

Wisconsin Veterans Museum
Research Center

Transcript of an
Oral History Interview with
SUSAN A. PRANKE
Supply Officer, Army, Persian Gulf War
2007

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Pranke, Susan A., (b. 1957). Oral History Interview, 2007.

User copy: 3 sound cassettes (ca. 136 min.), analog, 1 7/8 ips, mono.

Master copy: 3 sound cassette (ca. 136 min.), analog, 1 7/8 ips, mono.

Transcript: 0.1 linear ft. (1 folder)

Abstract:

Susan Pranke, a Green Bay, Wisconsin resident, discusses her career in the Army and her service as a Supply Officer during the Persian Gulf War. Born in De Pere (Wisconsin), Pranke attended East De Pere High School and fought a court battle to play on the boys baseball team. Pranke calls herself "one of the forerunners" for equality in women's athletics. Pranke remembers being fascinated by the military early on; at age four she would play with her father's old Soldier's Manual from World War II. Pranke also mentions being inspired by the television show "Gomer Pyle." She discusses her parents' negative reaction to her interest in joining the Army and her decision to wait to enlist until she was in college so she would not need their signature. Pranke attended University of Wisconsin-Green Bay for one year before transferring to University of Wisconsin-La Crosse, where she majored in Recreation Leadership. Pranke describes enlisting in the Army Reserve Office Training Corps (ROTC) during her sophomore year. She reveals she only doubted her decision for "about thirty seconds" when she arrived at basic training at Fort Knox (Kentucky) the summer after her sophomore year. Pranke covers her basic and officer training in detail, remarking that the drill sergeants treated everyone in ROTC "just like G.I.s." She outlines the demographics of her classmates who came from diverse regions. Pranke mentions most women she knew in ROTC had relatives in the military or grew up as "Army brats," which made Pranke feel like a "cold fish out of water." Pranke also describes befriending foreign soldiers in her Army classes from Zaire, Botswana, Sudan, Korea, and Egypt. Between her junior and senior year, she attended Advanced Camp at Fort Riley (Kansas) where soldiers creatively battled wood ticks. Later that summer, Pranke did on-the-job training at Fort Campbell (Kentucky) with a Quartermaster Officer. While at Fort Campbell, Pranke attended Air Assault School which involved rigging materials like jeeps to be picked up by helicopters, rappelling out of Chinook and Huey helicopters, and completing a ten-mile march in two hours. She tells a story of falling off the helicopter skid during training and bravely rappelling to the ground. Pranke states that she was one of the first 100 women to graduate from Air Assault School and that she was one of only two women in her class to finish the road march. She tells of encountering jealousy and condescension from male classmates when she returned to UW- La Crosse wearing her Air Assault Wings. After graduating college, Pranke applied to become a Military Intelligence Officer, but she was given a Quartermaster Officer commission instead, which she feels was ultimately a better fit. Pranke attended General Troop Support training at Fort Lee (Virginia) before she was given her first assignment in Fort Polk (Louisiana) to a Division. Pranke explains she was happy to go to a Division because she would learn what the "Army was really all about." She praises several officers who were strong role models, including a female Company Commander in her Advanced Individual

Training, and Major Dowling whom she worked with in the Division Support Command at Fort Polk. After a couple years at Fort Polk, where Pranke states she was the only female officer, she attended Airborne School at Fort Benning (Georgia) and then Parachute Rigging School in Germany. Pranke describes both experiences in detail, addressing the differences between jumping out of airplanes versus helicopters. She explains rigging school involved packing and repacking parachutes and securing equipment to be airdropped. Pranke feels seeing another woman from Wisconsin who had gone through Rigger School inspired her to go too. She states: "I always had to prove to myself that I was capable of what everybody else was." Following parachute training, Pranke, now a Captain, was put in charge of six people, including a few civilians, in the 29th Area Support Command in Kaiserslautern (Germany). After one year, she became Company Commander of a Rigger Detachment in the 705th Maintenance Battalion, putting her in charge of over 80 soldiers. She comments that "Airborne people [are] a different subset." She notes that she sent four or five soldiers working for her to alcohol and drug rehab. Pranke discusses the effective rehabilitation therapy available to soldiers, but also the difficulty of being the officer to send them there. Pranke relates an encounter with an angry "Army wife" whose husband was in alcohol treatment. She also touches upon personal scandals of soldiers in the Rigger unit: her first lieutenant was discharged for cheating on his wife, and another soldier went to prison for attacking his wife, a German citizen, in a drunken rage. After 21 months as a Company Commander, Pranke went to the University of Montana to be an ROTC instructor and serve on the Accessions Board. Pranke appreciated seeing the assignment process from behind the scenes and being a role model for the cadets. In August, 1990, Pranke was called up to Kuwait, the Persian Gulf War having just begun. Pranke portrays herself as reluctant to go. She was stationed in Saudi Arabia as a Staff Officer in the supply wing of the 18th Airborne Corps, 101st Corps Support Command. By now a Captain Promotable, Pranke states her job was to brief and educate commanders in the Persian Gulf about supply logistics and "what we could offer" units in the area. Pranke expresses frustration at the layers of bureaucracy and the two-day delay in communication that made it hard to deliver accurate reports. Pranke tells a story of the Colonel of the 101st ordering the supply staff to travel 200 miles to get chicken and hamburger meat because he was tired of eating "Meals Ready to Eat." Pranke depicts this Colonel as short-sighted, explaining that her objections were ignored and that the soldiers got sick from the fresh food because their bodies were used to eating MREs. Shortly after arriving in Iraq, Pranke recalls hearing on BBC radio that the war was over. Almost as soon as she got to Iraq, Pranke says, she was sent back to Saudi Arabia with the first wave of troops to return. Pranke states Saudi civilians "would come and be all smiles...and go out of their way to shake our hands and say, "Thank you, thank you.'" In Saudi Arabia, Pranke explains she was reestablishing operations and setting up camp for an estimated 10,000 troops. Pranke says that because they were the first group back to Saudi Arabia, they had to cater food and hire Sri Lankans to serve it. She details the delivery of bottled water and how trucks would come from Mecca and jostle to be the first unloaded at the dock. Pranke also mentions that Saudi civilians would sneak over the fence to steal bottled water while the Army looked the other way. Once the U.S. began to pull out of the Middle East, Pranke reveals that the Saudis raided the base for mattresses, cots, cranes, plywood, and supplies the Army left behind. She comments briefly on interacting with Saudi civilians and seeing nomads,

camel herds, and women wearing burqas. Pranke was impressed by the "expressive eyes" of the women. After nearly eight months in Saudi Arabia, Pranke was flown home. A single woman at the time, she recalls that the wives' support group had called her parents and arranged for a former cadet Pranke had taught at Montana to meet her at the airport. Pranke continued her career in the Army, attending Petroleum Supply School and later becoming a logistician officer in Japan for the 500th Military Intelligence Brigade. Now a Major, Pranke had a top secret clearance and learned much about military intelligence. In 1996, Pranke left Japan and retired early, at fifteen years instead of twenty, because there was an excess amount of officers in her class year. Pranke comments on the respect and opportunities that come with having a rank and reveals she was often mistaken for a West Point graduate because of her experience. She mentions joining the Madelyn La Canne 539th American Legion Post for female veterans in Green Bay (Wisconsin). Finally, Pranke reflects on her role as a trailblazer, stating "I opened a lot of doors and got a lot of second looks" and "you really don't realize what path you're creating until later on in life."

Biographical Sketch:

Pranke (b. 1957) was born in De Pere (Wisconsin) where she made news by being the first girl to play on the boys baseball team. She attended UW-Green Bay and UW-La Crosse, joining the Army ROTC during her sophomore year. Her military career spanned fifteen years and included assignments in Louisiana, Montana, Germany, Japan and Saudi Arabia. Pranke is a veteran of the Persian Gulf War, where she served as a supply and logistics officer. She retired in 1996 as a Major. After initially retiring in Washington state, Pranke moved to Green Bay (Wisconsin) where she currently works for the United States Postal Service and participates in the Madelyn La Canne 539th American Legion Post.

Interviewed by Terry MacDonald, 2007

Transcribed by Cathy Cox, 2007

Transcript edited and abstract written by Darcy I. Gervasio, 2009

Interview Transcript

Terry: This is an interview with Susan A. Pranke, who served with the United States Army, and served from 1980 to 1996. The interview is being conducted at approximately 12:30 p.m. at the following address of 300 South Adams Street, Green Bay, Wisconsin, on the following date of March 24, 2007, and the interviewer is Terry MacDonald.

Susan, can you give us a little bit of background as to the year you were born, where you were born at?

Pranke: Ok. I was born on October 18th, 1957 in De Pere, Wisconsin. And, attended the local Catholic school there, and East De Pere High School, and in 1975 a little bit of claim to fame was, went out for the boy's baseball team. But it wasn't as easy as that—there was a lawsuit and took people to court and so forth. But anyway, the end result was, I was one of the forerunners of the athletics the way it is now.

Terry: Did you have any brothers and sisters?

Pranke: Yes. I have a half-brother, and a half-sister, and a full brother. And, my full brother is three years older than myself, and—he—kind of—had a schizophrenic episode when he was like 22, so he was a little bit slower, and slow [*sic*] than me but—I always respected him, but I never understood why things were so much easier for me compared to him, and being an older brother you know, you look *up* to him and, it never dawned on me *why* that much, and then I you know, realized, his IQ was lower than mine and, you know just a lot of different things. And then I have a half-brother on my mother's side that's a truck driver, and he also lives in De Pere. And a half-sister on my father's side that is in Minnesota, and really they never—both Roger and Barbie never lived with us, and so they're quite, you know, distant. So.

Terry: Were you the only one who served in the military in your family?

Pranke: Yes. My father served—World War II—again he was drafted more or less. And, I remember, growing up, you know, like three, four years old, you know, I got a hold of his soldier's manual. And I was like, *wow*, this is *cool*, you know, and would page through that, and it was one of my treasured possessions. And then, unbeknownst to me I guess, I actually took his uniforms to the Goodwill depository downtown De Pere one day and, gave 'em to Goodwill. But uh, if I woulda known they were his uniforms I woulda kept 'em. I also grew up watching Gomer Pyle, he was MC [Marine Corps] on TV, and I think that was the niche for me for some reason. Gomer was an inspiration.

- Terry: So, when you joined the Army, what did your parents—were they still alive?
- Pranke: Oh, yes. My parents are still, presently living, but uh—
- Terry: What did they think?
- Pranke: Well, interesting question. I guess when I was in high school I kept telling my friends I was gonna go in the Army, but I don't remember that, but in hindsight a lot of things change. I went to UWGB, University of Wisconsin-Green Bay initially, for my first year. And, I remember going through or by the ROTC office [Reserve Officers' Training Corps], and always peekin' in and lookin' at somebody in their uniform. And, never had the gumption to go in. Also too, I actually saw—(some confusion, both saying oops)—actually I saw a recruiter. And you know, everything was fine and dandy, and—this was in high school, but I was about 17 at the time. And he said, "Well we'll have to come and talk to your parents," you know. And I said, "Oh no you don't." So, I knew where I was headed, but I wanted to overcome the obstacle of a signature. So, I guess I—I waited. The Army was still in the back of my mind. I transferred colleges to the University of Wisconsin-La Crosse, and one day—well, it was my sophomore year, the year I transferred. In the school newspaper there was an ad—Come and Get Your Briefcase, How to Fill Out a Resume and so forth. And I went up there, and all I know is five minutes later I had that little briefcase in my hand and I also was signed up for Basic Camp. (laughs) And I know as I left, they were still shakin' their heads that that was the easiest sell they ever had. (both laugh)
- Terry: So, you had the Army on your mind the whole time, then? Did you ever consider any other branch?
- Pranke: No, uh—one, my dad was in the Army, and two, it was Army ROTC at La Crosse, and—you know in hindsight now I realize there's other ROTC's, but at that time Army ROTC was the only one.
- Terry: So, how long was it before you had to go then, that you signed up?
- Pranke: Well, I signed up, and I believe it was right before, around Thanksgiving, and I went home for Christmas for, you know the Christmas break. And I had a vehicle at the time, but, I was already planning for that summer knowing I was going to be gone, so I think I sold the car during Christmas, unbeknownst to me that, you know, there is life after the Army. And so I sold that, but I never told my parents until around Eastertime. Or maybe a little bit later. And they were like—maybe it was later—they were dumbfounded. And—my father kept saying, "Well, you should go to

school and go be a secretary.” And—both my parents are really against it. And so, I didn’t need their signature, I didn’t need their permission, I didn’t need their approval, and so, you know, perfect timing. And the reason I signed up for Army ROTC, especially Basic Camp, was because I did not have ROTC in my background, and this was a way to catch up, with the training that I needed to be a junior in the program. And likewise too, there was no commitment. If you didn’t like the camp, you could say, I don’t like the camp, and *leave*, and there’s no obligation, nothing. So it was a win-win situation on my part, and everybody’s part. But, when I went to camp I realized—some of my friends—that they were twisting their arms when they said, “I want to leave.” And—some did leave, but, you know, they were still gonna get their money out of you. Or at least try and convince you that, you know, this is the life.

Terry: So was this kind of like a basic training for you?

Pranke: It was basic training, however, it was conducted by actual Drill Sergeants that would have uh, the basic trainees, during the other times of the year, and this was just summer. And so they treated you just like, you know, GIs, but the sergeants knew that we had a little bit more on the ball—well, we’re all college students and—it was interesting to get their take and the like. And—I remember—that night—it was at Kentucky. Fort Knox, Kentucky. And—all I know is, somehow I arrived in Kentucky late, but there was some other people waiting there too, so they rounded us all up together and then put us on a bus to take us to—Fort Knox. And—all I know is a Lieutenant or whoever was in charge of us—her name was Savage, and I thought, “Oh, this is an omen.” (both laugh) And so, needless to say, quiet that night, but—I had some good training before I left the college at La Crosse, about how to make a bed and some stuff. And so, that night there was like ten of us all in the same platoon then. And, they gave us sheets, you know they gave us, you know the uniform or, something. We went through some items and gathered stuff, and it was like, “Well, make your bed—oh, are you hungry?” And it was about midnight. And it was like, you know you’re scared shitless almost. (Terry laughs) And uh—all I remember I think, is showing the other girls how to make a bed, and they said, “Wow, you really know how to make this bed.” And then uh—went to sleep, but I know the next morning I woke up and, I thought, “What the hell am I doing here?” There was a second doubt, and it lasted for about—30 seconds. And I said, “Well, I’m *here*, and this is *it*, and, *go* for it.” And that was my only hesitation.

Terry: Was there anyone else from La Crosse that went down with you? Or were you strictly by yourself when you went?

Pranke: By ourselves, *but*, by sheer coincidence—and this is ironic—was uh—yeah, she was—there was Laurie Bruin, and we were in high school

together. And, she was also at La Crosse, and also the same major—my major was in Recreation—Recreation Leadership—and unbeknownst to me she was also at, Fort Knox—and you really don't see each other because there are different cycles and you're with your platoon, your company. And—but it was neat to know somebody else was there, but, you're pretty much on your own, and you're meeting kids from all over the country, and all different backgrounds, a lot of military brats, a lot of, you know, familiarity, more than *I* ever had.

Terry: Were most of them your age? Or did you have a—

Pranke: Some, some were—from—usually it was between 16 and 20, in that range group, and I was 18—oh, I was 20. Yeah, must have been 20. But there was some junior military college people there, like Virginia Military Institute. And you could tell that they were quite younger than the majority of us. And so, you could pick 'em out of a crowd right away but, you know, they were all in the same situation we were, tryin' to play catch-up, so we could go into the Senior ROTC program. And, I remember this—the Drill Sergeant, it was Sergeant Metzner(sp??), and it's ironic that I still remember his name, but uh—he was hard core, but I respected him. And all I know was, we were on a road march, and I was the shortest one in the whole platoon, along with somebody else—Amy. And, the trick is to put your short ones up *front* because you got a shorter *pace*, or *stride*, and so the intent was to walk slower, or march. And lo and behold, when you get two—the short ones up front—we moved out pretty fast and nobody could keep up to us. (both laugh) And but what was interesting was, Sergeant Metzner, you know, it was just like, “Hey, you,” you know. And, all I know is, during this road march he said, “Pancake! Pancake!” I said, “Who is he talkin' to?” And he said, “You! Get up here!” And, you know, that's when he wanted the—you know, us—and it was like a five-mile march, I don't know, we were coming off a bivouac or something. But—that was fun. And then also, in ROTC, you know you're learning to be leaders and so, there's a rotation of platoon leader and platoon sergeant functions and then company commander. And all I know was, I was Platoon Leader, Platoon Sergeant or somethin', and—somethin' happened to the person that was gonna be in leadership *with* me, and Sergeant Metzner said, “Oh you don't need anybody else, you can handle it yourself.” And I thought, “*What's* he talkin' about?” So—I'll tell you my leadership qualities for that day was a mimic of Sergeant Metzner. (both laugh) And, in hindsight the—my company, or platoon really didn't appreciate me all that much. (laughs)

Terry: So how long were you in that training program, then?

Pranke: It was six weeks. And then, when you—when the last day of camp or whatever, you could sign your papers, for the senior program, or you

could wait until you actually went back to school and signed ‘em, but, you know, just havin’ that committed—commitment in your mind mentally, and you know, the preparation of goin’ back, leavin’ all your friends that you’ve met, and goin’ back to school, and, you know is Hooah. So—I believe I signed the papers, and also, I was also in contention for a scholarship, because they pick out certain people. And then I remember about uh, two weeks left of camp, it was like, well, you’re not qualified for a scholarship. And it was like—and it was my eyesight. So—and you know, in hindsight, knowledge is a lot different as you get older, and I maybe could have pursued it with a waiver but—didn’t know anything.

Terry: So after your six weeks, then you went back to—college then?

Pranke: College, yeah. It was—

Terry: Now what did you mean by the Senior ROTC?

Pranke: There’s a—your freshman and sophomore year of ROTC there’s no commitment. Just like the Basic Camp was no commitment. But actually when you sign the senior contract, you’re actually then—you get a stipend of, I believe at that time it was a hundred dollars a month. And—you, you should have [the] actual uniform and then—you *are* obligated, at this point on.

Terry: To serve for—

Pranke: To serve, or at least, if not active duty, you’re required to serve reserve duty or somethin’, but there *is* an obligation. And, you know, I know you can get out of that stuff too, but you know, if you’re just goin’ in and, you know, no knowledge of listening to anybody and do what you’re told.

Terry: So you went back to school then, and did you get your degree?

Pranke: Uh, yes. Then I was a—two—University of Wisconsin-La Crosse—Everybody else, there was like 13 or 14 in my class, most of ‘em were prior service, and most of ‘em knew the military, you know, their sons—or their dads, or—and here, you know, I was a cold fish out of water, and had no clue, no idea, no nothing. And—paid attention and—got along pretty well, but I was like—I was lost, I’ll admit that from the start. But, I respected the ROTC cadre, and learned a lot from them, and in fact, one of the captains who was a cadre—I think he’s still in the military as of today, and he’s like a two-star general, and you could tell that he *had* it. And so—that’s neat to see him on TV, it was just recently. And—went to school, and then between your junior and senior year, that summer again you’re goin’ to what they call Advanced Camp. And my Advanced Camp was at Fort Riley, Kansas. And so you’re with—with your other peers,

from the Midwestern states basically. At that time it was all at—it was Fort Lewis, Fort Riley, or Fort Knox, I can't remember—but now it's just at one location, Fort Lewis, but back then there was so many people, cadets involved, that they had three different locations. And so—went to camp and it was just exactly what Basic Camp was, and so right away the instructors and the cadre could tell that I had some really good training, and they all attributed it to the school that I came from, but it was basically all the knowledge I obtained during the Basic Camp, you know that you're still back in that camp environment. And so, enjoyed every minute of it. In Fort Riley you're surrounded with ticks, and you know, you name it, we tried to do everything to combat ticks, you know. People even buying flea collars to put around their *ankles*, and you're not supposed to *do* that, and—I had tick bites, it must have been 50 or 60 of 'em on my ankles and—you're talking, blisters and you know, you're marching on big rocks and you know, you take it with a grain of salt back then, but—

Terry: It wasn't very comfortable, huh?

Pranke: No. Not at all. But hey, life goes on.

Terry: So you went—then your senior year you went back—now when you were on campus, did you have to do ROTC, um, drills?

Pranke: Right, right. We're actually in class, and I believe—your college—you take 18 credits of ROTC, so it's quasi-minor, you could say. Also, in addition to—after I completed the Advanced Camp, there's also additional training you could volunteer for, and it was actually on-the-job training—OJT experience. And so I signed up for this experience, and you don't know until like three days before camp was gonna end where you're gonna end up. And so I was selected to go to Fort Campbell, Kentucky. So right after Advanced Camp ended, the next day I was in Fort Campbell, Kentucky, and it was for three weeks. And—was assigned to this Lieutenant just to show you the ropes of what it is like to be a Lieutenant and on your first assignment. And, he was a Quartermaster Officer, in Petroleum specialty. And I thought, man, if he could do it, anybody can do this. (both laugh) And so—it was fun. There was like two, three other cadets from around the country in with the same unit I was with. And also at Fort Campbell they have the Air Assault School for the military. So—and the unit had slots, and they always try to fill 'em, and you know usually they—if you're at Fort Campbell you have to be Air Assault qualified. So, you know I'll try anything once, and so they were happy to have me say yes, and so, after the three weeks ended I stayed on another—two more weeks, and actually went to their assault school.

Terry: This is all between your junior and senior year?

- Pranke: Junior and senior year. And what was an interesting story then, when I go back to school I'm wearing Air Assault, a badge. And—
- Terry: So what did that consist of? Can you tell us what—
- Pranke: Oh, sure.
- Terry: --to get that?
- Pranke: Sure. It was two weeks, and it's helicopter rigging, you're actually rigging up equipment to be airdropped. And also you're rappelling out of helicopters, or you're climbing a troop ladder on the back end of a helicopter while it's still up in the air, and—you know, you can't be afraid of heights. And—
- Terry: And you being a little bit into recreation, you must have been in pretty good shape to be able to do all that.
- Pranke: Well, yeah, but it really was more mental. Because—a little bit of history—I think—they were just allowing females to go to Air Assault School. And this was 19—hang on a minute—'80, nope, nope-'78? '79. Oh, '79. And they were just allowing females and so—I haven't confirmed this but I was like one of the first one hundred females to actually have Air Assault wings—probably number ninety-six or something. And, it is a tough school, and uh, they usually have about three hundred start, and you know, you weedle [sic]—they weedled [sic] people out the first two days, just to be extra tough on 'em. And I think we were ended up with two hundred, who knows. But anyway there's—I think there was like twenty females in this class with us. And only two of us graduated, with the class. And uh, you just had to have this—if you got it you *know* it, and if you don't got it you're not gonna stick around. So, it was—helicopter rappelling, and helicopter rappelling is a little different than normal rappelling, what the military does, goin' off the wall and you got an L formation and you try and keep your stance. But with helicopter rappelling, you're—there's no wall, and so it's a little bit more intimidating but it's a lot easier, just to rappel. And so here I'm in class, and, we had Chinook helicopters that night—no—and also Hueys, and, we're loaded up in the helicopter, and—somehow I ended up in the first helicopter. And—the—other side of the helicopter you know, you gotta get down and assume your position on the skid, and you know the whole helicopter rocks, and then it was *my* turn. And I get off on to the skid, but before I knew it, it was just like an adventure film I was *swinging* underneath the helicopter. (laughs) And my foot, boot slipped, and everybody lookin' and, you know here I am and it's like what do I *do*? And he said, "Just go down," and so I went down, and everybody saw that, and he said, "Aren't you afraid," and I said, "No, I just want to get it over

with.” (Terry chuckles) So, I got back in line real—again, and did it again or somethin’ and, that was my adventure and I know what it’s like to be a stunt person. (both laugh) And then we also had a troop ladder on the back end of a Chinook, and you had to climb up that. And the—it looked easy, but it’s really hard because you got the helicopter wash, with the propellers and, you can’t wait to get up to the top of that ladder. You actually got a rest. And it’s like ok, you can go back down again, and it was like, oh, man do I have to? But, I was glad that was all over. And then, you know, we rigged up a jeep. And we rigged up some other items so that the helicopter could pick it up. And then we learned arm and hand signals. And also, there was a ten-mile march—road march—and you had to do it in under two—two hours, two and a half hours—and so, that was a stickler. And so, knowing that we had this road march in order to graduate, a friend of mine, we were in the same platoon, or the same unit with this OJT thing, and uh, we marched on that ten-mile road march, like two weeks before. And—

Terry: Kind of give it a practice run, huh?

Pranke: Right. “And so why you doing this?” “We’re practicing.” Nobody could believe it that we were doin’ this, and then the next week we practiced some more, and—it all paid off, but like I said, you know if you get blisters or whatever you’re done in for. But—I had an angel. That’s all I can say. I still remember this—I don’t even remember the guy’s name but I remember what he looked like. And on the road march, of the final—

[End of Tape One Side A]

Terry: This is Tape One Side B, and we’re speaking with Susan Pranke, and she’s talking about her airborne train—

Pranke: Air Assault.

Terry: --Air Assault training.

Pranke: Airborne’s comin’.

Terry: Air Assault training, rappelling out of helicopters and rigging equipment to be flown in helicopters.

Pranke: Ok, so uh—we’re on this road march, and about two miles in—this angel, forgot his name, but he was gonna—he was a gentle soul—and he and I teamed up and we ran the course, it was a half-mile hilly and a half-mile uphill, and you’re supposed to—ideally you run the downhills and walk the uphills, and uh, that’s what he did. He didn’t go ahead of me or whatever, and we just talked and had a good ol’ time. And like I said,

there was only two females that started with that class [she had said earlier that 20 women had started the class] and only two of us actually graduated, so in hindsight it was like, wow. It was quite an honor.

And, you know, when I went back to college then, and meeting up with the uh—my other classmates, there were all males except Laurie, the friend I was telling you about, and somebody else, but she didn't—you know, she wasn't the same Recreation major that we were and so—you know, didn't quite have it. So anyway, I show up wearin' my badge proudly, and the males are pissed off! (Terry chuckles) They say, "Where did you buy that?" (laughs) And, at first I had no clue what they were talkin' about because, you know I—I earned it, rightfully. But then—I sorta realized where they were comin' from: they were jealous. Because—I had the opportunity, I happened to be in the right place at the right time, and just sheer luck. And so, it took me by surprise, their reaction, but then I realized "Holy cow, there's a lot more to this military thing than I realized." And uh—but I'm glad I had that experience because it does pay off, in future years. And then I—graduated.

Oh, uh—then during that senior year too you fill out a questionnaire. You find out your preferences, where you want to be assigned, and also you're filling out this paperwork and it goes before an Accessions Board—that's actually where the needs of the Army and your background and so forth and where they'll slot you. And, at the last minute—had all the paperwork done, but at the last minute, I decided I want to be a Military Intelligence Officer. And they said, "You really don't want to do that." I said, "Yes I do." So, all I know is I created a lot more work for them, because with requesting Military Intelligence and now you have to do background check, and you gotta do more—a lot more hoops. But that's what I wanted to be. Well, the results came back from the Accessions Board, and I was not a Military Intelligence Officer, I was a Quartermaster Officer. And, a Supply Officer, and I was annoyed, perturbed, dejected, and I said, "What the hell can I do? I want to be a Military Intelligence Officer." And they said, "Nothing you can do." So then I thought—so anyway I thought, "Well, give the Quartermaster a shot." And, in hindsight, it's the best thing that ever could have happened to me and I'm glad I *was* a Quartermaster Officer, *am* a Quartermaster Officer, and after I saw what the Military Intelligence side of the house does, that wasn't for me at *all*.

And so—I was—let's see—oh, I know. I had to complete an internship for my major, and I chose to do an internship in my home town, which is not really what they want you to do because they want you to be in a unfamiliar territory. But I requested, and was approved to do an internship in the local Recreation Department in my hometown because I knew that after the six, seven weeks I would no longer be around, and leave. And so, did the internship, graduated—on a Saturday the end of July. And all I

know is the next day I was on a plane, and went to Fort Lee, Virginia. And, 'cause I was regular Army, and that was just like—they *gotcha*. And, I didn't realize that I coulda requested some leave before my actual basic training would have started. So I was what you call the snowbird. And so, had to go to Fort Lee, and they assigned you all your billets and so forth. And they assigned me to an AIT unit—it's bein' around soldiers that just completed their basic training, and now are going to receive their Advanced Individual Training. And they were all supply people. And so at first, you know, what else was I gonna do, and I didn't have any rank to speak of, just a Second Lieutenant, and—you know I did what I was told. But the female—the Company Commander of the AIT unit was a female. And—very intelligent, and really turned into be a super mentor. And—had really great NCOs [Non-Commissioned Officers], had a great time. And, I remember, bein' a practical joker from day one, they call this one Operation Sergeant, *Yardbird*. So one day, you know, birds like bird food I guess, so I went and got some *bird* food. And put on his *desk*. (both laugh) And he was a neat and tidy kind of guy, and when he saw all this bird seed on his desk, he was—he didn't know what to say, but he knew he couldn't get mad at me, but I did not make his day. (Terry laughs) And then this other Sergeant, a Platoon Sergeant with that unit, Sergeant Seales(sp??)—somehow he took me under his wing, and showed me how to polish my boots, and you know—just you know, told me this is the way it was. And you know, it was—grateful to have people like that to uh—

Terry: Now was he a career Sergeant?

Pranke: Yes. And at that time he was an E6 from Panama, and the greatest person you would have ever, enjoy, and I'm glad I had that experience of just meeting people. And so when I went—was actually in the basic course for—with other Quartermaster Officers, I always had like a *home* to go back to, Tango Company, and go see my friends. 'Cause I was with the snowbirding for about five weeks. And then school—basic—course started and—you know, we had West Pointers in class, and we had all shapes and sizes and—it was fun. We had learned a lot of stuff that—well, how the logistics of the Army worked. And also too, lookin' around class we had foreign officers in our class. And it was like, what's goin' on, in here? But, it happens all the time. We have a lot of allies with other countries that, you know they go to our schools so, learn our system, they can take it back to their country and show other people in their service, you know, how we do things. They also order stuff. And so, I remember—I volunteered a lot, and so I was a sponsor to Taboo(sp??). And he was an officer, Lieutenant or Captain, from Zaire. And, it was phenomenal. And then there was Botswana, there's even the guy from the Sudan, a Korean—it was just phenomenal. Just to get their input and the way they do things, and—the honor that I had was Taboo was—his wife was expecting while he was in the course. And all I know is, he named

his—the next *child* he had after *me*, because of the—you know, a great honor—

Terry: Yeah. Good for you.

Pranke: --and—and that was neat. And so, he says, “If you’re ever in Zaire,” you know, “come visit.” And then I always, you know, any time you see people on TV, even in the crisis goin’ on now, you know I see if you can maybe see a familiar face.

Then—let’s see—oh I know. Ok. Then, after—let’s see, when was that—then after basic, the basic course is completed, then you actually go into an additional training. And with the Quartermaster there’s—let me see if I get this right—Food Service, there’s Petroleum, and there’s also like General Troop Support, like a hodgepodge of everything, and I was chosen to be General Troop Support. And, you know, that’s—you get to learn more of what you just learned, but a little bit different level. And, it was fun. It was just, you know, goin’ to school and getting paid for it, and you know, wearin’ clothes that the—you don’t have to think about what to *wear*. (both laugh) It was enjoyable. (both laugh) And so—enjoyed every minute of that. And saw—because Fort Lee is so close to Washington, D.C. went to Washington D.C. a couple times, you know, Richmond, you know actually, you got to know that part of the country really well. And after completion of that schooling, I—my next assignment was Fort Polk, Louisiana. And, whenever I’d mention that, they said, “Poor, poor soul.” (Terry chuckles) And, that’s like what was considered the armpit of the military. And, *I* was excited. It was a Division.

Terry: And this was your first assignment as a—

Pranke: My first assignment. As an officer, and Fort Polk was home of the 5th ID [Infantry Division]. And, a lot of—some other—my counterparts were going overseas, and you know, to other installations, but I was going to a division, and that’s what’s dreamed into your mind—you want to go to a division. And the reason why is, you’ll know the structure of the Army and how everything *should* work. And so I was happy to go to a division. Then I found out what the Army was *really* all about. (both laugh) No longer was it school. So I show up, at Louisiana, and—all I know was, nobody told me this before it happened that they have these phone calls, they call you up at *night*. And you’re supposed to get *up* and bring your *gear* in, and show up for *work*. They had *alerts*. And so, all I know was—was my first alert, I think, I can’t remember—but, I met another NCO, and I’m not quite sure what transpired, but—anyway, he was annoying me so I unplugged my phone. (Terry laughs—both laugh) So, I show up for PT [Physical Training] in my PT clothes. And everybody’s

wearing their fatigues and stuff, and carrying around these bundles of clothes. And I said—and I show up, and it's, "Where is everybody?" They said, "Lieutenant, why couldn't we get a hold of you?" I said, "I don't know." "We have an alert." Had no clue what an alert was. (laughs) But, you show up for formation, you get like x-amount of time, like maybe—like, it should have been like half an hour—well you actually got two hours, rather, to go down post. So you come in as quickly as you can, and so when they could not get a hold of me, they kept trying, and—I was a little bit embarrassed, when I showed up for physical *fitness* and everybody was actually playin' *Army*. And, learned fast what they do in an alert, and then I realized—they have these every month. (laughs) And—never unplugged my phone again. And--(both laugh)—lived to tell that one. I was working, when I first went to Fort Polk—oh, I was with the Supply and Transport Battalion, the 105th.

But, you know, lieutenants are expendables, or that you can go anywhere they want you to so, they had to plug a slot, and so I was the chosen one to go from this battalion up to the DISCOM—Division Support Command—Brigade, and it's a headquarters. And they needed somebody to help out in the Adjutant's office. So, paper-pusher, you know, the personnel end of the business, and so—lost sight of what a platoon leader should do and so forth. And enjoyed the job. Worked for this one Major, Major Dowling. He was a pilot, helicopter pilot in Vietnam, got passed over. And you know, at that time I didn't know what promotion boards were all *about*. And so the list would come out, and you could see he was a little bit disappointed, and here I'm saying, "Well, you need to call somebody and tell 'em they made a mistake." (both laugh) And he said, "What you talking about, Lieutenant?" (laughs) And so, he was strait-laced, and you know, just a neat guy. And I always respected him for that. And, I don't think he ever made it to Lieutenant Colonel, so—bein' a Major was ok in my book, too. But, he had integrity and—would do anything for the guy. And, so I had good role models.

Anyway, I was always promised, from the Colonel, the DISCOM Commander on down, that I would always go back to a platoon and be a platoon leader. Well, my three years was up, and they said, "Oop. Sorry. You're going to--." Then you go to the advance schooling, or, and you go—in my case I returned back to Fort Lee, Virginia, for more schooling, and it's preparing you for company command. And uh, all the commanders, you know, were saying, "Sorry. We didn't quite get you a platoon, but you'll do fine." So, thank you, and continued to Fort Lee and, went to school, uh—let's see—enjoyed the school environment wholeheartedly. Volunteered to be another sponsor of a foreign student. This time it was from Portugal. And uh, fascinating individuals. It was also, some other senior officers like a Colonel and a Major from Egypt. There was maybe four or five other countries represented in just our class

out of like eighty students, but—it was just interesting. And, again you're learning logistics but you know, but pretty much the same stuff. I think I even used my notes from, you know, three years previous and, you know it was the same old stuff. But, it was fun. And uh—did well.

Let's see—then—oh, I know! Backing up a little bit. Before—oh yeah, gotta tell *this* story. Backing up. Coming out of, the basic course, before I went to Fort Polk, also I was—they ask you what you wanna do, and if you want to go to any schools so, before I realized it I said I want to go to Airborne School. And that's at Fort Benning, Georgia. And the—your assignment officers have so many slots, like, I think for the class we had, it was eighty students and so they had like eleven slots. And, I said, well, without knowing it, you know I blurted out, "I want to go to Airborne School." And they said, "Ok, you're going." (Terry chuckles) And so—it was scary, because I think about it and, you know, you're like, re-living this *adventure*, and uh, before I knew it I was jumping out of *airplanes*. At Fort Benning. But, also too, because of the way you go to the class, or you check in, I ended up being a plane load commander. And what that means was, you're in charge of this plane load of other students, and you get the—have the manifest of that *plane*, on your *person*, so just in case the plane goes *down*, you're supposed to hand over this list of *names* so that they can *account* for everybody. And so, it's like, "Wow, I've really got a big important *job* here." So, mentally again, I told myself I could not get hurt. And so, any way I landed, or, you know, it was like I had to get up and give it my all, and—a couple times I landed, and I thought, I don't know, I landed on my knees, and I thought how'd I ever get up off of that one, and I didn't want to let anybody *down*. And also, unbeknownst to me, was after class ended, and it's three weeks, I had this—my back of my legs were really sore. And I thought, "What happened?" Well, it took me a little bit of figuring out but, the plane load commander's also the first one out of the plane. And, it's one big *step*. And I guess it was one big step a *lot* for me so—I was actually being *pushed* out of the plane. (both laugh) And my back of my legs were sore because it would just *hit ya*, and, I was sent on my way. And, which was fine. And, you know, you'd open your eyes, once you get outside, and then, the first jump you experienced complete silence. And so, it just—for all that training, just to have that experience was phenomenal.

Terry: Well the first jump, was it—

Pranke: It was the best. Because you hear silence. After the—you're mesmerized because you see people going out of the plane, and they're not coming back in. (Terry chuckles) And then it was like before you know it's *your* turn, and, I'm thrown out there, and it was like, "Wow." You're actually by yourself, and if there's a malfunction when you look up at the parachute, and something's wrong, you gotta engage your brain to react,

without thinking really, the, just react and, you know, if you need to, pull your reserve. And the training was excellent, and but it—it gave you—basically it's a badge of courage. That it's not, you know—mentally it's not right, you're jumping out of a plane while it's still going, but, it's that, the gumption to have it, and actually do it. And like I said, it's just really a badge of courage. And so, anyway, I did not get hurt.

And *again*, you know looking back to the Air Assault experience, and the Airborne experience, again there was like twenty-four females, and only two of us *graduated*. And it was, unbeknownst, it was the same person, the other female—can't—Turney, or something—it was the other same female that was with me in Air Assault School, and we graduated, and we were the only two again. And, this was 1983, and females had been going Airborne, but again, it was one of the first five hundred or—it was a small number, again at that time. And you really don't realize what path you're creating until later on in life, as you obtain more rank, it opens doors, more than you realize. And also too, goin' to Fort Polk, you know, it was a division, and you know in—this was 1980-'81, the WACs had been disbanded since 1976—and so you know, females are going to West Point in 1980, and so, you're living that life and so you don't think there's anything extraordinary. *However*, in *hindsight*, when I look back to Fort Polk, Louisiana, in the whole battalion, I think I was the only female officer at that time. And, *I* did not think anything of it, but, you know, you're trail blazing. And you had to set the example. There was another female *captain* in our, in the unit, and I would—as a unit, we'd all run physical training together, and all I know was this other captain would always drop *out* of the *runs*, 'cause she couldn't handle it, she couldn't *hack* it you know. And physical fitness training, especially in the morning when you had those *runs*, it was a test of, like, do you have it today or don't. You know, it was just—everybody's checking everybody out and making sure that they had it. And if you dropped out of the run—some days you just could not help it, but a little tick was in your armor, was chipping away, and uh, a lot of the soldiers, you know, you really didn't measure up to “be all you can be,” in that, just one incident. And you know, in hindsight too, a lot of other officers dropped out, and it was a little chink in their armor. And it—and that was—and to me it was appealing, and that's when I was younger and could keep up no problem but, Louisiana in the humidity and coming from the north to the *south*, and this was *deep* south, and humidity was like a hundred percent at six o'clock in the morning, and you'd start running and you were drenching in sweat, in a minute. And, it was like, can you *hack* it? And, you just hung in there, and you're just glad you made it.

So, getting back on track then—I was finishing up, going back to the advance course. And, again, they'd ask you what you want to do next. So you sit down with your assignments officer, and you know, they'll tell you

where you're going, and if you're stateside, you're going to go overseas and vice versa. So, I knew I was going overseas. And so, I was going to Germany. But then uh, when you—

[End of Tape One Side B]

Terry: This is an interview with Susan Pranke, and this is Tape Two Side A, and she's talking about now finishing up her advanced training course and talking about her next assignment in the military.

So Susan, what was the next one?

Pranke: Ok. Well then, as I was just alluding to that, every time you go from one duty station to another, that's a good time to go to school. So, again, I knew I was going to Germany. And, I declare—out of the mouth of a babe—I said I want to go to Rigger School. And it's basically Parachute Rigger School. It's where you learn—go—It's three months, and you learn, the first month is how you pack a parachute. And then you actually jump with that parachute. The second month is rigging up equipment to be airdropped, now, instead of being lifted by helicopters they're actually gonna shove it out the back end of the plane. And the third month is maintenance of the parachutes and actually sewing with all kinds of heavy-duty sewing machines. And the *reason* I wanted to go to Rigger School, was I, I always had to prove to myself that I was capable of what everybody else was. And so there was this lady—also from Wisconsin who was in my advanced course—she was Rigger. And I thought, if *she* can do it, *anybody* can do it. (both laugh) So I, you know, was able to talk to the assignments officer, and he said, “Well,” you know, “what do you want to do?” And I said, “Well, I want to go to Rigger School.” “We'll get back to you.” Well, I didn't know Germany had a rigger unit. So, yeah, the assignments officer got back to me [in] about another hour. And he says, “Well, you're going to Rigger School.” And I thought, “what did I get myself into?” I go to Rigger School, and there was three, there was three other guys, *two* other guys in my class that just finished up—outstanding officers and one is, a Colonel and might even be a General now—in that class with me. And we had two foreign officers. One was from maybe Australia, and one was from Britain. But it was just fascinating to see more skills from around the world. So, the month of packing your parachute is over 250 steps. And there's not enough time to take notes. You gotta *know* these steps, down pat. And what do you do everyday at school? You learn the steps, and you pack and pack and re-pack, and pack and pack and re-pack. And I never worked so hard in my life. (laughs) And it would take about an hour, to pack it, and then, you know, to make sure everything was good to go because, when you're finally going to pack your last chute, before moving on, you're actually packing a chute that you're actually going to jump with because a rigger's

motto is “I will be sure, always.” And so, the day came that—oh, I know—back up again.

The first day of Rigger School, when you actually go, they have to make sure you’re airborne proficient. And what does *that* mean? Well, you got to jump out of a plane with a parachute. And I haven’t jumped now for three years, you know, and like I said, when I did go to Airborne School I was pushed out, so there’s actually no thinking involved, I was just reacting to a good blow on the han—on the butt. So here, at Fort Lee, Virginia they don’t have a high speed airplane, they have helicopters. And helicopters are interesting to jump out of because, you’re sitting, and then you gotta convince yourself you actually want to do this, and you’re again putting your feet on the skid—and remember my episode with Air Assault School—and, when it was my turn, again the other side of the heli—there was four parachutists in the helicopter—and again the other side jumps out first and the whole helicopter just *rolls* and you’re, you know, it’s like two feet, you *feel* it. And, they signal for the other guy next to me to go, and then it was *my* turn to go. And, all I know was, when it was *my* turn to go, instead of like climbing out closer to the *edge* of the helicopter, I crawled back in. And they circled, and they said, “You gotta go. You’ve *got* to go.” I said, “Will ya *push* me?” (both laugh) So, all I know is, I got out of that plane somehow. I think I just fell because I was too close to the edge, but—I did what I hadda do. And you know, once you’re out, it’s not a problem, and you enjoy the scenery and then you, you do your parachute landing fall, a PLF, and you know, you get up and say, oh, that’s over with, and go on but, just making that actual *attempt*. And, and you could—you know everybody watching up ahead knew I was hesitating, ‘cause it’s like, why was I circling again and not coming out. And so, I’m glad I stuck with it, and also too I know they weren’t about to cut me, I *had* to jump. And so, there was no turning back. This was forcing me to live up to my actions. And so, I’m glad I did it, and, onward and upward with the class.

Also with Rigger School, where this is Advanced Individual Training for other soldiers, PFCs and Privates, who are jump qualified, or Airborne School qualified, and now are going into Advanced Individual Training to actually be parachute packers—this at the Airborne School and likewise. And so, we are in the same class with the rest of the students, and but we, all the officers, five in this case, were separated, we had our own pack tables. And then every—once a week, on a afternoon, we’d have additional classes. For example, how you would set up a landing zone, you know, how you would scout one out, how you would supply it and, certain different topics, that would be related to our background, and in case, you know, we’re actually gonna do all this crap.

So, well anyway, I finished the training and was happy to go to Germany. And, the first assignment over in Germany was at the 29th Area Support Command. Or, Area Support Group, in Kaiserslautern, Germany. And I was like an action officer and, I think I was in charge of like, six people, and most of those were civilians, and—it was a different Army than what I was used to, coming from Fort Polk, because it was all military and it was a division, and here it's like, where does this fit into the Army picture? And, it was a directorate, it, it was interesting. It was—also the headquarters building was an old hospital. So we're talking, from one end of this headquarters building to the other end must have been a whole city block. And, I was in—oh, Plans and Operations. Had no clue what I was doing. (laughs) All I know is we had weekly meetings, and my boss wanted to hear what we were doin' and, still haven't figured out what we were doin', but I said somethin'. (laughs) But we were busy every day, I don't know what, but uh, anyway. Unbeknownst to me when I landed in Kaiserslautern, there's a Rigger Detachment there. 5th Quartermaster Detachment. So, come around about a year after I'm in country, and you know, havin' this job at headquarters, they say, "Well you have to go talk to the battalion commander of the 705th Maintenance Battalion", I think. And I said, "Well, what for?" "Well, you're going to be the company commander." "Of what?" "The Rigger Detachment. You're the only one qualified in country." I said, "What?" (laughs) So, the formality is, you go and request to be a company commander. Well, I really didn't want to *be* a company commander but, it's a ticket you should punch. And, you know I go over, talk to 'em, and no problem, you know, when do you want to change command? I said, "What?" So, you know, you take like thirty days to change command, you got inventory, and all this other stuff, and then you're setting up the schedule, and you know you're planning down to the day that you're actually going to take the guide on and, and move on. And, I said no problem. And it was a small unit, it was eighty people. But, again, it was—I should have been the platoon leader back when I was a lieutenant. Because, here I'm gonna be in charge of soldiers, eighty of them plus, and you know, all with a specialty of jumping out of planes and rigging up airdrop deliveries. And, you know, once I had it in my frame of mind that, once you did somethin', you won't have to do it ever again. (laughs) But, that wasn't the way that the Army goes. It's like every day is different, and you know, maybe every two weeks you got people coming in, and leaving, they're going to school, they're PCSing back to the States—Permanent Change of Station—and it's not all that easy you know, things keep changin'. And—oh, and by the way, you know, you have a first sergeant, and he's usually the guy with the experience and when the captain shows up, and at that time I was a captain. I was promoted to captain while I was at the advanced course at Fort Lee. And, you know, when they see captain's bars on your collar that, you know, there's a certain amount of respect, dignity and knowledge that goes with that. And so, on face value they judge you on that. And

then, once they get—you get to know people, and talk to ‘em, and then you realize if they burn that rank, or if they’re just sheer lucky in wearin’ that rank. And you can size up somebody pretty good. So anyway, I take command. And—and I have this first sergeant. I think its Sonny Bolden. So, which is fine you know and, you know I did my thing and he did his thing, and I really didn’t have to do that much because, also I had two warrant officers who really ran the rigging operation. And then you got a first sergeant that runs the soldiers, and then you got a company commander that’s really the figurehead, and a paper pusher, and just sign papers. So—which was *fine*. However, if your first sergeant does stupid stuff, like, I think he was cheating on his wife. All I know is, I think I was on leave to the States. And, I think I get a phone call, saying you have a new first sergeant. I was like, “Ok, who cares?” (laughs a little) So I go back, and maybe the times aren’t exactly— but anyway, you know, it’s like, what happened? (laughs) I have a new first sergeant, I should have some *information* here, and so—I’m thinking he cheated on his wife, but his wife was also in the military, and, who knows what happened. Anyway I have a new first sergeant.

And—oh yeah, let’s see. Interesting lot, the Airborne people. We’re a different subset, and also at that time, this was ’86, we were also—besides the Green Berets, wearing green berets, Special Forces, we were also—the Airborne could wear *maroon* berets. And so, you’d stick out like a sore thumb, and so, if my, any of my soldiers did anything wrong, there’s like, well, they’re wearin a beret, so, it’s like—and in Germany, we stood out. And, you know they could see us a mile away. So anyway, everybody—we were on Daenner Kaserne, and then there was Kleber Kaserne, and Germany’s all set up with different areas, especially Kaiserslautern, different areas, and so, you know, everybody knew, a mile away. So, I was given this other first sergeant, Sergeant Prestridge(sp??). And he was a great guy. But—I think he—I think he PCSed after awhile. But anyway, in the meantime, he was a recovering alcoholic. And, in my unit, you know maybe it was the former commander would always turn his head or so, but I swear I was finding alcoholics in my unit left and right. (laughs) And so, the thing is, you know we have a alcohol/drug counseling or whatever, and, I was puttin’ my soldiers in that all the time, and, and you can also get what you call Antabuse, if you think your soldiers are still drinking and they should not, you can give ‘em this and if they do drink, they’ll get real sick and they should avoid drinking. And then, if that doesn’t work you can get ‘em in-house counseling, like four weeks of intensive you know, and the Army pays for this, and they go away and it’s also they bring their families in. And it’s really good, training. And I swear, I must have sent—four or five soldiers. And everyone that came to me I swear, (laughs) if they got in trouble they must have been alcoholic. Well, in hindsight, I’m pretty sure I was correct. But, what really broke home one morning was one of my soldiers—really

good guy, but he was just, immature. And he got in a accident and alcohol was involved. I think he took a corner too fast. Anyway—all I know was, in my mind, he's got to go to this training. So, usually, you know, overseas you can bring your wives and your families. Well, I never had this happen to me before—his wife comes into my office. She starts yelling at me. And I thought, who *is* this person? And all I know was, she read me my rights upside down and upside the other, and I actually felt the hair on the back of my neck stand up. I was scared of her. (chuckles) And she actually said I had no right to ruin their family life and, da-da-da-da. And, I said, "So what? I made a decision, you're going." And, you know, I think he was a better person after—her husband David—finished if they—you know hindsight's 20-20, I don't know it—when you leave the unit you pretty much lose contact if you really close to a lot of people. This other soldier in my unit, he also had a alcohol problem but, what happened was he married a German wife. And they—we had off on a Friday afternoon and he was drinking and drinking. Anyway, somethin' happened at their apartment, and this was years ago, but anyway, he—I think his wife was out with somebody else, or somethin' ensued and, you know alcohol plays a role—he almost killed his wife, that night, in the apartment. And, they arrest him, and—he has to get an attorney. And, I know he's gotta come up like ten thousand dollars for a retainer fee for this lawyer, 'cause it's almost manslaughter, almost. And, he somehow gets the money, I'm not sure, but he has his civilian lawyer represent him. And, you know the lawyer's telling him one thing, and you've got the criminal, UCMJ [Uniform Code of Military Justice], on the other side with the military lawyers and—all I know was, he ended up going to Mannheim prison. And being a company commander, (sound of water pouring) and a first sergeant, I remember—maybe my first sergeant—well anyway, I remember takin' him up to Mannheim, and how they escort you into the prison. And I believe, my first sergeant went and saw him subsequently, after like a day or so. And, within two hours, he was broken. I mean the way they treat you, and he was a nice guy you know, really knew his job, and you just hated to see him go to prison. But—he broke. And you know, when I see prison, you know documentaries now, of—it's amazing how you do break. And, within two hours he was mumbling gibberish, the way they got to him. And especially military prison. And I believe he was sentenced for ten years. It was weird. And then we had this other soldier in my unit, that—you know if you happen to be in the right place at the right time—he was driving for the general. And the generals over there have armor-plated cars, and so, you just can't get into this car and think you know how to drive because the braking distance is all different because of the added weight. So, he would drive the generals around. So anyway, part of the unit was—and that's an aside—so he was chosen, you know, if you can drive the generals around, you know you're halfway decent. So anyway, every six months, the rigger unit, we had to go check on parachutes that were in depot storage. That—

it was in Burtonwood, England that was a parachute storage facility and it maybe is until this day. But parachutes, you know you gotta re-pack, and unpack, every so often so it doesn't get crunched down and the folds are set in place. And so we had actually sent a team up there, six months to unpack and repack, cargo parachutes we're talkin'. And so they'd be up there about three weeks. Well, this Gilford guy, was on guard duty by himself, or walkin' the perimeter of Burtonwood, and, I think he hallucinated or something. And, I swear, I can't quite remember the exact testimony or whatever but, people picked him up or—who knows, I don't remember the details now but—we're talking when he got back to Germany there(??) was a big investigation about what really *happened* and all *this* stuff and, you know, here, you know, being a company commander, you got the soldier comin' in and tellin' you his side of the story or what he knows, you're lookin' at written testimony about what's goin' on, and it's like, you know, what's goin' on here? And so, I can't remember what happened to him but, you know, you think—you look at sitcoms these days, and sitcoms cannot *compare* to what you actually experienced.

Terry: So your position as company commander wasn't always [an] easy job.

Pranke: No. None whatsoever. Also too, you go to training and you know you learn how to be a company commander. But also, I'd always go into work like four o'clock and catch my CQs [Charge of Quarters] *sleepin'* so, that'd be a Article 15, you know, 'cause you're not supposed to be *sleepin'* but, you know, if I was a soldier I'd, I would find it hard not to sleep anyway but, you know rules are rules, and you gotta *play* by 'em. Anyway, there was this one incident, and I thought I was gonna be a *good* company commander, 'cause you could always hand out a—Article 15s you know, restrict 'em to quarters, or take their money. So I thought, well that's not right. There was another incident. Soldiers are drunk, there was two of 'em, they were on temporary duty assignments in Munich. Anyway, they were drinking and somebody jumped out of a window, broke both arms. His buddies didn't help him, so buddies, you know, these are all soldiers in my unit, and I said well, you know, to find out the situation and so forth. So instead of giving 'em Article 15, I made 'em write *essays*. (both laugh) And writing, to the typical soldier, with a pen, is foreign. You know, they'd rather have their money taken away than writing, you know, and then, but they—they actually wrote the essays, and you know, it wasn't high quality but, that wasn't part of the assignment but, I learned then that you still have to be fair, to everybody, and you know, the UMCJ is there for a reason, and also what punishment they have. I was a company commander. Usually the term is twelve months, it's what we call the punch your ticket. But, because you'd have to be rigger qualified, and there was nobody else in country, I stayed and I stayed and I stayed as company commander. I was a company

commander for twenty-one months. Did I thoroughly enjoy it? No. (laughs) But it was a job, and, on the whole it—you know anything after twelve months a company command is gravy, and so it was like—twenty-one months, wow, you really impressed.

[End of Tape Two Side A]

Terry: This is an interview with Susan Pranke and we're on Tape Two Side B, and Susan just finished up her command as a—in Germany as a company commander in charge of a parachuting rigging company, I believe.

Pranke: Yeah. Yeah. Then, I—usually you would go stateside again, so, this time I went stateside from Germany. And went to the University of Montana. It was a ROTC assignment. I was cadre. And, it was pretty fun. Only worked, or taught, one class, two hours a week, and, for the most part is being a good role model to the other cadets. And letting them know what military officer life is all about. And, I was also fortunate to be in the right place—I was a secretary or an assistant helping out on an Accessions Board. So, when I mentioned previously about being a Quartermaster officer and wanted to be a Military Intelligence officer, I actually saw the inner workings of how that all works. And, quite, quite, interesting. And also during my summers, or during the cadet summers, I was also cadre out at the Advanced Camp, and so the exact role *my* cadre was in, I was doing that at Hintz. And I also volunteered to evaluate the nurses, 'cause they have a certain—a different camp, a shortened version because they actually go to an on-the-job nurse training. And then I also had the actual platoon. And so it was interesting to compare the different people, personalities, and to see the leaders of tomorrow's army and be part of that to *choose*, you know, who would, was better leaders than the others. Then, ROTC was great—I could have stayed in Montana forever.

I'm sitting at my desk and answer the phone one day. It happened to be August 2nd, 1990—1990! And why does *that* ring a bell? Well, that was the day after the invasion of Kuwait. And I answer the phone and it's the assignments officer. And he says, "You got your bags packed?" I said, "What are you talkin' about?" "Well, if you want to go, you can go. Give me a call tomorrow." So, I figured out sort of what was happening, listening to the news that night, and call up the next day. I said, "I don't wanna go." "Well, don't worry, we already have somebody in that position." I immediately take vacation for three weeks, and travel the southwestern states. I come back, and the Lieutenant Colonel in charge of the detachment says, "You know, they called you *twice* while you were gone." And I thought he was joking. Pulling my leg. I answered the phone next day. "Are you ready to go?" I said, "What are you talking about? Who *is* this?" And he says, "You knew, when we called you before, you're on a list, a short list, you know?" "Well," I said, "you gave

me a choice last time.” And he said, “Well, you have a choice this time. Smoking or non-smoking?” So that meant, a week later I was PCSed, I actually had to move out of Montana, the war was goin’ on, or whatever, preparation, and gave me a week to go to Fort Campbell, Kentucky. Fort Campbell pops up *again* now. And, it was with the 101st Corps Support Command. It was new doctrine back in 1990. It was a group to support the corps. It was the 18th Airborne Corps, and [they] had their own entity, and we’re just offering additional logistics. And, went to Fort Campbell and—it was a new unit, existed only on paper, and the colonel wanted to go over there so, he went to the Pentagon and started pounding on doors and, oh, lo and behold we had equipment and we had people and, a week later the airplane opened up and we saw desert in the back of the plane.

So, we—I was needless to say in Saudi Arabia, and the staff officer part of a—can’t even remember—supply and—part of a supply wing of the, of this command group. Additional logistics, and basically, because it was new doctrine we were like tryin’ to educate other commanders in the *area* what we could *offer*. Because, again you know, when you look at a division you know the set up, you know what the core does, so this is another layer. And so you had to educate the people of the capabilities that we had, and basically our capabilities were—existed with what units would fall under us. We had a unit, the Supply and Support Battalion from Fort Campbell. We had another unit out of Fort Hood, Texas. We had some reserve units that offered laundry and bath, and laundry. And so, there’s a hodge-podge, and you had to, you know, for three months I swear we just did briefings, and, it was like, this is ridiculous, but hey. Then, one day—what happened? Days go by and you think you’re gonna plan ‘em appropriately but, things change in a heartbeat. So, the S3 got fired. And the S4, who’s the supply guy in the S’s, or in the G staff, became the S3. They needed an S4. But at that particular point in time, I was a Captain Promotable. And in all intents and purposes you’re actually a Major, you’re considered a Major. And so, the rank of the S4 for this Corps Support Command was a Major, and so I fit the bill. And so, here I am, in charge of this—the S4—providing logistics just to our unit, but also the other units that fall under our command. And likewise, *our* units would support other people, so it’s just another *layer* of layers.

And so, all I remember—well, there’s a lot of highlights, but I know with us moving that there was new technology out at that time with the Communications Corps. And it was—wasn’t quite satellite phones, but they were—to be hooked up you still had to run cable but, they were a little bit more classified phones. And so you could talk secret *stuff* on ‘em. And, when we were located from one position to another place in the desert, communications might be two, three *days* behind. And, it was hard getting used to, having *no* communication with your units. And, one day I’d know I was in—you know, this is a case in point how tough it was, that

I actually was so upset I broke down and *cried*, because it was like, I needed to get information for a *report*, and yet you just can't pick up any frickin' phone and call, and then, oh, by the way, they're maybe two hundred miles apart or whatever, and so you just couldn't go hop in a Humvee and go. And so, talk about frustrating. And it was like, you know, that we had daily briefings, and you know darn *well* you were gonna get asked about this information, and you didn't know. And it was horrible. You know, if I could've been any place else, anywhere, I was wish I could've been *there*. And it was so frustrating.

Then, we were in—we were following the 101st—there was an “end around play” is what they called it, and so we were coming in from the west into Iraq. And, we were following the 101st. And, the Colonel, at that time—you know, we'd been eating MREs and Meals Ready to Eat all this time and, all of a sudden he wanted to give us real food again. And so, a war's going on, you know people were getting shot at, and he says, “Well, why don't you go send your mess sergeant down to the dock”—and this is already two, three hundred miles away—“and go pick up hamburger meat and chickens.” And it was like, why? You know, you're—it's like we've lived on this food for so long, why do you want to be a good guy at the last second? And, everybody—he'd expected you to say, “Yes sir, yes sir, three bags full.” And the staff officers were pretty much, you know, *yes men*. Well, you know, I wasn't gonna *lie*, and so I'd say, “Well, I'll see what I can do.” I can still remember, to this day, he's got the prettiest blue eyes, but at the same time they were staring a hole in me. And, I was actually saying that I'll prob—you know I don't know, I'll probably won't *do* it, you know tell my NCOs. And it was like, I was taken aside by the Executive Officer after that meeting and he said, “Don't tell him that. “You're going to *do* it. You *know* you're going to *do* it.” And I said, “Why lie?” You know, so—again, I was instructed on how to uh, appease the guy in charge. And, I didn't want my soldiers doin' it, but you know, they did it, because, you know, you're affecting all the troops and you know that—you know it took 'em like two days I believe, to go back down, pick up the food and come back. And then, actually when you were *eating* the food, because you're so used to MREs and the certain bacteria you get used to it, you know when you actually have this food you get sick. And so, a lot of diarrhea and, you know, life goes on.

And then, I remember goin' into Iraq. And, everybody—a lot of people had short-wave radios, because we could listen to the BBC, and to find out what was going on because otherwise you wouldn't know. And so I remember waking up that, the next morning and, it was like, it's over. And actually hearing that on a radio, and I thought, what the hell's goin' on, you know. And, about an hour later the XO [Executive Officer], my boss, comes down and says, “Hey. You gotta go back, to Saudi Arabia,” where we were stationed, “and set up camp. We expect ten thousand

people to be in our camp.” And this was a couple hospitals that we were supporting or giving logistics to. And, it was like, ok, ten thousand people. What do ya gotta do? So we went back down—there was four of us were sent back. But what was so interesting was, we were one of the—well, I swear we were the first Americans back, goin’ back in through Saudi Arabia. And so, when we were stopping for gasoline along the way, at the roadside shops, the Saudi Arabian people would come and be all smiles and happy, and go out of their way to shake our hands and say, “Thank you, thank you.” And you could just see how happy they were. And that showed—it was so neat, the feeling, the American pride that was just swelling up in you. And without realizing what was goin’ on. And, or how they really felt. And, it was that way through the entire trip. And so then when we get back down to this camp, we were living on this farm. Well actually it was a deserted farm, but there was also um—a cow farm, about two miles away. And as anyone knows, with cows you got flies, especially in hot weather. So, anytime you’d open your mouth to eat food, I swear I was eatin’ flies too. And, you won’t even have to pepper your food, because you wouldn’t—couldn’t tell what was pepper or not. And so, during this time when we were coming back into Saudi Arabia and set up this camp again, or reestablish the operations, was that you’d have food catered in, to the camp because, all your mess equipment and—all the equipment was going to be washed and cleaned, then it had to be inspected and packed. And you know, to go back on ships to be sent back to the States. And so, for food, I go to this Warrant Officer, and discuss we need food, you know. And he said where are ya and all that. And guess what. It was a Warrant Officer that I knew, way back at Fort Polk, Louisiana. (Terry chuckles) And, he was a CW4—a CW5—and here I’m a Major now, or a Captain P, or yeah, yeah—and so then it was, it was so neat like, like I felt like I was a Lieutenant again, but it was just old times. It was very unique. And he said whatever I can do for you, and then we hashed about old war stories and other people we knew from that point in time. And, you know, we’d set up—we’d have this food *catered*. And the way they would catered it would be in large ice chests, like the twenty-gallon ice chest. And you have received potatoes in a ice chest? I mean, the ice chest was *full* of potatoes. And now, who’s to serve this stuff? You know, the soldiers are busy cleaning the equipment so, a lot of third world country, people, i.e. from Sri Lanka and you know, were bein’ hired left and right to come and help out, because you know the manpower alone was what was needed. And so, I was known as Boss Lady. And, we’d have the mess tent set up and, you’d go through the mess line and they’d recognize Boss Lady all right, and so I’d get like double heapings and stuff, (Terry laughs) and, weren’t quite coordinated, you know to use utensils, and so you’re—they’re wearing those plastic gloves, and, “You want some potatoes?” A handful of potatoes would just be plopped on your uh, (both laugh) plate. And of course, Boss Lady, oh you get two helpings. It was like, oh, my goodness. And this went on for about two,

three; four weeks until the unit was ready to be packed up. And, we were gonna support a lot of doctors and hospitals that were gonna be co-located with us. But once the hospitals realize that they'd still be livin' in sand, they didn't stay with us. They went to the airport right away and they stayed in the parking ramp where it was clean cement and the whole nine yards but, here we are, desert rats, and living in the desert.

Also too would—was hilarious at this time—because the equipment, the generators that they were using to purify the water, was again gonna be packed up, and you know shipped. And so, the solution would be, to use bottled water. And, the water was coming in from, Mecca, I believe, and, it would take a three day round trip, where these drivers would go get their trucks loaded up, come back to where we were around Dhahran, and, offload and then go back. And the sooner they could offload, the sooner they could go back and get paid. And so, the turnaround was very important. And so, you find out how to get this water, and they said, “Well just show up at this parking lot.” So I took my NCOs, and said, “We're just gonna show up at this parking lot.” We showed up, and there was twenty-four water trucks. Nobody else shows up. Nobody else wants water that day. So I said, “Well, I need water for ten thousand people. Come on!” (laughs) Said there's twenty-four water trucks. And there's like a four-lane, eight-lane highway, and then there's a country road to get to where we were situated. And, these trucks were like sorta passing us on the highway, but still getting, you know, maintaining their distance. And it didn't dawn on me until we—we go up the one-lane, the road into this—our compound. Well first in, first out. Uh, you know, they're all lined up and they were jockeying for position all this time. They get in right behind us, and it was like, we all stop, and I was discussing to get a forklift, and so, the water comes and they want to be offloaded. And, you need a rough terrain forklift. And there was one in the area. And, it took like an hour and a half to unload *one—truck*. And so, after two trucks were loaded—unloaded—and this was about late afternoon—all these guys were comin' up to me and saying, “We wanna go. Get us offloaded.” And some of 'em were getting pissed, and they were just throwin' water off the trucks, right before my eyes. And nothing I could do. And I understood where *they* were comin' from, and you know, I was hopin' they would understand where *I* was comin' from. And then, some of 'em didn't mind, they went down to the ocean, that night, and you know, they invited my NCOs too to go with them to go smoke and fish, you know, and—I'm not quite sure what they were gonna smoke, but I'm pretty sure—your mind wonders what they might be smokin'. So, they came back the next day and we were still offloading trucks—it must have been ten trucks left—but, there was a pile of broken water bottles, all *over* up and down that lane that had to be policed up and picked up, and oh, by the way captain, what you get ourselves into? And it was like, hey, I got water. You know, I did *my* job, as a logistician.

And uh, so, what was interesting—and this really put a different insight into all this—was, that first night, or the second night after all the trucks were offloaded, we would be drivin' around in our Land Rover—that's how, you know, high off the hog we were livin'—and the Land Rover, and these people were comin' over the *fence*. There was like twenty, thirty Saudi Arabian—you know, men and women, you know all in their robes. And the first—the second night, they were intimidated. And so they would crouch down and, they were sneaking over the fence and stealing water. And then it was like, well what can you do? There's so many of them, and you know, it's just water anyway. And then, the population that we were supporting was dwindling anyway, so. The *third* night, we go again and look around, and this time, even if you shone your headlights out there, they just keep comin' over the fence. It was like, so what? You're not going to *do* anything. So, they were taking' water left and right, and you know, leaving a lot of empty water bottles behind, and so, every morning there was a police call, and I was to clean up my mess and—so lo and behold, we were at camp maybe in that location for two weeks and then we were ready to go. And, the day before we're all leavin', these men and women—they knew we were leavin', they knew the military was leavin' that area. And they would come, and we were livin' in like, run-down mobile homes. And they would actually be coming, and they knew we couldn't take everything and, like your sleep—like your cot, you were sleeping on a mattress you know, and they were *wanting* this stuff. And it was like, you know, it's dirty, sandy, you know you're not going to take it back to the States anyway, so—so they were just loading up on stuff. And, what so impressed me was, how the women you know, with their barakas? —or burqas on—burqas—that all you could see was their eyes and how expressive their eyes were. They could carry on a conversation just with your eyes. It was phenomenal. And, you know what, we—they ended up with a lot of stuff. And so the next day we're pulling—we pulled out about noon, and, I was still tidying up some work I had to do with reports of surveys because some equipment was lost and that was my job to tidy up loose ends. And then, as we were pulling out of the lane, you know, all of this ar—compound we're in—we stored plywood, like about fifty sheets you know, for the owner of the property 'cause we were leasing, and we stored barbed wire and stuff like that—well, within—as we were leaving, these people just showed up and every thing was gone. It was like the rats came at night and savaged everything. It was phenomenal. And then we had to leave like five cranes, heavy equipment cranes, there, and it's like, we surrounded it with concertina wire and so forth but, it was like, man, I hope they just don't start cannibalizing that stuff, you know. And I think those cranes were picked up like a week later, but they were out in the middle of nowhere just waitin' to be picked up, but, it was fascinating how you know, seeing nomads just go across the desert and you know actually camel herds and

so forth, and you know, seeing where the Saudis lived and so forth, and you know, what was to us leftovers, you know, was prize possessions.

So, anyway, left Saudi Ara—or that assignment after was in the desert for seven and a half months. And then there was word that came down. If in fact when you had your orders to be assigned to a unit that was in Saudi Arabia, and if there was this one sentence on it, in support of Desert Storm or, Desert uh—if it had that one sentence, it didn't mean you had to stay with the unit. And so when this rumor came out, everybody was looking at their orders. And I was one of 'em, I looked at my orders, and I had that sentence on. It was like, the lucky sentence so, what do you do? You start calling up your assignments officer this time, and say "Where am I going? I don't want to stay with this unit." (laughs) And so, and they would keep getting—I would call up Washingt—you know, my assignments officer, every chance I could get to a phone. Like, every three days. "Where am I going?" "Where am I going?" And, "We'll decide that actually when you get to the States." And, so we get back to the States, get on this chartered aircraft, and I swear it was a shorter flight going back to the States than the flight going *to* Saudi Arabia. But landed, was a welcoming party, and they evidently—I'm single, so they called my parents when we were in the air, so my parents knew that I was actually coming back to the States, and I didn't know these phone calls were made. But, they're made from the wives' support group. And, when we landed, you know we ended up in the gymnasium and, you know wives were being connected with their husbands and their children and all that stuff. And, you know, I'm getting off the plane and it's like, lookin' around and, out of the clear blue there's this cadet, that was in a class that I taught in Montana. And I said, you know, "Hi, how you doing?" At least there was a face that I could recognize, and shortly thereafter we go back to the unit and, everybody's signed out and then we could go on leave for—

[End of Tape Two Side B]

Terry: This is an interview with Susan Pranke, and this is Tape Three Side A, and Susan's talking about when she came back from the Iraq war, and she got back to the United States at Fort Campbell, Kentucky.

Pranke: Right. Landed—you could immediately sign out on leave, and so, signed out—well it was, everybody was on thirty days vacation. Kept calling up the assignments officer. And, because—Captain Promotable, you know, you're lookin' at Major positions now and so, you know—and being a logistician, or quartermaster, you're a rare commodity. So they need ya. *All* the units need ya. So it was like—kept naming off assignments, oh thirty assignments that I could pick and choose. So, at this one assignment, it was like, Fort Lewis, Washington. And it was, you know, was around Montana and, I *was* at Fort Lewis and so it was familiar, but

what intrigued me was they needed a Petroleum Officer. So in order to go and take that assignment I needed to go to *school*. (Terry chuckles) So, you know remember back when I mentioned that if this lieutenant could be a petroleum officer, anybody could. So well, my dream comes true again. I was in Petroleum School, and you know, you apply yourself, and it was just fascinating, to know how petroleum and gasoline and oil and, you know how you set up your distribution systems and so forth. And there was about twenty, twenty officers in there, and then some were from other countries again, and so that, you know, part of all that training you saw as a whole. And I applied myself, and it was like, I'm gonna *prove* to myself, so I graduated number one in that class. And I was like, ok, I'm petroleum qualified after all. Go to Fort Lewis. They said, "Why'd they send you to school? We don't need you." (both laugh) I said, "I don't care. I went to school, it was kinda fun."

And so, there was another unit being established, and—an engineer unit. And he could—the commander could pick and choose who he wanted so he started looking at officers that were available, you know in that area and he, you know—on paper you know, it's like I've done that, I did that, I punched all the tickets and so, I was like a, a *diamond* in the rough. What a find. And—was interesting setting up a unit. You know you're coordinating facilities and, you know, the Army at that time was in a lot of transition, and everything you see and hear about going on *now*, that was the start of it. And, brought a unit up, you're acquiring equipment, the more and more people are coming into the unit every day, and lo and behold, pretty soon you have alerts. And because now I'm with another tactical unit again, and you have alerts. And sometimes we'd go on alerts, Fort McChord Air Base was right next door, and so—and they wanted to fly, the troops, you know it's good training. So, sometimes we'd go on alerts and fly over to Yakima on the other side of Washington and then camp out, or bivouac, for about a week, and you know, it was part of the *fun*. And being with engineers, you saw more of an interesting aspect of the military than ever before. And, learned a lot and, the integrity of—those engineer officers were by far super quality people.

And so, got in a lot of trouble at Fort Lewis. They see things that other units have—my commander does, and well, we want those same items. Well, there's a right way of getting stuff and there's a not quite so way of getting stuff, and—was able to get stuff, but, you know, talking directly with an item manager, who controls certain commodities, worked out great. We got our stuff. But oh by the way, you don't have the right color *money* for this. And so, I said, "Well how you gonna pay for this?" "I don't care." And, the budget lady was gonna have me fired. I was like, yeah right. So uh, (pounds fist) luckily Fort Lewis had a certain color money they needed to apply toward these tents that we got. But you know, it was like, you're not doing what's right, but you know, the thing

was, being a logistician, you know, you're—like Sanford and Son, you do what you gotta do and don't ask questions how you get it. And, everything worked out—enjoyed everything.

Sitting in my office one day, get *another* phone call. Assignments officer. He said, “Going overseas.” ‘Cause I’ve been stateside now, “You’re going overseas.” And that—about that time, Army times, you keep reading the newspaper, they were like keeping officers like four years on an installation. And so, you know, I was only there two years, why are they calling me up to go overseas? So, they said, “Well, you’re going overseas.” I said, “Ok.” And then I was gonna go—after that conversation I was gonna go to Germany, because of the POL [Petroleum, Oil, and Lubricants] experience, the petroleum experience, I was gonna run the distribution center of all of Germany. And so I said, “Well, I’m kinda like a little shady on this information. You’d have to send me back to Fort Lee for a refresher course.” So, he agreed to that, and by that I never heard anything. A month later I get another phone call. Assignments officer. (pounds fist) He said, “You’re going overseas.” I say, “Yeah, I know it. Evidently I’m going to Germany.” “Nope. You’re not going to Germany. We need you someplace else. You want to go to Japan.” And I said, “Japan?” And, he said “Yep. Give you twenty-four hours.” And so, luckily there was somebody I knew that was a civilian stationed at Camp Zama. And he said, “You gotta take it. You just gotta go.” So, call up the next day and, “Ok, I guess I’m going to Japan. When do you want me there?” “Yesterday.” (Terry chuckles) And so, I had to go tell my boss now I was leavin—actually leaving. And uh—I think we bargained on sixty days, but actually the unit in Japan didn’t have a logistician officer, so they *did* need me yesterday, and so it was—you know, you bargain for time.

Packed up. Moved to Japan. And, the first night I got over there, it was staying in the temporary quarters. And about three o’clock in the morning, I swear the whole *bed* shook. And then there was emergency lighting on in the room and, I had *no* clue. So the next day, I forgot what I experienced, and we were riding around to the firing range or something, and I said, “What was that last night?” “Oh, those are earthquakes. Those happen all the time. You get used to them.” (laughs) And lo and behold, you do get used to them but, they do happen like, a lot, on Japan, and then a couple of them would really shake. And, there I was with the 500th—was it?—500th Military—Military Intelligence Brigade, and this was a lot of the things that you read and hear about, but never actually get to experience. And, it was a lot a—it was another insight into the ongoance of what the military does and can do. And, a lot of the pertinent acronyms being used today, like NSA, and the CIA, but not as much—but there was portions of our unit makeup of—that had direct input. It was just fascinating how all this melted together and how you’d—how military

intelligence structure actually does work. And, I had a top-secret clearance, but you know it was only on a need to know basis and so. But just gleaning what I could, it was very, very insightful. And also talking to my counterparts and their past experiences and what not, and what they were doing on a daily basis, was just incredible.

Then, after—there was talk ever since I had ten years in, that possibly they would be doing an early release program, for the military. And, there was rumors and—lo and behold, it does work out if you stick around long enough. After my fifteenth year, of Major and so forth, there was a program. Because there was too many officers for my year group—we're talking year group 1980-'81. So they had three thousand too many, for the end cap and end strength of the military. So, there was actually a program for early retirement, looking for three thousand officer volunteers. And so, needless to say, I kept calling up my assignments officer, and, "Is the message out yet?" (sirens in background) Next day, "Is the message out yet?" And a message *was* released. And I got my hands on that message and within, 48 hours, my retirement papers were in the mail, and 90 days later I was—I left Japan to be out-processed at Fort Lewis, Washington, and a civilian.

Terry: So was that—did they give you some sort of benefits to—

Pranke: Yes. It—

Terry: --to make fifteen instead of twenty?

Pranke: Right. It's—the only reason I did that is the actual message and the actual paperwork says you get all the same benefits and everything else as if you would have retired after twenty. It's a early retirement, and, you get—instead of getting 50% retirement pay I get, based on 15 ½ years, was 39% of my base. But that's more than, you know, needed, and it's an opportunity and—the military was a dream, and it was just, you know, in the fifteen years, looking back, it was—it turned into a nightmare of—the officers I respected were no longer there. People were more or less, in my eyes, covering their ass. And it was just a different make up. And I know even if you ask people today, it's different than what it was even ten years ago. And so, it's a transitional cycle, it happens all the time in many organizations, and then, it just happened and I just saw it, and it wasn't a right fit for me any more. And so—

Terry: So what year was it that you retired then?

Pranke: 1996—it was in February—February 1—but because I have so much vacation saved up I actually was separated, I believe, October—October time frame.

Terry: Did you retire as a full major then?

Pranke: Yes. Because—timing grade was three years and it was about three years exactly, I—you retain the rank.

Terry: And when you got out then, did you come back to the Green Bay area? Right away?

Pranke: Well I—I was—when I was at Fort Lewis originally, you know, planning on being in that location for four years, I bought a house. And so it was like, keep the house, sell the house, whatever. And so, I was able to rent it out to another fellow officer, and, they— her and her fiancé lived in it. And, then they moved out after about a year and so, here I'm thinking, I'm paying mortgage on a house that is empty. Why am I doing that? And so, the message for early retirement could not have come out at a better time and so, it was a simple decision of—it was something I was toying with for the last five years, about the ten-year mark. But I wasn't about to give that up, the time I invested because, you know, ten years is a decision factor and, it was like well if you come that far you're gonna stick. And then, the benefits no doubt about it are fantastic. And so, you want to have something to show for your efforts and your time, and so, I wasn't about to cash it in without, you know, getting something in return either.

And, just, you know, one word sums up everything is luck, and you know, being in the right place at the right time. For example, wearing the Airborne, Air Assault in Rigger of—probably less than fifty people in the entire Army has all that, ever. And probably—there's a female General that was a Company Commander in the same unit I was Commander of two years prior, that's now a two-star General. And so, you know—that opened doors. It just did, and I opened a lot of doors, and got a lot of second looks, because, you know, you size up somebody immediately by not only their personality but what's on their uniform. And, a lot of people thought I was a, a, ring knocker—that's a reference to West Point, because West Point has the carpet laid before them. And people were surprised that I was a product of ROTC and, you know, just happened to be in the right place at the right time for any of this. Met many a—dignitaries—even met Mr. Marsh—he was the Secretary of the Army at—'90—or '86. Met a lot of generals, even was escorted through Munich with AK47s at the ready because—was attending the AUSA [Association of the United States Army] function with this two-star General, and so they were actually guarding *him*, but I was with him on the party. Actually rode some private *jets* the military offers, you know that, lot of people never get—set foot in. Rode the commander and general's *train*, in Germany, and so—the world was open to many things. I visited thirty countries and, you know, what a lot of people do on their vacations, it was

just in your back yard so—the experience was worthwhile and, once the military's in ya, you never get it out of ya.

Terry: So how did you, when you got out, when you got back into the Green Bay area, how did you find out about the Legion Post?

Pranke: Ah so. The Madelyn La Canne [American Legion Post No. 539 of Green Bay, WI]. There was a—I joined a—another post in De Pere, and because it was local, but I always knew there was the 539th of Madelyn La Canne, all female. I knew there was another one out of Milwaukee, and reading newspaper blurbs there was something, and then they would be on TV from time to time and it was like, I never quite got the name or point of contact. And then, lo and behold there was a mailing, and it was like, oh. Ok. Finally.

Terry: Did you use up another other VA benefits that maybe—did you take any additional training after you got out?

Pranke: No, but, what I did do—you could actually say, the military was my first dream, ever. You know, I mentioned for, you know three, four years old. And the next dream was the work for the Post Office. And, that's where I am presently working, and it's a dream and you know, the structure, the military type discipline or whatever, it's a perfect fit for prior military. And, there's not so many military people around here, but, when I was—got out—in Washington state, I worked for the Post Office, and more prior military was working in that Post Office structure I was in, and, it was a easy, easy, easy transition. And, you couldn't have asked for anything better.

Terry: Mm hmm.

[End of Interview]