

Wisconsin Veterans Museum
Research Center

Transcript of an

Oral History Interview with

PHYLLIS C. PERK (HUKILL)

Stenographer, Women's Army Corps (WAC), Korean War

1995

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Perk, Phyllis C. Hukill, (1932-). Oral History Interview, 1995.

User Copy: 2 sound cassettes (ca. 110 min.), analog, 1 7/8 ips, mono.

Master Copy: 1 sound cassette (ca. 110 min.), analog, 1 7/8 ips, mono.

Abstract

Perk, a Madison (Wisconsin) native, discusses her Woman's Army Corps service during the Korean War. She mentions graduating from high school in 1950 and taking a stenographer's job at the Department of Agriculture in Madison before enlisting with the WAC that August. She describes different aspects of basic training at Fort Lee (Virginia), the racial desegregation taking place, and different women in her barracks. Perk recalls no racial tension between the basic trainees and speaks of her reactions to Leesville's public segregation at the time and recalls entrance and water fountain signs with "White" or "Nigger". Perk mentions stenographer training at Fort Dix (New Jersey) before duty assignment in counterintelligence work in January 1951 at Fort Holabird (Maryland). Perk describes her impressions of Baltimore (Maryland) and a typical workday. She discusses her Korean War feelings and her social activities in and about Baltimore, including her marriage to an NCO in August 1950. Perk describes her interest in going to officer candidate school, similar to her husband then, but she was granted an August 1952 discharge with a corporal rank. She discusses going with her officer husband to Fort Benjamin Harrison (Indiana) and the culture for women to marry quickly. She discusses her dismay of not being considered a veteran and the "unspoken rule" that officer's wives were not to hold jobs. Perk talks about being a military wife, Army brats, life at Fort Polk (Louisiana) and going by troopship with her husband to Baumholder (Germany) in 1955. She discusses her lavish German apartment, her kids seeing a burning cross on the school lawn in Alexandria (Virginia) and the children's schooling differences between Fort Polk and Fort Ord (California). Perk relates her abhorrence of Southern attitudes, her favorite and worst bases and Fort Ord pedestrian rules. She talks about joining the United Women Veterans organization after seeing one Vietnam march in Madison and her many years of "military dependent" status. She discusses her "sense of camaraderie" at Legion activities and health care issues of women veterans; particularly the Persian Gulf and veterans' struggles in the United Women Veterans group. Perk concludes by recalling her activity on Pearl Harbor Day, "muscle soreness" during boot camp, her discharge rank, and enjoying stories of other women veterans.

Biographical Sketch

Perk (1932-) served in the Women's Army Corps as a counterintelligence stenographer during the Korean War. After discharge she married becoming an Army officer's wife.

Interviewed by Mark Van Ells, 1995.

Transcribed by Jackie Mulhurn, 1996.

Transcription edited by Daniel Birk & John McNally, 2007.

Mark: For the transcriber here and then we'll be ready to go. Today's date is March 30, 1995. This is Mark Van Ells, Archivist, Wisconsin Veterans Museum doing an oral history interview this afternoon with Ms. Phyllis Perk of Madison, a veteran of the Korean War. Good afternoon. How are you doing?

Perk: I'm doing fine, Mark.

Mark: We're doing this interview by telephone as you can probably tell by the tone of the tape here. Perhaps you could start by having you tell me a little bit about where you were born and raised and what you were doing prior to 1950 and the outbreak of the Korean War.

Perk: Okay. I was born in Madison, Wisconsin and I grew up here on the east side of Madison. I was born January 29, 1932 and, of course, I was in school prior to my enlisting in the Women's Army Corps.

Mark: So, okay, you were 18 years old then 1950.

Perk: Eighteen, that's right.

Mark: And what possessed you to join the military? Was it the fact that the war was going on? Or something you thought about doing anyway?

Perk: No, no. I felt a sense of frustration during World War II because I felt a sense of patriotism and then when the Korean War broke out I thought, well, now I'm old enough and I felt patriotic, of course, and that's what motivated me to want to join.

Mark: I see.

Perk: And I thought now, now's the time. I'm old enough and it was just frustrating during World War II to read about the accounts of women that were in service and I wasn't old enough to try for one of the corps.

Mark: Uh hum. Now, women serving in the military at the time wasn't always popular in some circles. Did you encounter any sort of resistance?

Perk: No, I didn't. The circles that had difficulty with this were usually men who felt that women should stay at home and, of course, I wasn't adverse to that at the time. I accepted the cultural mind at that particular time but I guess I just didn't think that it was going to affect me. [Laughs]

Mark: Yeah.

Perk: And it didn't. Because I felt that even at that young age that if I respected myself then I would be respected and if I did my job the way I should then, you know, I would get back what I'm putting forth. I never had any problems. I really didn't. I think there's only one

instance, I was going through a food line, mess hall line, and I think the men were a little bit resentful because the women in the WAC detachment did not pull KP duty. This was after I got out of basic training. And I can remember my tray being grabbed and my wrist being grabbed by a young man who was pulling KP and, of course, there were all kinds of water and stuff on it. I just thought I, you know, we were taught to forget about this; just to go on, you know, keep your cool and so forth so I just took a napkin and wiped off my hand and wrist and went on through the line. I still remember that so it must have made some impression upon me. But I can understand, looking back now, the resentment because we didn't have to pull KP.

Mark: Yeah.

Perk: But on the other hand, I have a feeling when looking back now that some of that machinery was awfully heavy for us to operate and that could have been part of the problem. But I know our commanding officer did not want us to do that so, for whatever reason.

Mark: So, once you decided to enlist what sort of expectations did you have for your service? Was there a particular job you wanted to do?

Perk: No. There wasn't. You know, I really didn't have, as I recall, I did not have expectations except for the excitement of traveling, you know, and no, I felt that I probably, I was told at least, and I thought well this is probably the way it's going to be. I'll probably be doing the same thing I did when I got out of high school. I had a job right away when I got out of high school, with the state as a stenographer with the Department of Agriculture here in Madison. At that time the Department of Agriculture was housed at the State Capitol and so I went directly, within one week of graduation, to the State Capitol to be in working. So when I was interviewed by the recruiting officer, you know, he -- he -- it wasn't a she -- he said that probably I would be put in the same field. And he said women normally are put in the administrative portions, you know, of the service. I really wasn't expecting too much more of that. Once I got into basic training I found out that there, you could go into the cadre if you were chosen and there were different fields within the administrative areas that you could go into. So, no I was never disappointed.

Mark: Okay. As for actually going to the recruiter, where did, in town here somewhere? Was it the same recruiter the men used?

Perk: Yes, it was a recruiter and I don't recall -- it was somewhere on the Square, as I recall. And then there was a basic interview done and then I had to go to Milwaukee for a physical. I had to take written tests. There were oral interviews and so forth. But all of that went well. But when I went to Milwaukee to take my physical I failed it because my tonsils were so bad, at least I was told that. So I said, they said, well, if you get the tonsils removed, or words to that effect, then you can reapply again. So I went back home and told my parents what had happened and so they helped me get an appointment with a

doctor and I had my tonsils removed. After I was feeling better I went right back to the recruiting office and I had to go through another physical again. But this time I passed.

Mark: And then you got in.

Perk: Then I got in [laughing]. And I just barely made the weight limit [laughs]. You'd never know it now but I just barely made it.

Mark: You mean too thin?

Perk: Pardon.

Mark: You were too thin?

Perk: Yeah, I was. I was too thin.

Mark: Where'd you do your basic training at?

Perk: At Fort Lee, Virginia.

Mark: Okay. If you would describe for me the process of leaving Madison and getting to Fort Lee, Virginia and describe the kind of training you did.

Perk: Well, when I left Madison I had to go by bus -- my, we had one car and, of course, my dad was working and so I took the bus. Said good-bye to my parents and my sister and I took the bus to Milwaukee to the bus station. I was met there by a recruiter from the Milwaukee area and then from that point to the train station I have a blank so I don't know what happened. But we, a group of us gathered at the Milwaukee train depot which is now a parking ramp on the east side of the city.

Mark: Are these all fellow women recruits? Or is this just general? It was a group of women?

Perk: Yes. Women recruits from the Milwaukee area. I guess, I don't know what the area, recruiting area, encompassed at that particular time, but it was women from Milwaukee, surrounding towns and Madison. And I happened to be the only one from Madison in that particular grouping and we boarded the train. We were there overnight. And all I remember is just a lot of talking and giggling and there were enlisted NCOs on the train with us, of course, and we had a section, a car all to ourselves. And then we pulled in, it was mid-day, as I recall, and all I remember, I could smell the pines and I know I had smelled that odor in the northern part of Wisconsin when our family would go on some vacation trips that we took and I thought well, this is the same smell that I remember. That smell was very important to me and I don't know why it was at the time. But it was, the land was very, very flat and the railroad, you know, backed up directly into the camp area itself so we never got to see the small town outside of the fort itself. And then from there we were put alphabetically into groups and I got my first taste of standing in a group

and learning how to fall in and have a shoulder, or arm's length away from your fellow, I should say, I'll use fellow generically, fellow women [laughs], and then we were told to stand up straight and we did. We dropped our gear right by our side and that was it. From then on the indoctrination came about. We were divided into four barracks. At that time, well, desegregation had started initially in 1948, as I recall, and we did--

Mark: The racial desegregation, you mean.

Perk: Pardon.

Mark: The racial desegregation.

Perk: Racial desegregation, yes. Thank you. Racial desegregation. And there were five African-Americans, as I recall, that were in our group. There were no Orientals and the rest were Caucasian. And I happened to be in the fourth barracks because my last name started with "S" and we were shown our bunk areas. It consisted of one floor level. The bunks were turned one head one way, one head the other way. It was just a rolled up mattress on springs plus an open closet affair. It was really just two-by-fours with the rod on which we would eventually hang our clothes. And we put down our gear and, see there's also a footlocker there as I recall. Everything was very clean, spic and span but low and behold it wasn't clean enough [laughs]. We soon learned that we had to have GI parties as they were called. But, no, that was the extent of it. You know, getting settled. And that first day we were, I would say not marched but it was almost double time to the quartermaster area on our particular section of the base. And we went through the line. We got our clothes, including, he called it a brown iron underwear that we had to wear, and our caps as I should say. Not hats. We did not have the, we just had the caps. We didn't have that hobby hat. As I recall, that had gone out of style. We never received that. But we received fatigues, we received combat boots, the socks to go with them, the duffel bag. Let's see, a poncho, we received a trench coat with liner, gloves, and all of that. And surprisingly enough everything fit. I guess I was most intrigued with the combat boots because these looked like work boots that I had seen here in Madison on some of the men that went off to, oh, to Kipp or Oscar Mayer's, places like that. But surprisingly enough that's the piece of gear that I miss the most. I, they were so comfortable.

Mark: Really.

Perk: Yes, they were. And they came up past my ankle and I just wish that I had a pair of them now. I see some of them now on some of the students at the University. But they were so comfortable and I think that's the piece of clothing, plus my trench coat, that I liked the most.

Mark: As for the actual training, I imagine it lasted about six weeks?

Perk: No. Our training lasted, our basic training lasted for three months.

Mark: Really.

Perk: Yes.

Mark: And what did it consist of?

Perk: Well, it consisted of classroom work like, oh, military courtesies; law, military law; oh, procedures for donning gas masks; procedures that we would follow when we went on bivouac. Just different, just different aspects of the military. We had to memorize command line and what a battalion meant, and company, all the way through the hierarchy. But most of it was a lot of drilling and getting a feeling of team work about yourself and about the other women that were in the barracks with you. Individualism was not put down but, of course, it was at the bottom of the ladder so to speak as far as individual rights were concerned. And at the time it didn't, I guess it didn't bother me because I grew up in a very strict home and I had to do a lot of work around the house and help my mom and dad quite a bit. So, it wasn't too bad. I think what I found worse getting used to was the constant running from place to place that we had to do but I soon found that after a couple of weeks of sore muscles that I was able to, able not to complain about it any more. We all were complaining about it. And I found that I was getting stronger, physically, and I had put on a lot more weight and it felt, I felt better. I guess physically I just felt better and mentally I felt very much alert. I was very in tune with what was going on. We had some great, our group, we had some great people in that barracks I'll tell you.

Mark: That's one of the standard questions I have anyways so we can just go with that topic.

Perk: Okay, all right. Whatever.

Mark: Yeah, like what sort of women joined the WACs during the war? Did they join because of the war and where did they come from, regional--

Perk: A lot of them had the same feeling -- of course you know that you always think that your thinking is unique but being that young I realized that a lot of the women had the same feelings that I had. And they were from different parts of the country. My next door, I'll call it "bunk mate" she was from South Carolina and she happened, I remember her particularly. We nicknamed her "Smitty" because her last name was "Smith" but she was so slow and that's where we learned to work together so that we wouldn't get gigs, you know, in inspection. She was slow in getting her bunk made, not getting her clothes lined up properly. She never shined her shoes properly. She was just, and it wasn't done to get out of service. She was just, she just had a more relaxed air about her than some of us did.

Mark: Did she get along well? Did she wash out?

Perk: Yeah, she did. She got along well because she was very easy going, she, well, one aspect, she could play the guitar really well and she contributed a lot to, you know, after hours the few minutes, or hour, that we had before we had to turn in after cleaning and getting our gear ready for the next day. She really contributed to the morale of the barracks because she had brought her guitar with her -- that was allowed -- and she would play that. And it was great. It was country music which I hadn't been very much in tune to when I was here because my family liked to listen to classical and semi-classical and pop music of the day so that's the mode I was in. And so that was my first taste of country music. I guess some of it I still like to this day, some I don't. But she was a real ice breaker but we all had to kind of work on her to get her act together so that we wouldn't be gigged so much. She was just too slow. And then, of course, later on, I realized she came from a southern small town and the hot weather and she wasn't used to rushing around so it was just part of her background and makeup.

Mark: As far as age is concerned, were they all 18 year olds like you?

Perk: No, they weren't. Most of us were. We were 18, 19, 20 in that range, I would say. There was one woman in the barracks from Arkansas that was 32. She was just, I think the age limit was 35 at that time. I don't want to say for sure, I think it was 35. But she was 32 and she was older but she was the most petite little thing I've ever seen; then and since. But she had a calming effect on most of us. She was more serious and she had gone through a divorce, she had lost one of her children and so I guess this was something that she, you know, it's just a way of perhaps getting away from the life that she had led before. But she was a steadying influence, I must say. She never got too excited about things that happened. For instance, if the NCO came in all of a sudden, or the corporal on duty, and we had to stop what we were doing and then do something else. You know, she just took it as it came. It was a good example for us, at least for me it was.

Mark: Yeah.

Perk: I'm trying to think of some of the other -- oh, there was one young woman from Massachusetts in the barracks. She was one of my best friends. Then there was another one from, I'm trying to think, oh, it was Missouri, Missouri. And so there was a conglomeration of women from different states, different outlooks and so forth. So that was my first real opening onto what would happen if I met somebody else from outside the state of Wisconsin.

Mark: I see. Because you hadn't before that I guess.

Perk: Excuse me. I'm sorry.

Mark: Because you hadn't really--

Perk: No, you have to remember that I grew up during the Depression and during the war years and travel was restricted. We had one car and we had, the gasoline that we got for that

car, my dad got for the car, he had to use it in his work so we took very few trips. I can remember a few trips to northern Wisconsin and I'd say two trips to Milwaukee. One to see the zoo and the other one I think was to the museum. Those were very long trips because at that time there wasn't an Interstate, of course, and it took, we had to leave very early in the morning and then we got home after dark. We always took a picnic lunch along. So those were considerable trips at that time.

Mark: Yeah. And so going to basic training, going into the Army was a pretty eye-opening experience.

Perk: Oh, it was. Yes. Absolutely.

Mark: About the racial desegregation, as you mentioned this was the first time really that the US Armed Forces had had such a thing.

Perk: That's exactly right.

Mark: Was there, were there racial tensions or problems or that sort of thing?

Perk: No. It was strange. Now that I look back on it, all of the African-American women were put in the, there were four platoons, they were put, I was in the fourth platoon and they were in the, they were all together in the second platoon mixed in with Caucasians. And because we were alphabetical in these platoons I simply assumed that their names were in that particular platoon category. But no, no. They were, I know the second platoon won some awards for marching and one of the African-American women was the guidon bearer of that particular platoon. When we received our orders after graduating from basic training I recall going into the second platoon, you know, just to ask around to see where everybody was going and we were allowed, before we were kept pretty much in our own platoons and we weren't allowed to mingle too much but after graduation we were allowed to do that. So I went in the second platoon to see, you know, some of my friends there and then I went down into the latrine and these five young women were in there, they were discussing their assignments and I came up and I asked them, you know, where they were going and one was going to Fort Gordon, Georgia for signal school and, I don't recall what the other ones. But they were, you know, hi, how are ya? I didn't really feel anything about that. I know I, in Madison here, most of the Blacks and the Italians were in the Triangle or in the Bush area and they attended the Central High School and I had a number of friends at Central High and, you know, I never experienced too much, how can I say, well I didn't have any African-American friends because they were, we didn't have any at East High at that time. They were all at Central High. I had some Caucasian friends at Central. But I don't know, I never felt anything, you know, any tension or anything like that.

Mark: Animosity, perhaps the word you're--

Perk: No, I really didn't. I guess I was curious more than anything else. But I guess I didn't dwell too heavily on it.

Mark: Okay. I've got one more question about training and that involved discipline.

Perk: Oh, yes.

Mark: I went to basic training and I remember a lot of four-letter words and this sort of thing. Was that your experience?

Perk: No.

Mark: Okay.

Perk: No, we never had that. We were cussed out but when I say cussed out it was never like I've heard later that the men went through. Our cadre were all women. And we were called, let's see, what's the name? Geeks or something like that. But we, you know, goons or whatever, but we were, it was a derogatory term applied to all people in basic training. And once we got past that we realized, at least I did, that, and I'm sure some of my friends did, that that was the end of that. But we never had any cursing or anything like that. I don't recall anything like that. There was more discipline done with looks and low tones and knowing that if we didn't get everybody together working towards the same goal, there would be problems for the whole barracks, whole platoon. So you soon learned this is free and tried to pull together.

Mark: I see. Did you have male training instructors?

Perk: No.

Mark: Or did you have women?

Perk: No, we had all women in our basic training area. Yeah, it was, let's see, we had a captain was the commanding officer Second Lieutenant and then we had sergeants and some corporals who took over the marching, the drilling and so forth out on the tarmac, what looked like an old air field runway. Yeah. We soon learned about rank and so forth. We were, of course, we were taught how to salute, respecting to an officer and respected. We should demand of, you know, when we did our job and just as an individual, as a person. That's about all that I can remember about that phase of it.

Mark: I see. Did you get off the post much? Did you get into town?

Perk: Well, during basic training we were allowed one pass. And that was in, let's see outside Fort Lee, what was that town? Leesville it was called. And all of us took our passes and I recall our barracks, groups from our barracks, went out through the gate and I and another young woman went, young lady from Massachusetts, went down the street and it

was a dusty, rotten town and then we saw these, I'll say rotten right away because we went past places that had entrances for Whites only and entrances for Niggers. It was right there, painted.

Mark: Oh, that particular word was labeled on them.

Perk: Oh, yes, yes. And the water fountains, the same way. And so, she was from Massachusetts and we both looked at each other I can recall, and I thought to myself and I finally told her I said, "I don't want to have anything more to do with this." I just felt sick to my stomach about it. And I don't know what those young Black women did. They got the pass like everybody else but obviously wherever they went it was segregated from us. But we just walked down the main street and there wasn't much to that town at that time. I imagine by now it's been changed but, and I was so sick of it I turned to her and I said, "You know, to me this isn't much of a pass. I'm going to go back in, I'm going to turn in my pass and go back in and go to the library or go the enlisted persons club." I said it's just getting to me. She agreed with me and we walked back in and that was the end of that pass and that was the only one we had. I was really disappointed. I suppose my view of that incident hasn't changed all these decades but it probably would if I went back there now. Things would probably be changed. That still remains in my mind as a very strong memory. That was the first instance I had of segregation. And although we certainly still have this in more subtle ways in the North, that was my first concrete example of what segregation meant. But it made me sick.

Mark: So, you finished training after three months, you said?

Perk: That's right.

Mark: And you went to Fort Dix?

Perk: Then I went to Fort Dix, yes. That was strictly the same thing I was doing here in Madison; administrative, clerical, mainly stenographic work. That was my job at the state Department of Agriculture here. I got further training in that at Fort Dix. And that lasted for, let's see now, I have to think about this a minute. I went into basic training in August 1950 and was out the very first part of November and then from there, oh, it was about two months because I remember being assigned after that further training to Fort Holabird, Maryland in January. I arrived in January at Fort Holabird. So it was two months of that. Of course, we had more freedom there. There I was in a cubicle, all of us had cubicles, and we had more weekends off. And I can recall going to Philadelphia. There was a train right from Fort Dix into Philadelphia and visiting the various sights in Philadelphia. It was interesting. I enjoyed that very much.

Mark: Now, there was a Christmas over this time. Did you get to go home or did you have to stay at the post?

Perk: Yes, I could have had a leave to go home but I didn't have enough money for air fare and my parents were, you know, didn't have enough money to send me air fare at the time even though it was negligible now by today's standards. And so they sent me Christmas presents and I stayed there. There were some women that stayed on the post. It wasn't as if we were lacking in Christmas cheer or anything but after that then the next, I took leave twice in 1951 and then twice in 1952. And by that time I had learned to save my money a little bit better and I could afford airfare back and forth. I did come back to Madison.

Mark: Holabird, I'm not sure where that is in Maryland.

Perk: Well, that's just outside of Baltimore in a suburb called Dundalk. At least it was at that time. In fact, where Baltimore ended and Dundalk started it was just a matter of cross the street, so to speak. But Fort Holabird has since closed down and I didn't realize this until, oh, a couple of years ago and I'm trying to think who it was that told me that it was part of the post closings. It was a very small postage stamp sort of post.

Mark: I see.

Perk: It was just, well, you could walk from the line or border of Baltimore city on one side and you'd be in Dundalk and then a couple blocks then you'd go through the main gate of the post. And it was a quiet little suburb at that time. And the post was very small, as I said. You could hike across it in about 45 minutes.

Mark: Yeah.

Perk: It was just set down in a civilian community. Similar to some, I'm trying to think, was it Fort Totten in New York? I know I, when I was a military dependent I stayed at, we stayed at Fort Totten before leaving by troopship to Germany and it was just set down right in a civilian community. Very small. We were, our WAC detachment was off in one corner of that fort. It had a big fence around it and that was where we lived and went from there to work each day and then back. It was a very secure kind of place to live.

Mark: Yeah. Now, was there a particular function of this base?

Perk: Yes.

Mark: You worked in counterintelligence department.

Perk: Yes. It was counterintelligence and on this particular fort they trained counterintelligence corps agents. And men, at that time women weren't allowed to enter this agent training. And I found, just as a sidetrack here, I found out after I was discharged in August of 1952, I wrote back to some of my friends and one of the women I was friendly with she had been trying to get into this agent course and it was that, almost to the end of that year, '52, and she wrote and told me that they were finally accepting women into that particular training and that she had applied for and received it. I felt very happy for her. If I had

stayed on I probably would have applied for it myself. But it was, I enjoyed the post very much. And I enjoyed Baltimore. We were on a rotation schedule on weekends. Once a month I worked at the headquarters building, as I did during the five days during the week, but the rest of the weekends we were free and go into Baltimore. You'd either go with friends or sometimes I went alone because I liked the museums, I liked the library and some of the women didn't. So I just got used to taking the bus back and forth and burying myself in that Pratt Library and the school of music that was there. They had a nice library there. Plus there were all kinds, there were open air stalls with flowers, all different types of food especially seafood. I had my first taste of crab cakes there which I never tasted before and that taste still lingers.

Mark: And you've always liked since, huh?

Perk: Yeah. And there were a lot of little interesting tea rooms, plus just the streets themselves and the architecture, row houses and so forth I recall were very interesting.

Mark: If you would describe for me a typical work day.

Perk: Okay. Let's see now, in basic training we got up at 5:00 but we had to be to work at 7:30 in the morning and our day usually started about quarter to 6:00, at least I did. Because if you got up early then you could get into the shower quickly without having to wait. And then, I was the type of person who needs breakfast in the morning. Some of the women didn't. Then I'd just get dressed. Some morning we fell out in formation. Other mornings we didn't have to and we just ate at the mess hall which was in a central headquarters building and then went on to work. Then your day started and we had lunch, we went back to the mess hall, I mean it was only maybe half a block away so it wasn't a long walk, and back to work, then go back to the detachment, mess hall or detachment, then you were free for the evening.

Mark: Yeah.

Perk: But you did have to take care of your uniforms and we did have inspection; if I recall it was once a month which was quite a wonderful thing after basic training. We all had cubicles there. It was pretty nice. Most of us had one to, each person had one. There were a couple that were together; two women in one cubicle but I had one to myself. And two footlockers, two closets. I had plenty of room. It was nice.

Mark: And so your workday involved what?

Perk: Okay, I would go into work and I worked for a captain. I had top secret clearance, in fact all of us there had top secret clearances except for two of the women who did a lot of the filing. And this was in the operations section, G3 of the G2 center which comprised the counterintelligence corps headquarters center. It was all administrative. There was some housekeeping, like the finance area, personnel department, and so forth but we were all under the aegis of G2 but we were divided in G1, G2, G3, and G4. And I was assigned to

operations and I worked for a captain. In fact, those of us in G3, let's see, the colonel in charge of the section had an office to himself and then there were two majors, there were, the captain I worked for and then there were two, three NCOs. One was one of the sergeants from WAC detachment that I lived in and the other two, one was a sergeant first class and the other one was the reigning master sergeant of that particular post. He had a desk right next to mine and I, boy, I learned a lot from him. He was so sharp. He would come in every day, I never saw him when the uniform didn't have creases so sharp it was just, and so I thought this is a good person to imitate so I, I mean he was really, we got along really well. He taught me a lot of things administratively that I couldn't have found out in the two short months that I took this general training. And I really have always been grateful to James for teaching me the hows, whys, wherefores of that particular center. The captain I worked for was from South Dakota and he was only in for just the time that he was called up for. He didn't want to make the Army a career. He was a lawyer in civilian life.

Mark: And he was a reserve officer?

Perk: Reserve officer, right. And he was just a real, well I'll use an old phrase, just a swell guy. And I enjoyed working for him. We got along well together. I didn't have any trouble with my stenography at that time. I was able to take shorthand very fast and be able to transcribe it well. I've lost a lot of that skill now. But I never had any problems. In fact I enjoyed the people very much. There was a young man, a PFC working in the office next to mine who was also in operations -- he was from New York City -- and then two of the women who were file clerks were in the same detachment that I was. They were from, one was from Massachusetts, the other one was from I think New Hampshire if I recall correctly. I think it was a real good group. I didn't have any recall of, I mean, you had to mind the rules and this master sergeant who had a diamond in his, he was a [intelligible], I mean he really enforced the rules but he didn't do it in a, I mean his authority was there and you recognized it and he really didn't have to impose it unless you really went up against him. I never saw that happen. It was just a, he just kept a tight ship, I guess that's the way to describe it.

Mark: In this environment, you work with men and women?

Perk: Yes, that's right. That was the first time in service that I worked with other enlisted and officer personnel.

Mark: And how did that go?

Perk: It went well. It seemed to me that when I came in the door, I mean, you knew their positions and you knew where you were in that hierarchy and you just did your job. I guess I never thought about it. Now we couldn't fraternize with officers on off-duty and you know, they had their own mess hall and, of course, the enlisted had theirs. But that was expected. I mean, you learn that in basic training. It was just something I never thought about. It just was the way it was that's all.

Mark: In that office, what was your relationship to the war going on in Korea? I don't want you to divulge any top secrets here or anything.

Perk: No, no. I did have a top secret clearance but, you know, during that period of time, Mark, I saw two documents that had that label on them and I had long ago learned that whenever I see, I look at it, do what I had to do with it, and then forget about it. And to this day I can't tell you. I mean, maybe it's drilled into my subconscious somewhere but I can't recall it now.

Mark: I see.

Perk: To me it wasn't a big deal. I think what happened when I came home on leave that first, when was it? That had to be '51, that first leave I took that year before Christmas. I know when I came home and my parents asked me, well they said this FBI agent came around and was asking about you. Then I went back to the church that I belonged to in the youth group area and so forth and just to make reacquaintance again and my pastor told me, he said he was wondering why this FBI agent was around asking about me and I said, "Well I hope you told him something good about me." and he laughed but he said he couldn't understand why and then I told him it was this clearance that I needed to work. So that must have been going on while I was at either, probably in that two month period when I was at Fort Dix. Or maybe even in November, I'm not sure.

Mark: I was just curious if there was more concern about the cold war with the Soviets or things in Korea.

Perk: That was so distant from us. It was so distant that at this point all I got out of it was of any newspapers or magazines I would read. And we were supposed to be releasing a person for combat duty in Korea and, of course, this was a nonexistent person that I had never met or even knew whether it was really so or not. And all I knew was what I read in the newspapers or the magazines. There was a general feeling that the war wasn't going well at all. And, of course, it wasn't. Later on, you know, after reading accounts in later years about what really happened it was just futile.

Mark: Okay. So, if you could describe a little bit about your social activities, I'm thinking of the name of the place here --

Perk: Holabird, Fort Holabird.

Mark: What did you do for fun? Did you go to town? Did you socialize with other women?

Perk: Oh, sure. We'd sometimes go to movies. There wasn't a movie spot on the post itself so we had to go into Baltimore. There was an NCO club. There wasn't an enlisted persons club so since I was a corporal I couldn't really go to the NCO club but what they did, they made an exception for us women so that we could go there if we wanted and I, we went a few times. Some of my close friends and I. But, you know, we got to thinking this really

isn't what I want to do. I didn't want to play pool. And the only swimming pool I should say was at the officer's club and we weren't allowed to go in there. And I did really like to swim so that was one activity that I couldn't indulge in. Except there were beaches. Now, of course, I dated. I dated quite a bit in fact.

Mark: Now did other GIs?

Perk: Yeah, enlisted. You know, you'd come into the mess hall, a group of us would, and we'd sit down and start talking and then some of the men would come over and they'd ask if they could sit down with us and so you got to know a group of people. And we went out on dates. It was usually into Baltimore, either to a restaurant or to a movie, or something like that. A couple of times we went to a beach and I can't think of where that beach was now but it wasn't too far from Fort Holabird. We had picnics, you know, things like that. Just the normal run of things.

Mark: Were these guys that you worked with? On the same post?

Perk: No. They were on the same post. Some of them, not in the office that I worked in, no. But they were working in other areas of the headquarters building or they were working, well I guess they were agents, agents in training. So, yes, we could date those because they were all enlisted men, except for the cadre of that particular training section.

Mark: Yeah. Now with this officer/enlisted fraternization thing, was that pretty well followed on the dating scene?

Perk: No, it wasn't. It wasn't. Because I knew a couple of women who did meet outside and date, they were second lieutenants they dated. And I dated an NCO, a sergeant at that time who worked in the finance area of the headquarters building and he had said that he had applied for officer candidate training in Fort Reilly, Kansas. He wasn't sure whether it would go through or not. We kind of joked around a bit, well, you know, if you come back a second lieutenant, we won't be able to date anymore [laughs]. What happened is we did get very serious and he went off to officer candidate school and he asked me to marry him, by letter, sent me a ring and so we were married in August 1950. He, at the fort chapel. He came back a second lieutenant but that never would have worked if we had both, if he had been working there at the headquarters. And, of course, he wouldn't have been assigned there anyway after that training. At that time I had a choice of, if you were married you could still stay in the service but there was no, how could I say, there were no, that didn't mean that you would be assigned with your husband. So you had the choice of either living apart at different posts or taking a discharge. Meaning the woman would take a discharge. So that was the choice that I made at that time.

Mark: I see. Now, I was going to ask how you got out of the service. 'Cause you only served until '52?

Perk: Yes, and I had a three year enlistment. That's the reason. And so, you know, we talked about it and I was young, we both were young, and I thought well I can't stand this. I have to be with him. It was a tough decision because earlier that same year, after he had left for OCS training at Fort Reilly my commanding officer called me and I had been giving information, education talks once a week to the women there in the detachment, and this is just a little side line, but she let me, I called motor pool and I was able to get a car and a driver to take me into Baltimore, go to the Pratt Library and do some research on the particular topic for that week, which was fun. I enjoyed it. And came back and prepared a small talk and then I gave it front of the group -- on Wednesdays after lunch that we were excused from work for this particular time. And then, you know, I was critiqued on it and I didn't realize until she called me into her office that she had been looking me over as a possible candidate for officer's candidate school and she told me that and it was then that I had to -- I was keeping it from her that, you know, I was engaged and I didn't want to tell her until I absolutely had to.

Mark: And that was then.

Perk: It was disappointing to her. I could see that in her face and in her eyes. Sometimes when I think back to that I think it's interesting how these roads diverge in your life when you could have made one decision to go one way and one another. When you're young you only see what's right in front of your eyes. Anyway, that's what happened. So I took the discharge in August of 1952.

Mark: Okay.

Perk: And then I went on with my husband to his new duty station which was at Fort Benjamin Harrison.

Mark: In Indiana.

Perk: Yeah.

Mark: A couple more questions on that note. Was this a common experience among other women in the service. I mean, did a lot of them get married and leave the service?

Perk: Yes they did, yes they did. And I'm not, I guess it was just our youth. That's usually the time, at least it was at one time of our generation, get married earlier. Now it's more sensible. You wait for awhile or don't get married at all. I think there's more thought being given to it now-a-days than when we were there. But we grew up in that culture. You were expected to just go through high school and get married eventually and settle down. Never give it a second thought. Now, of course, I look back and I think, oh, how different it is now.

Mark: Yeah. Were there any sort of problems with other soldiers, soldiers dating other soldiers? I'm thinking, for example, of some of the World War II women I've spoken with, are

amazed that there are now maternity uniforms for women. Back in those days if you got pregnant, you got discharged.

Perk: That's exactly right.

Mark: Did that sort of thing occur much?

Perk: Yes. It happened once at Fort Holabird. One of the women in our detachment, she was dating, unfortunately she was dating a married man, and she became pregnant and she was discharged. She was given an honorable discharge but it was less than honorable. It was a medical discharge.

Mark: I see.

Perk: I've often wondered what happened to her. She was a sweet, sweet young woman as I recall. It was a tragedy. We all felt it; felt badly about it.

Mark: But it didn't happen all that much, apparently.

Perk: No. It was--

Mark: This was one incident in two--

Perk: Just one incident that I recall. None in basic training, of course. None that I recall at Fort Dix in the group that I was in. But just that one young woman at Fort Holabird at the time that I was there.

Mark: I see.

Perk: And, of course, there were no maternity clothes then. I was amazed when I went to Vets Place Central last year for the dedication and one of the members of the 84th Division Band, a young woman, and she had a uniform on but it was a maternity uniform. It was just hard to believe that. Because from my generation, I thought, well, that's progress. That's great. If she can stand it and, you know, there's a uniform available for that, that's fine.

Mark: So in 1952 you left the service.

Perk: August, yes.

Mark: But you stayed in the military community.

Perk: Yes, I did.

Mark: So things like readjustment assistance like GI Bill and that sort of thing.

Perk: No.

Mark: That never came up for you.

Perk: To my regret. I must tell you, to my regret, of course I didn't know this at the time, I was -- in fact I'll tell you about one incident. And it didn't make much of an impression upon me at the time because I was, I know I was naïve, most of us were. But going through the discharge area, personnel, I remember the young man sitting behind the desk and saying, joking me about being discharged and getting married, and he said, "You know, you're not going to be considered a veteran." And I guess it just passed right over my head because I hadn't even thought about benefits or anything like that and I was given very little information. In fact, I can't recall anything. It was just a very quick process going through that personnel area. And as I look back on that now, there was a disservice done to me because I wasn't given any information about educational benefits and so forth.

Mark: And the men were?

Perk: I don't know, I don't know. I have no idea because I was the only one going through the personnel area at that time for discharge so I can't really say any comparison. But it was not, it wasn't until, let's see, some time in the 1980s that I realized that I really could be considered a veteran. I mean, that's sad, Mark. That's really sad. And then when I found out that I thought well all those years I wasted, and of course I don't have any benefits now except for headstone benefits when I die. But anyway I found out that when I became a military wife, officer's wife, that it was frowned upon for us to hold a job outside the family and various social activities. Plus it was frowned upon for us to go to school. And there were several times in our travels in the United States that we were in communities that had community colleges somewhat similar to MATC here.

Mark: Yeah.

Perk: And I wanted to go. But this darn rule, this unspoken rule, and sometimes it was spoken in the coffee groups that I was in that we just couldn't do it because we were there to be an adjunct to our husband's career and yet I always wanted to. So there was that frustration. But I feel that -- I learned how to play golf and I went to so many teas and coffees and social events, cocktail parties and luncheons and things like that that after awhile you became saturated with all of that. But I did help. I had learned how to bowl and did all the things that I was supposed to be doing. And we had two children and they were -- I guess they're Army brats -- they don't like that expression now.

Mark: They don't like that expression?

Perk: They don't like it.

Mark: Oh, I see.

Perk: But they did enjoy the traveling around.

Mark: I've got some interesting, what I hope are interesting, questions along those lines anyways. It's an interesting topic to me. I was in the peacetime military myself. And I know that there's a whole military culture -- the military brat as you say.

Perk: Yeah.

Mark: You spent how long as a military dependent?

Perk: It was from, let's see, well, it was 14 years.

Mark: And you got shuffled around quite a bit. On the data form I had you fill out I've got like six posts here.

Perk: Yeah, that's true. That's right. Lets see. I'm trying to think. We went to Fort Benjamin Harrison -- I think I wrote down Fort Benjamin Harrison twice. We were there twice.

Mark: You did, yes.

Perk: For two different courses. The first time we were there we lived on the civilian economy because as a second lieutenant there wasn't room on the post for -- he was going through a basic finance officers course -- and there was no housing on post for us. And so we found a small apartment in Indianapolis. And then the second time we went he went to an advanced course and we were offered quarters on post, such as they were. It was in a student section, you know, like little cracker boxes. But it was on post. There was a kindergarten on post where we could have our daughter go to. You know, you make due. You learn how to make due. And I got, after the first couple of moves, I became very proficient at packing up and knowing what things to throw out and what things to keep. How to get a place organized. And I think that's the thing that I brought forth from my service, both the two years I was in plus as a military dependent. The ability to be organized. The ability to, initiative being able to stay calm in most instances, under stress, and also to just take initiative. Sometimes, usually when you're not asked but just to go ahead and do the job that has to be done. And that has stood me in good stead. Plus the esprit that I, esprit de corps, that I felt when I was in service and missed all of these years until I finally discovered that there women veterans' organizations out there. That was a revelation to me.

Mark: I want to stop a sec here.

[End of Side A, Tape 1

Mark: I was wondering if you could comment a little more on being a military wife and having military brats, as you say. Is it hard on a family?

Perk: No, I think because I -- I think it is for some women -- yes, absolutely. I saw instances of that particularly when we were stationed at Fort Polk, Louisiana. We had, first of all we had, there wasn't any housing on post. That was when Polk was being mobilized for the Vietnam War. And the reserves that were there, in fact the day we came in, they were moving out. And the few hotels that were in De Ridder, Louisiana literally, beds weren't changed or anything. It was lines by these motels. They were checking out and we were moving in until we could find housing on the civilian economy. That was difficult. We finally got a place, it was a brick little house that we rented in De Ridder, Louisiana which was a number of miles from the post itself. But it was the only place we could find that seemed half way decent. And even at that there was a high fence in back of this home that we rented and beyond that there was a junk yard. And you went down to this home on a dirt road. And I thought, oh, this is, I mean both of us, we just. There was one air conditioner in that home in all that heat and I thought, oh, we've got to do something different. So we stayed there for six months until we could find, we bought a home in Alexandria, Louisiana which was 50 miles from Fort Polk. And another good reason for doing that, at least at that time in our eyes, was the fact that England Air Force Base was about 12 miles outside Alexandria and so we had access to that base exchange, the officers club, swimming pool, golf course, the commissary, and so forth, without having to go into Fort Polk which at that time still hadn't a commissary and post exchange. And so my husband got into a car pool with some other families, men who had decided to do the same thing and they drove 50 miles one way into work, 50 miles back in this car pool, every day of the week. And it was easier on me mileage-wise except when there were social events and so we had to buy another car. I went in, when the kids went off to school in the morning and there was a coffee at Fort Polk or in some of the homes in the surrounding vicinity, I left immediately after they were on the school bus and I came back in time, by the time the school bus hit the street in front of our home. And that happened several times a month plus there were cocktail parties to go to, receptions and things like that. So we were back and forth that 100 mile distance at least 4 or 5 times a month. Sometimes 3, maybe sometimes more than that. As I recall at that time the commanding officer of the post and his adjutant were quartered in barracks. It was really rough because that whole post was just starting from scratch again. And offices had to be set up, logistics and everything. It was a rough time. I know the men were gone a lot. I soon found out that at England Air Force Base a lot of the Air Force wives were the same way. The men would leave on training missions and during the time that we were there I know a couple of the men were killed. These were women that I had known and, you know, just from socializing with forever. It was rough on them. They had to move out of their quarters and probably go back to their parents or wherever they came from.

Mark: And you went to Germany, too. Was it difficult to take your whole family overseas?

Perk: Well, let me tell you about that. We, I'll say "we" in this instance because it was a family thing. We got orders to go to Germany. And this was when we were at Fort Monmouth, New Jersey. But it was only order for my husband to go because there wasn't enough housing at Baumholder where he was slated to go into the finance office there. So I

thought well, I guess I'll just have to pack up when I get the notice that there's quarters available. So he went ahead. I remember he drove to, I'm trying to think of the name of that base that people go into, the fort that they go into before they go overseas. It was near McGuire Force Base in New Jersey.

Mark: That's Fort Dix isn't it?

Perk: No, it wasn't Fort Dix.

Mark: I got discharged in McGuire.

Perk: Oh, okay. No it wasn't Fort Dix. But anyway there was this embarkation point and he was there and he was ready to fly out the next day and the day before that I got a phone call, I don't remember from whom, who called me on the fort, at Fort Monmouth, but he said you've been given clearance for quarters at Baumholder and if you can reach your husband he can come back to Fort Monmouth and then you can go by ship over to Germany. And so I tried to reach him and tried to reach him. And then I asked the charge of quarters to put a note on his bunk and he finally got it and he called and I told him and so he came back right away, you know, back to Fort Monmouth and we stayed in the quarters there until we were cleared. It was about -- [interruption] -- so he came back to Fort Monmouth, New Jersey and then we left in October for, I think it was for Fort Totten, New York. Anyway, it was close by the Brooklyn Naval Base or Brooklyn Port in New York state. And we left from there, on a troop ship. I can remember looking out at the Statue of Liberty as it faded in the distance and then the captain of the ship told us that we were heading into a storm. I thought, oh, boy. We had a daughter at that time. She was--

Mark: Yeah, how old by this time?

Perk: Well, let's see. I'm trying to think now. She was born in late '53. That would have been, she would have been about, just a little over two years old. And then, oh, prior to this we were told that if you brought a child on board you had to put a harness on them when they were out on deck. Well, it was required and we did buy that. She hated that. But it turned out that we had to use it even in the passageways because the storm was so great -- that ship was just, I can still see those huge waves and the ship plunging down into them and then coming back up again. Just to maneuver down the corridors and go back and forth to eat and into the laundry area and into the, they had a play room there for the children which was nice. But we weren't allowed to go out of the -- what are the doorways called in the Navy?

Mark: I was in the Air Force. I can't tell you.

Perk: Okay. But anyway, you had to step up and over them and the men that were down in the troop ship holds, so to speak, were the ones that stood guard at these doorways. And so many of them were sick, seasick -- and I was too for a time. It wasn't a good crossing. It

took several days longer. We came out of it and I remember seeing in the distance the White Cliffs of Dover. There was some fog shrouding them but sure enough there was a chalky white. And then the ship did a right turn. We went down the coast and we landed at Bremerhaven, Germany. That was, we weren't allowed to debark right away. We had to stay on ship for, until the next day. But I can remember the German police there with their long green coats and their jack boots and I thought this is just what I remember reading about or seeing in my magazine. They still had, the jack boots really made an impression upon me because of the Nazis, you know, with the same kind of boots. And they were pacing up and down the wharf I recall with a very straight -- same kind of hats that they wore in World War II -- and the long green coats and the black jack boots. It was frightening. They looked frightening to me. And I thought this is what they must have looked like, you know, during World War II. But anyway we got out and then we were taken -- we had to travel by train from Bremerhaven to -- over night again -- to Frankfurt. I recall that we were assigned two bunks. Nice meals. Very nice, pleasant meals on the train. But because we had a child with us one of us had to sleep with the child and I can remember Lynn kicking all night long. When we got to Frankfurt then we had to wait for a train, the train that took us from Frankfurt to Baumholder. [Laughs]

Mark: I was in Germany but I can't remember where Baumholder is. Is it near the Czech border somewhere?

Perk: It's in the, as I recall it was in the Taunus Mountain Ranges. Baumholder was where--

Mark: Up near Frankfurt?

Perk: Pardon.

Mark: Near Frankfurt.

Perk: Yes, approximately near Frankfurt, yes. But I recall that we were on the train it seemed for a couple of hours. And the train backed out of the Frankfurt station and went into Baumholder backing up all the way. That was the end of the line.

Mark: Now this is about '56 or so.

Perk: No, it was '55.

Mark: So World War II had been over about ten years.

Perk: About that. But Germany was still occupied.

Mark: Yeah.

Perk: It was still an occupied country.

Mark: I was going to ask what accommodations were like for military families that soon after the war. That early in the cold war. Did you have decent facilities? Were you well taken care of?

Perk: Yes, we did. We were housed in Rommel, well I understand, at least this was the story I heard shortly after I got there, that Rommel had trained, was with his troops there at that particular spot and we were, there were, oh, I would say about two rows of these particular high-rise brick buildings. There were four floors in them, steel doors and that's where the officers of his tank corps were housed. We are assigned to a fourth floor apartment. There was no elevator so you just climbed up these wide stairs. It had the sound when you went in and closed the door as soon as the doors to the apartments were closed -- they were steel -- they shut, it was almost like an institutional click and shut. Woe betide the person who forgot their key because you couldn't get in. But it was on the fourth floor. Very roomy apartment. It was completely, it was carpeted in deep red, rich carpeting -- burgundy almost. We had complete, it was completely furnished. There was a beautiful set of Rosenthal china in the living room, and crystal, Bavarian crystal. We drew our sheets from quartermaster. I can recall that I was told that if you wanted extra sheets they were a quarter apiece. It was really something. We had a crib that we got from quartermaster. There was a beautiful built-in closets in the bedroom area. A built-in vanity, a large mirror. The windows had no screens on them. I always thought that was rather peculiar until I found out, you know, how the fact that there weren't that many insects. At least where we were. You could swing these windows open. But I soon learned, too, that I had to keep them partially closed because Lynn, our oldest, was climbing and getting into things and so I had to really watch her on that score from the fourth floor.

Mark: I'm kind of curious. You say today your kids object to the term "Army brats."

Perk: They do. I think it's because--

Mark: I wonder why that is.

Perk: I think it's because it's a crass, brassy phrase. And I think that's why they do. I know that they enjoyed where we were all the time. We were, I think Lynn was more outgoing than Mark. But they made friends pretty quickly. It was never a problem. They were always busy with either school, and I remember taking them to swimming lessons and dancing lessons for Lynn. And Mark, I know there was Scouts. There was always plenty for me to do. I know that I chauffeured the kids around a lot. Did a lot of things with them. Also, I had a Brownie troop myself and helped with Mark's troop later on.

Mark: And so the kids moving around and that sort of thing all the time didn't ...

Perk: It didn't appear to. And there may have been some, not that I recall though. They never seemed to complain. I know moving from place to place in the car they would tend to fight like any brothers and sisters do but the long, monotony of the driving perhaps. I

know that was a problem. But that's about the only thing that I can recall. They never seemed, they always did well in school. The only time they didn't was when we were in Louisiana. I never realized how poor those schools were. They were getting A's in their school that they went to in Alexandria, Virginia. This was right about the time that the Civil Rights Act came out. I do recall one day that the kids came home very excited. They said there was something, a cross on the front lawn of their school and so I drove by there and sure enough there was the charred remnants of a cross that had been put in that school. That was the first time I had seen evidence of Ku Klux Klan or thought that it might be that. Nothing was ever reported in the papers about. But anyway, when we moved from Fort Polk, Louisiana to California that was a shocker to me because the kids -- there was a very fine elementary school on the post—

Mark: At Fort Ord.

Perk: Yeah, Fort Ord. And I got a note from both of their teachers saying that both of them were behind in the class work and I couldn't believe that. And so I went to school and I found out that what they had learned in Louisiana simply wasn't applicable to the, in a very small way, to the California schools. So they, the teachers were willing to tutor them so that they could pass the particular grade they were in. So I told them they really had to bear down and once they had that tutoring after school then they had to come home and had to apply themselves. And they passed. But the whole, this is when it came to light for me that all educational systems weren't the same.

Mark: Were not equal.

Perk: Yeah. I just couldn't believe what they didn't know. But, fortunately, they had some very good teachers and were brought up to standards and went on from there. But it was hard on them because they wanted to go out and play and they wanted to go over to their friends' house and everything. But I had to bear down on them because that, I know they didn't enjoy that period. They simply had to in order to pass that grade. So they had to do it.

Mark: Out of curiosity, did either of them choose a military career?

Perk: No. No, they didn't [laughs]aw. Mark was, he had a draft card, you know, by 1974 he said that if he was ever called up he was going to go to Canada. And I said, well, if that's what you want. I guess it was more cajoling than anything. I said, if that's what you want, I'll support you. I'll drive you there. But, of course, it never came to pass.

Mark: I've got two more questions about military life and then I'd like to move on to your experience with veterans' organizing here.

Perk: Okay.

Mark: First, I'm wondering if you could comment on some of the best and worst places you were stationed. You don't speak very highly of Fort Polk.

Perk: No. That would have to be the bottom of the line, so to speak. I'm trying to think -- the best place, well, it would have to be, I'm trying to think. I guess it would have to be two places. That would be Fort Holabird and also Baumholder. I enjoyed both places.

Mark: Okay. For what reasons? Just because--

Perk: Well, I don't know.

Mark: Were they nicer facilities? Nicer--

Perk: Well, that would be part of it. And the people. And, I don't know, the Southern attitude and I just, it was sort of abhorrent to me. Attitudes, well, for one thing Lynn had a friend when we were at Alexandria, lived across the street, and her father ran a restaurant in Alexandria and Lynn was invited, I know a number of times, to, with Pam to eat at the restaurant. And Lynn came back and said that, she said there was a back door and she said that she went into a back room and she was told to stay out of it, that's where the Blacks eat. And she said that they couldn't go in or out of that door and they couldn't eat back there. Once I took, there was a Disney movie playing in Alexandria and I took the children into the movie theater and back home here in Madison I as a child and a teenager I enjoyed going the Orpheum and Capitol Theater and sitting up in the balcony and so I thought well, maybe the kids, they had never, most of the, in fact all of the post movie houses did not have a balcony and then I thought that this would be the first time that they could enjoy something like this so I started to go up the stairs with both of them and the man who was taking tickets called me down and he said you don't want to go up there. And I said why. And he said well that's for Niggers. And so what I did, I took the kids by the hand, went down the steps and walked out of there. I was so disgusted. And of course the kids were confused. I got them out on the sidewalk and I told them how I felt and that we were never going back in that theater again and that it was just wrong. And so we got in the car and went home. That was the end of that. But I never frequented that movie theater again or any of the restaurants in the downtown because of the segregation. It just made me sick.

Mark: Yeah. And how had the military changed -- from your perspective in a military family -- how had the military changed over these -- 14 years, you said?

Perk: Well, it remained pretty much the same. I think each post was, of course, the physical layout was somewhat different. I, the rules were normally the same for military dependents. In one instance at Fort Ord I realized that the painted spots on the road were where the pedestrians walked. There was a law, I found out in California, that vehicles had to stop at the crosswalk if there were any pedestrians in the crosswalk, even on post. That was brand new to me. Also, it was the first time that I saw the basic training area where the men were inducted and going into the barber shop -- a couple of lines going in,

you know, they had all this luxuriant hair, at least some of the men did [laughs] -- and when they came out the other end they were shaved clean. That was a revelation to me and I guess I saw that one morning when I was going to, this was earlier on and I saw that going to the post exchange. It shocked me and it also, it was also laughable at the same time. Because when I was in basic training they told us to keep our hair off the collar, whether you put it up in a chignon or cut it short or what but just to keep it off the collar. This was really a shock.

Mark: I'm interested in your work in veterans' organizing and that sort of thing. It sounds like an interesting story. I'd like to get it on tape if I could. Describe for me if you would, when you became conscious of yourself as a veteran. You mentioned before you didn't think of yourself like that until much later in life.

Perk: No. It was, in fact I'm trying to see -- I think it was -- I'm trying to think of the year that Madison had its march for Vietnam veterans. I recall that that parade was extremely somber. There was no music whatsoever. I went up to the Square because I wanted to see these men. In the group itself there was a small group of women marching. I later found out that they were United Women Veterans. And I thought, my gosh, you now, here I am, I'm here on the sidelines. I was in service, too, and they were in service and so how is this going to come about. So I did find out about this organization. Found out when they were going to meet. The first time I went to a meeting was over at VFW Post 7591 on Cottage Grove Road. They were having a meeting over there. And so I just went over there. A small group of women and found that it was very likable and they welcomed me and that was the beginning of it. But I couldn't get over, here there were women marching and I thought where have I been all these decades. But then I suddenly thought now wait a minute, you know, you were a military dependent and it wasn't encouraged to do things like this. So that's where I was all these years.

Mark: Yeah. And so there was never any thought of joining the Legion or anything like that.

Perk: You know, it's funny. After I got involved with United Women Veterans and in the Department of Veterans Affairs at one of the early meetings that I went to, it was at, it was at, at that time it was held in Racine, Kenosha and various spots, and I believe it was in Racine, and one of the men who's on one of the committees -- I think it was the Legislative Program Review Committee -- came up to me and asked me if I was a Legion member. And I said, no. I said I thought that was just for men. I said I didn't know that women could join. And he looked at me kind of funny. I mean, I really didn't know anything about veterans' organizations. And he says, oh, yes, there's some women in the Legion. And so I thought, well, okay, and so he gave me an application blank and I joined that particular post -- it was 481 here in Madison, just outside of Madison in Waunakee, I guess, just that borderline there. And I stayed there for awhile. I was the only woman who attended meetings and at that time I didn't know that there was an all woman post in Milwaukee. I since found out that there are two all women posts in the state of Wisconsin. So I thought this is for me. So, what I did, I just transferred from 481 to 448 in Milwaukee and I've been happy there ever since. It just never occurred to me --

I thought it was all men. You know, it's all the pictures you would see. All men. And of course, since I have found out that it is, of course, absolutely, the hierarchy is male dominated. But that's fine. I'm contented where I am. I don't have any aspirations.

Mark: Now as far as your membership in the Legion and activities in the Veterans Affairs, how do you find that the men veterans look, treat you and some of the other woman.

Perk: Oh, I have nothing but respect. I guess I went in there -- I try to go into situations where, with dignity -- I guess I give what I get. I never had any problems because I guess number one, I minded my own business and I was intent on doing the best job I could in that particular council and I thought just by being quiet and listening I would learn a lot. I've never had any problems at all. In fact, I think there's, I just feel a sense of camaraderie. I don't, yeah, it's just good companionship. I just don't feel that there's any problems at all.

Mark: Is that why you decided to get involved in the veterans' organizations. For camaraderie and social things? Where there other issues facing veterans ...

Perk: First of all I was amazed at the fact that there were women veterans' organizations. I became involved with the United Women Veterans. And then Frieda Schurch at that time was the representative to the Council on Veterans Programs from the United Women Veterans. I think also she served on the Board but I'm not sure in what, how long or anything. But then she decided that she wasn't going to do that any more. So there was a notice put in our newsletter that she was bowing out and it would be helpful if someone would volunteer to fill her place because we didn't want to lose that seat on the council. And so I talked to the other women and I talked to Frieda about what needed to be done. And I thought, well, maybe I can do this. And so I volunteered my name and the group decided to send me as a representative to the council. I guess I've been there ever since. And I've learned a lot about politics within the Department of Veterans Affairs and just the general workings of veterans' organizations. I've really enjoyed it even though there have been some controversial times. It's just something I should have been doing much earlier in my life I think.

Mark: What do you see as the biggest issues for veterans these days? And for women veterans in particular?

Perk: For women veterans I think it's health care and particularly those that served in the Persian Gulf. I did go to a seminar that was held at the VA Hospital here in Madison. And I walked in that door and I was amazed. I thought maybe I might be the oldest person there but all the young people there that had served in the Persian Gulf, many, many women, and the health care problems that they have that came up in question and answer periods. I know I had read about this. I serve on Senator Feingold's Veterans Advisory Committee and also Representative Klug's and these issues have come up in these meetings. I thought something's got to be done and then they talked about, at this seminar, about the Women's Health Center that they have at the VA Hospital and I

thought that's perfect for women veterans and those that, you know, were in the Persian Gulf, they can go there. But then I found out, now I'm not eligible for treatment there at that hospital. I'm not in the categories that they have but I thought now here they can go and have all this done. Then I found out that you have to be an admitted patient in that hospital to be referred to the Women's Clinic within that VA Hospital. And so in other words, even if you're a woman veteran, you can't walk in off the street and say I would like to have a mammogram, I'd like to have a pap smear, I feel I have blood pressure problems and you can't be treated there. I guess I never will because I have private health insurance and it's very adequate for what I need. But it's there and yet it isn't there. And I think that's a real problem. I know the VA touts these Women Health Centers throughout the United States and being innovated and being new. I know Joan Fury who's the Women Veterans Advisor to Secretary Jesse Brown has touted these centers and they're fine as far as they go. And I don't know about the other ones but that surprised me -- that kind of rule about coming into the Women's Health Center. I know, I received, and members of United Women's Veterans, received brochures on the fact that this health center was opening up and what a big thing it was. But it turns out that there's more to it than just this grand brochure that they have advertising it's services. You have to be admitted as a patient before being referred to that women's clinic. Now, that's not right.

Mark: It's not easy to use in other words.

Perk: No it isn't easy to use.

Mark: You want to open up access to it or make the rules simpler or something.

[End of Side A, Tape 1]

Perk: Exactly. And I thought well now maybe this is just this particular VA Hospital. But then at one of our 448 meetings, American Legion meetings, there was a representative from Zablocki at our meeting talking about the Women's Health Care Center that they have in Milwaukee. And when she got finished several women, she said, well, how many of you have been out there and been at the Women's Health Center. Nobody raised their hand and she says, well, and she had brochures and she passed them out and one of the women finally, from World War II, got up and she said she you know, we're not eligible to go there. Evidently, the same rules apply there as they do here in Madison. You have to be admitted as a patient. And to be admitted as a patient you have to fall under those three categories that they have. I believe that they still have those. So nobody is really eligible for it. So, evidently, those women that are eligible to get treatment at these hospitals, VA Hospitals are the only ones, the few women that can be referred to those women's clinics. So what good are they? I know it's a foot in the door but it's not really accessible to women veterans in general. Just as health care at the VA Hospital is not accessible to so many veterans, male and female alike. And I know there are cost containment problems and I know that there are all kinds of rules that have to be followed. But it's just, I can well understand these World War II male veterans saying that the VA system is just going

down hill and to the dogs. It just isn't right and yet, on the other hand, on the pro side of the argument, one of the women I know from Chapter Four Women's Army Corps Veterans Association in Milwaukee, she was disabled in service. She was in the quartermaster corps. She lost, her left leg had to be amputated and she lost the use of one of her eyes. She's blind. And, of course, she was retired with a medical discharge and she has full access to the VA Hospital. And in a case like that, that certainly should be that way. Those are the exceptions. There doesn't seem to be much for those of us who are relatively healthy. You just better know that you need some private health insurance, that's all there is to it because you're not going to get it from the VA Hospital.

Mark: I see.

Perk: And I think in the future it's going to be even more strict.

Mark: Two more things I want to cover. One involves the membership of the United Women Veterans. As far as generations are concerned, is it mostly World War II and Korean vets?

Perk: Yes, yes it is. It's mainly World War II veterans. We are a small group. At last count we had 87 members but at the last meeting I attended, it's been down somewhat. Of course, some of the women have passed away and a few have decided not to renew their membership because they live in parts of Wisconsin and they can't attend the meetings here. The membership will gradually go down and I would assume that in maybe even in the next decade that that organization may be defunct because of the women just getting too old to attend meetings or dying. It's just a fact of life. And I know this is a problem with a lot of veterans' organizations. Some of it has to do, with American Legion especially, the fact that I've heard some male members of the Legion complain because their post doesn't have enough younger members coming in and yet the Vietnam veterans that I've worked with on the Stand Down here in Madison, I've asked them that same question and they say, well, when they came back, you know, they were asked to join the VFW and the American Legion but when they got into the meeting it was this old hierarchy again where the World War II veterans didn't want to give up there so called "power" and ceded to the younger people. Well, it's the younger people that should have that power because they have the physical and mental capabilities to do, and the energy, to accomplish a lot more. This is what we lack, I think in most veterans' organizations--

Mark: Do you think that's the case of the United Women Veterans as well.

Perk: I think that--

Mark: 'Cause there are a lot of women Vietnam veterans out there. And, of course, the Gulf as you mentioned.

Perk: Oh, yes. Oh, we have. And in the women's' veterans' organizations I belong to, this has been a continuing problem. We do have a few but here again if they're married both

partners are working full-time jobs, they usually have children and that is a killing pace for most young people.

Mark: Oh, I know.

Perk: And some of them are still in the reserves. You know, they have all of these other things to do. And so I can understand the reluctance to get involved with a veterans' organization. And I keep saying to myself that maybe when the children are grown they'll want to become more active. But in the mean time I don't know where the present organizations are going to go for their membership. This isn't happening in great numbers I don't believe. But it's going to be a problem in the next 10 or 15 years.

Mark: I see.

Perk: I'm not sure exactly where these things are going but something's got to be done. I know in Chapter Four in Milwaukee, we have, let's see, I think I have two women who are Vietnam Era veterans and one of them works at the Post Office full-time on a shift that doesn't allow her to attend meetings on weekends, has two small children, husband works, it's just impossible. It's just one of those things. And I certainly understand that. But I can also see the larger picture where veterans' organizations have, I don't know what we're going to do, quite frankly. It's a dilemma.

Mark: I've got one last thing I want to cover and that involves how you got involved on the Museum Board here. How did all this come about? It's only natural for us to want to get our own history on tape. And so I'm curious how you got to find out about this, how you-

Perk: Well, we found out about it through the Department of Veterans Affairs meetings. The first people that were named to the board were actually those who were able to, larger organizations, that were able to donate a lot of money to get it started. And I can understand that. And then there was that bru-ha-ha between the Council and the Board about, that there, the smaller veterans' organizations should be also members of the Board.

Mark: I should tell you before you go any further that I'm not involved with the Board at all. I don't know any of the history. So you can tell me anything you want.

Perk: That's all right; it doesn't make any difference. So that was changed. And so the Council was given, Veterans Programs, was given three members that it could rotate every year amongst the various small veterans' groups on the Council. Well, it turned out that I was asked by Chauncey Dunday if I wanted to serve on the Board. And I said if I can help in any way, I'll be glad to. So he named me and Paul Bialk was at that time already a member of the Museum Board of Directors. I'm trying to think, was there another person -- there must have been. I just don't recall the name right now. I think it was, who was the VFW representative? Oh, Italo Bensoni. But anyway, so I went on and then I told

Chauncey, let's see, that had to be last year in August and he said, he just came up to myself and Jess Jefferson and said I'm reappointing you for the next year. And I said, well, I thought we were supposed to rotate. He says, "Well, I haven't had time to contact any other people." He said, "This has to go in." So I said, "All right. I'll serve for another year." And of course then in October or November I think it was Chauncey died. Then Marv has just continued the same people. So I don't know what Marv's going to do this coming year. If he wants me to, fine. I do feel that there should be a rotation among the different Council members to be on the Museum Board of Directors. But that's not my say-so. Marvin's the one that's going to have to choose, I guess.

Mark: I think you've exhausted all my questions.

Perk: Okay.

Mark: If I had some more, I forgot what they were. Is there anything you'd like to add before we finish off?

Perk: Well, let's see. Just let me look through some notes 'cause I did make some notes on that questionnaire that you did send me. I'm very happy. Now, I must say that women are accepted into some of the combat MOSs. I think that's long overdue. One of the questions was the attack on Pearl Harbor in 1941. Well, all I remember is that my family and I were eating Sunday dinner in the kitchen. At that time we called the noon meal "dinner;" it was never "lunch." And we heard it on a small white radio. I recall asking my parents the meaning of it which they, of course, didn't know at the time. Actually, I kept, even at that young age, I kept up on the war very well because we had *Life* magazine in our home, and different magazines, and I was a voracious reader and I read everything from cover-to-cover. A lot of that must have sunk in and that's probably why I remember so much about it. Let's see. I guess most of the questions we've covered. I'm just going down the list here that I wrote. Oh, under basic training, it was physically grueling for me that first month and I think it was just getting my body, my muscles over the soreness that was caused from that drilling and running all the time. I did try, I did apply for overseas duty while I was at Fort Holabird but I was turned down because the other person and myself, a Norma Holman, strange I remember her name, we both had stenographic MOSs and we both applied for overseas duty and we were both turned down because, the reason we were told, officially, was that we were needed at Fort Holabird for our skills. So I never, I wanted to go to South Korea. At that time they were opening up I think it was Pusan where a detachment of WACs eventually were and I thought maybe I could help out there but I was never sent overseas. I was just there at Fort Holabird. Oh, on the biographical data sheet you had asked what my rank was. It was corporal but I want to explain the temporary rank of sergeant and also my discharge. There isn't any ambiguity to that. I was discharged a corporal. That was my rank in service at Fort Holabird but because I gave those INE lectures within the detachment area I was given a temporary rank of sergeant, I guess because I kept an eye on the barracks, you know, and made sure that things were going right. So I guess because of that I had that temporary rank but it was never official; I never got the stripes.

Mark: Never got paid for it either.

Perk: No, never got paid for it [laughs]. So that it's true both ways. But it never appeared on by discharge. I think that's about it. I've gone through most of my notes here. A lot of the questions did pertain to World War II.

Mark: Oh, I understand.

Perk: I guess our time is coming in about five more years.

Mark: I think it's coming now.

Perk: Is it really?

Mark: Well, that's why I'm interviewing you -- and others.

Perk: You know, I wondered about that. I thought, well, these are the commemorative years and all of these wonderful World War II people, the women especially, should be interviewed. I know a lot of the members, veterans, have such interesting stories to tell. And some of them have appeared in the newspaper. I know you have some of them on tape. I always enjoy hearing their stories. One in particular, Juanita Wilke--

Mark: She's coming in next week.

Perk: Is she?

Mark: Yes, she is.

Perk: Oh, good.

Mark: I'm looking forward to it.

Perk: She's 85 and she served as an officer during World War II. She has so many interesting stories to tell.

Mark: And she's still very sharp. I spoke to her and she's--

Perk: She is; she's a very sharp individual.

Mark: I would not have guessed her age by talking to her, I'll tell you that.

Perk: Oh, I know, you don't. Al and I just recently had dinner with both her and her husband and we, it was really a fun evening. They have a real good physical and mental acuity.

It's just amazing. I really enjoy those people so much. Well, I don't have any more to offer unless you have more questions.

Mark: I just ran out. Well, thanks for spending, what two hours, with me.

Perk: Has it been that long? I haven't looked at the clock. It sure has been.

Mark: I've got, these tapes are 110 minutes and you're almost done, into side two. It's been about 100 minutes, whatever that is.

Perk: That's great.

Mark: Excellent.

Perk: Well, listen, Mark, thanks for calling then.

Mark: Thanks for talking to me. I'll talk to you later.

Perk: Okay. Bye-bye.