just did not have the energy, and some of the doctors said—and I went back—"I just can't get my energy back."

And they said, "Well, you're just—You know, you're leaving from over there, the stress," this, that, and the other, "Just give it a chance; give it a chance to come back. Maybe the climate change that—" this, that, and the other. Well, the physical proved different and William Beaumont wanted to do open heart surgery to repair the hole. I had a hole in my septum, atrial septum defect, and it was getting bigger and bigger.

And I said, "No," because I had been in the OR and I knew that you had to go on a heart-lung machine while they were doing it. I said, "No." [chuckles]

TS: You guys are the worst sometimes. [chuckles]

LS: And then—And they wrote in there that they recommended that when I retired I was coming back to North Carolina to go to Fort Bragg to a clinic there and talk to the cardiologist there. So I did because—I didn't have any plans but I bought a house and it had two stories and going up and down the steps I was, like, "Why in the world?"

And I told him that and he said, "Well, you need surgery, Linda. You've got to repair that hole and if you don't repair it it's going to get bigger and you're going to die." And he says, "I can do it and they would have to send you up to Bethesda, Maryland, to do it."

I said, "No."

He said, "Well, I have read that Duke [University Hospital] is doing this new procedure. They're in Europe right now doing it, but they're going to come to Duke and they're going to do it as a trial basis. Would you want to do that?"

I said, "What does it entail?"

He said, "Going up through the groin in your leg and putting a titanium mesh at the hole, open it up like a butterfly—butterfly wings—it's called angel wings—and the tissue in the heart will grow over it and close the hole."

I said, "I'll do that if I can do it." Well, they sent me to Duke, Duke did all the work up, and they said, "Well, the doctors are in Europe. They'll be back on this date, and we can start on this date." And I would have been the second person in the United States to do that.

Well, something happened. The girl is either [unclear] or something and I ended up being the first.

TS: Oh.

LS: And they closed it. They went up through the groin like they do a catheterization and they—since we were the first one they showed my husband how it worked—this, that, and the other—and he knew more than me because—what was going on. And they opened it up and the tissue has grown over it and it's totally closed.

TS: How about that.

LS: And now it's obsolete.

TS: Is it?

LS: It's obsolete; they don't do it anymore.

TS: They don't?

LS: It's gone on to bigger, better things.

TS: They have different ways, then—

LS: Yeah.

TS: —to do it. Not as invasive as the—

LS: No. See, before they would have had to cut me open.

TS: Yeah.

LS: I'd have this wire in my chest wall and all this other stuff—

TS: So they still do the mesh thing? Or they do something—the one that you had, is that obsolete?

LS: Yeah, it's obsolete.

TS: Oh, okay.

LS: It's like a titanium mesh that they had used and when it was in the catheter—when they're coming out—when they placed it where they wanted to it was, like—It was, like, you push this part through the hole, it was like this, and then the butterfly wings opened up like this and the hole was in the middle and the body's natural tissue just grew over it.

TS: Right. You need a video for all that.

LS: Right. [both laugh]

TS: Well, that's very interesting. Do you think there's anything that you would want a civilian to know or understand about what it's like to serve in the military that they may not appreciate or understand?

[Speaking Simultaneously]

LS: I don't—I don't think the military—I don't think—The civilian sector that has not been around the military has no clue sometimes.

TS: In what way? What are they missing out on?

LS: The respect. The—To know that they're living in this free country and to know how they can't get it free unless they've been to a country that doesn't have that freedom. And when a veteran comes by in a parade, stand up and salute that flag or—because there's people here that don't even know that some of the military are here. What did it take to get here? During the Revolutionary War we had a battle right over there, Tory Hill[?]. What [others] had to do in order to get here. They don't even know. If they're not interested in the history they don't understand it. They know Fort Bragg's there but they don't know the sacrifice that those families go through when their—when their spouses go overseas. They don't know what the children go through. My children can tell you that but these children don't understand it.

TS: Well, what does patriotism mean to you?

LS: Oh, man. Everything. I mean, just to know—Like, my little bit is like a grain of sand on a vast ocean that got just the way that it is. Just go to the beach and drop one grain of sand in all the rest of what these—what we should be truly blessed for here in this—in the United States. And I would have never got there; never. I would have been like some of these that just really don't care of what the military has done, the sacrifice that the military's gone through. I would have never known the sacrifice if I would have stayed working on a farm and marrying a farmer. I would know what was sacrificed to provide for a family, but I wouldn't know all that it takes to be able to do that. And I think I'm a different person because of that, for my children's sake also.

TS: Yeah. Well, I don't have any more formal questions. Is there anything that we haven't talked about that you wanted to maybe mention?

LS: I can't think of anything. Just—When I started in '74 it was just to get away from the farm, and now I look back at it as providing me a good life, a real good life.

TS: Would you do it again?

LS: Yes.

TS: Anything you think you'd do differently?

LS: Yeah.

TS: What would you do differently?

LS: I would travel a lot. I would not have—[laughs]

TS: Well, you can travel more.

LS: I travel all the time. I would not have done—I would—If it was the same situation that I was in there's probably not much I could have done about it, but if I hadn't lived with an alcoholic and knew that I had the determination that I did to take care of my children I think I would have made rank more. I would have made—rank would have been easier.

TS: That would be, like, one of the disappointments.

LS: That's one of the disappointments, and I can say it was circumstantial, but you have to give up something to gain something, and I wasn't going to not be there for my children. And when you're working and you've got two children that you're raising by yourself, and you have to do their homework and—helping them with their homework, helping them with their school, provide for them, by the time they're in bed and it's time for you to take a nap, do you really need to study? Do you really have that energy to study when you're with a man that's calling you, "I'm going to kill you or commit suicide or hurt the children or something"? Do you really have that opportunity to study and retain what you were studying? And I think I did pretty good by going to school at lunch and going to school at nighttime and on the weekends and stuff. That was before the children came along.

TS: But your circumstances put you in a position where—

LS: Right.

TS: —you had to make certain choices and they were for your kids.

LS: And I think—I think my children have done real well.

TS: Yeah.

LS: They both have good jobs and they both know what it is to work, so. [unclear]

[Speaking Simultaneously]

TS: They travel. Do they travel too?

LS: Not as much now that they have their own families. [laughs] They want to.

TS: Yeah, I'm sure they have the bug now, too, I can imagine. Well, thank you so much for meeting with me today.

LS: You're welcome.

TS: I really appreciate it.

LS: I enjoy it. I'm glad that you ladies are doing this. I went to DAR [Daughters of the American Revolution] last year at the Women's Memorial and they're trying to do some of the preserving also.

TS: Oh, good.

LS: But I'm—

TS: Oh, I can go ahead and turn it off now.

[End of Interview]