

**Wisconsin Veterans Museum
Research Center**

Transcript of an
Oral History Interview with
PAMELA PARKIN
Medic, Navy, Vietnam War

OH
1687

**OH
1687**

Parkin, Pamela (b.1947). Oral History Interview.

Approximate length: 2 hours 2 minutes

Contact WVM Research Center for access to original recording.

Abstract:

In this oral history interview, Pamela Parkin, a native of Toledo, Ohio describes her career in the Navy Hospital corps during the Vietnam War. After completing boot camp at Bainbridge, Maryland, she was transferred to work at the Naval Hospital in Jacksonville, Fl. Subsequently, she was stationed in South Philadelphia where she worked at the Methodist hospital there. She speaks about the experiences she had while in the services, including the way women and men were segregated. She describes her opinions on what military service can do for individuals, and what her opinions were on the Vietnam War and its protestors. She also recounts the time she and her husband spent with the Navy Sea Cadets in Madison, WI.

Biographical Sketch:

Parkin (b. 1947) served with the Navy Hospital Corps during the Vietnam War. She was stationed in Jacksonville, Fl., and Philadelphia, Pa. She left the Navy while working in Philadelphia.

Archivist's Note:

Transcriptions are a reflection of the original oral history recording. Due to human and machine fallibility transcripts often contain small errors. Transcripts may not have been transcribed from the original recording medium. It is strongly suggested that researchers engage with the oral history recording as well as the transcript.

Interviewed by Deborah A. Thompson, 2012.

Transcribed by the Audio Transcription Center, 2016

Reviewed and abstracted by Robert Brito, 2017.

Interview Transcript:

[Beginning of Parkin.OH1687_file1]

Thompson: This is an interview with Pamela Parkin, who served with the Navy during the Vietnam War. This interview is being conducted at her home at the following address: [REDACTED]. The interview is Deborah A. Thompson. We're going. All right, Miss Parkin, thank you for agreeing to this interview to tell your life story.

Parkin: Oh, you're very welcome.

Thompson: You want to start out by just describing yourself?

Parkin: I'm retired now. I had been in LPN since I got out of the service. I've worked as an LPN. Being in the service helped to formulate that particular career for me. I'm almost sixty-five, not quite--almost sixty-five, Caucasian female. I was born May 25, 1947 in Toledo, Ohio. I came to Wisconsin to be with the man who is now my husband. So that's why I moved to Wisconsin, so I've been here since I was about twenty-three years old, twenty-two years old, something like that. I have two children. I have a son who is thirty-seven. He lives in Belleville, Wisconsin, which is not too far from here, and a daughter, Rebecca, who is thirty-three. There's just almost four years to the day between the two of them. She lives in Richland Center, Wisconsin right now with her husband. So they were both born here in Wisconsin. I'm trying to think of something else to say here.

Thompson: Where were you born?

Parkin: I was born in Toledo, Ohio.

Thompson: Toledo.

Parkin: Yes, and--

Thompson: Brothers and sisters?

Parkin: I have three sisters and a brother, and my brother recently passed away a couple years ago, and he was in the Air Force and the Army. My older sister still lives in Toledo, and my sister that's youngest next to me is a retired lieutenant colonel in the Nurse Corps, but she also served three years in the Air Force. She was--worked in personnel and had a top security clearance and all that kind of thing. And when my mother passed away, she had a sixteen-year-old son. She's a single parent, and she had been in the Army Reserve. She'd gone to nursing school after she got out

of the Air Force, and then joined the Army Reserve. So she asked my nephew, "Do you want, if I can go in the service, where would you expect to be?" He says, "Mom, if you can get Hawaii," he said, "I think that would be absolutely wonderful." So she was to the age where she had to decide if she was going to go full-time Army or if she was going to just stay in the Reserves.

So she went full-time Army and that gave her and her son quite a maximum of security, actually, and she said, "If I can get Hawaii as my first duty station," she says, "I'll go no problem." They gave her Hawaii. So she was at the--she always called it the big pink hospital in Honolulu I believe is where that was. I always get the Hawaiian Islands mixed up. So she was there for four years, Tripler, yes, and so by the time her service was done at Tripler, Ryan was to the age where he was not going to travel with her any longer. So she had to go to San Antonio for further training. So he stayed there and he still lives there. He has a family in San Antonio. Then she went, had further training for officer training. She went to Leavenworth and had some officer training, and then she got four years in Germany, which was absolutely wonderful and she traveled all over Europe. She had--you know, you always form groups of friends when you're in the service, so they all traveled all over Europe. So that was fun, too.

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Then when she came back from Germany, she worked on getting through the Army got her Master's in nursing and she also got her Master's in Administration. So I think that was wonderful on her part, that she could take advantage of that. She did go to Iraq. Unfortunately, she developed blood clots on the way over, and like most women she was on birth control and it just did not agree with her and she ended up with blood clots. So after she got back from Iraq she retired. She said, "This is enough." She couldn't match the physical training any longer, so she said, "I've got my time in." She says, "I'm just going to retire." So she just thought, "I don't know if I want to work or if I want to go on, you know, looking for a job. I don't know exactly what I want to do." I says, "Well, just take some time to yourself." I said, "Be a Walmart greeter if you want to," you know, just to get used to civilian life that she hadn't had for many, many years. She had a friend that worked in personnel then that offered her a job in the Wounded Warrior Program as a nurse case manager in Clarksville. Well, she lives in Clarksville at the hospital there. So that's what she's doing at this point, so I think the service really was very, very good for her.

When I got out of the service, I stayed in--I was--my last duty station was Philadelphia at the naval hospital, which is no longer there. Now it's a parking lot for the sports arena. After I got after the service I stayed in

Philadelphia for about a year. I had met my husband while I was in the service--who is now my husband. We were just dating at the time, and so he'd always write to me and call me. When he'd come back home, instead of coming back to Wisconsin, coming home, he'd come to Philadelphia. He was stationed at Quantico at the time. So he'd come back to Philadelphia and stay with me, you know, for a few days. So when I was in Philadelphia, I had to decide, "Am I going to stay here?" I was working at the Methodist Hospital in South Philly at the time. "Am I going to stay here and continue working at the hospital or do I want to just kind of go someplace else and try to make a life someplace else?" So I thought, "Well, you know, Dick is out of the service now and he's in Wisconsin." So I moved to Wisconsin and then we just developed our relationship from there, so--

Thompson: All right, it sounds like you have quite a military tradition in your family. Were either of your parents in the military?

Parkin: My parents, neither one of them was. My dad was not allowed because of his eyesight, but I have two uncles that served doing World War II and Korea, and my one uncle was in the Army. He was lieutenant, I believe, and he died of war wounds, unfortunately, from wounds he received in Korea. We didn't find out until many years later, when my aunt pulled out a box of things that had been his that he was a silver medal winner. So as I was saying, we found out many years later that he had a silver medal. He had his purple heart. At one point when I was in Washington I looked at the Korean monument to see if his name was listed and it was not. My aunt said, yeah, they got some paperwork but they decided, oh they didn't need to fill it out and it just kind of fell by the side. So we're going to see if we can get him put on to--at least listed, you know, on the Korean monument. I also had another uncle who was an officer in the Navy, and he was on one of the--the story was he was on one of the aircraft carriers that was out to sea when Pearl Harbor got hit. He was officer in the radio area of the ship, in the communications area. So I decided when I was twelve years old that I was going to go in the Navy.

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My family kept saying, "Ah, it's never going to happen. You're not going to do this." So when I turned eighteen I went up to the Navy recruiting station in Toledo and got all the paperwork, and I brought it home to my mom and said, "Will you sign this?" She says, "You don't really want to do this." I said, "Oh yes, I do. I've been telling you since I was twelve years old that I wanted to go in the Navy." So they signed the papers for me and stuff, so I continued on with the process. You know, I went through the physical and when I went to recruit training, it was in Bainbridge, Maryland, and we had old World War II barracks, and there

was, I believe, two or three floors of boot camps, and there was like two or three buildings. So they were really putting a lot of women through boot camp at the time, and that was really my first experience away from home, and it was an interesting experience. [laughs]

There were many of us in this barracks, and we all had duties that we had to. You make, you know, friendships while you're in boot camp. Two of the people that--actually three of the girls that went in to the service with me I'd gone to high school with, and they were in one building and I was in another. [laughs] Two of the girls were identical twins, so I don't know why they put them in the same company, but they did. So we were able to see each other from time to time and stuff. We had to do night watches and, you know, things like that. So it really was very much of a learning experience, and one thing that I realized with boot camp is it's not so much the physical strain. I mean, we did marching. We didn't do a lot of the stuff that the men do with obstacle courses and stuff like that. Women at that point weren't expected to do that kind of thing. We never did weapons training or anything like that, but it's more of a psychological breakdown, and then once they go through a certain amount of the psychological breakdown then they're bringing everybody together as a team.

Thompson: Can you describe what you mean by the psychological breakdown and how did that happen?

Parkin: They made a stringent effort to make sure that you were not talking as "I." It was always we and we were always put into teams. We were never individualized by anything. An interesting thing happened to me that I had never experienced before, and I think it was some slight prejudice. We had a black company commander, which was fine. I had no problem with that, but I sewed patches on when I was in boot camp and we had to sew patches on uniforms. There was probably six to ten gals that I sewed their patches on their uniforms, because they had not a clue what to do with sewing and I had sewn mine on. This woman ridiculed me in front of the company because my patches were not sewn on right, but I'm the only one that she did this to. So it quickly hit me that there's something going on here between her and I that I'm not realizing.

I was always a quiet person. You know, I didn't go out of my way to be boisterous or anything like that, so one of my friends that was one of my bunk mates, she was in the bunk above me, I had done her patches as well and she said, "Your patches are just fine." She said, "I don't know what's going on here either," but I got really depressed about the whole thing. So when they came through and did an inspection for those people that supposedly had things wrong, I laid my uniforms out again and passed, and I never touched my patches, and I got pulled into the lieutenant's

office one--I think it was in the afternoon.

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And she said, "It seems like there's some problems here and they're talking about maybe sending you back and stuff." I said, "I don't know what the problems are," and I told her about the patches, and you know, told her about what had happened. I says, "You know, I have an uncle that was a Navy officer during Pearl Harbor. He was out to sea." I says, "That's what made me decide that I was going to be in the Navy." We talked about some other things and so I was dismissed and so I went back to the barracks and the next inspection we had was for our dress whites. So again, I had sewn patches on everybody's uniform. I didn't touch a thing, and we were all lined up and this company commander pointed me out specifically to this lieutenant and saying what a bad recruit I was, and I wasn't cooperating, and my uniforms were never right, and I'm standing there thinking, "Oh good gravy, they're going to send me back. I can just see it." The lieutenant looked at me and she looked at my uniform. She said, "There is absolutely nothing wrong with this recruit and there is absolutely nothing wrong with her uniform," and then they went on down the line and you could just see the steam coming out of this company commander's ears.

So I got passed through without a problem, and that lieutenant had quite a bit to say, I think, to this company commander. I had never really experienced prejudice like that before, and I really feel that's what it was. I had gone to a great school that was mixed. You know, we had all different races. We had all different religions and stuff, and I had never experienced that before.

Thompson: Were you the only white recruit?

Parkin: Oh no, I was not the only white recruit. Actually, there was only about five or six black recruits in our company, so I think it was just a problem between her and I, and I had no idea what was the problem. So I was very glad to get out of boot camp. [laughs]

Thompson: When did you go into boot camp?

Parkin: I was in boot camp in September of '65 until almost Christmas. I think it was almost Christmas. It was a ten- or twelve-week boot camp at that time.

Thompson: You mentioned night watch. Can you describe what night watch was like?

Parkin: Oh, they'd wake you up in the middle of the night and you'd have to get

dressed, and you couldn't sleep dressed in your bunk, so you had to get up and you had to get dressed, and go to whatever building you were assigned, whether it was another recruit barracks or if it was the company commander's barracks or what. So each time you had night watch or any time you had watch you were always someplace different. But you had to kind of walk--you had to know where you were going, and it was kind of dark at night, and you had to walk to these buildings, and you had to relieve the person that was on duty, and there was a logbook. You had to sign in and out of the logbook, and every hour you had to make an entry into the logbook of anything that was happening. And you had to continuously make rounds throughout this building. So that was where we were learning logging, and it was all a learning process.

You couldn't do watch until so many weeks into boot camp, and so it was continuing adding responsibilities. This is what you're going to expect while you're in the service, and it was because any time you were in the service you had watches, whether it was day watches or night watches. And you couldn't sleep, you had to stay awake. You could take books with you or you could write your letters in between times. Sometimes it was interesting. If you were in the company commander's barracks, there was always partying going on somewhere. [laughs] And it was kind of interesting seeing how some of these people acted outside of being company commanders, and you didn't dare say anything. [laughs] And as it got closer to time that you were getting out of boot camp, you're saying, "Wow, there is life after boot camp." [laughs] So it was an interesting experience. And that's probably the only time I really felt any kind of prejudice. I had--when I was stationed in Florida at the Naval Hospital in Jacksonville, I had a nurse lieutenant that also had this kind of same thing.

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And she had me on continuous nights, so I finally went to the XO and said, "You know, this just is not good for me." I says, "I'm thinking very seriously about asking to be let go because of this continuous nights." I said, "I have no social life. I can't go anywhere. I can't do anything." So she finally took me off nights, and I realized, yeah, you just have to sometimes take things in your own hands and address issues with the people they need to be addressed with.

Thompson: Did you make any friends?

Parkin: I did, but you know, it's the friends while you're there. There isn't really any lasting friends, which is unfortunate. Sometimes there is, occasionally, and I've tried over the years contacting, like, the gals from my high school that went into the service with me through, you know, like the high school thing on the computer, and I've never heard anything back from them, so--

which is unfortunate, but, you know, that happens.

Thompson: What was the food like in boot camp?

Parkin: In boot camp, actually the food was quite good. They had a lot of starches in it because you couldn't eat in between meals. So they had a lot of, you know, high starchy, high protein meals because, you know, the exercise and the walking and that kind of thing. So I think that's how they had it planned. It wasn't just because, "Oh, I'm just lazy and I don't want to cook anything." That's what they had to do. There was also a male boot camp, and we would go to chow at the same time but of course in entirely different areas of the chow hall. And in boot camp, men were considered trees, and you don't look at trees. So therefore, you don't look at the male people that were going to chow at the same time. You didn't make eye contact. You didn't talk. You didn't whisper or send notes, because they were trees and trees don't communicate. [laughs] So we had to call men trees all the time. [laughs]

Thompson: Was there a similar term for the women recruits?

Parkin: I have no idea. The men certainly tried making communication with the women. It was very interesting. You know, they'd whistle or they'd, you know, say something, or they'd see somebody and you'd happen to be close enough that they could talk to you and you couldn't talk to them. So--and they knew that and I think they kind of teased people on purpose, because they knew that the women recruits could not talk to anybody. So that was an interesting thing, and we had a recruit companies. There was one building that was strictly Coast Guard, female Coast Guard, that were going through the same boot camp that we were, but we never had any interaction with them either.

After six weeks, we could earn, quote earn, time to go over to the enlisted men's club, and so there you could talk to anybody you wanted to talk to, and a lot of gals hooked up with guys and stuff like that. And there was a fellow that was interested in me, and he'd walk me back to the line where, you know, then I could go on from boot camp. So it was like walking me home kind of thing, and you could dance. And you know, they had entertainment and stuff like that. So it's kind of like after six weeks they're saying, "Yeah, you're almost done with this so you can start living a little bit." And they had a little place they called Kidon [sp??] on the boot camp side, that you could go and there was sodas and you could get chips and that kind of thing. And they had a jukebox, so we'd sit around and we'd dance together, and, you know, sing the songs, and the popular songs at that time, like "Sloopy" and those kinds of songs. It was--and I can still, when I hear those songs, I go right back to certain times in my life. So I remember some of those things. So there was enjoyable times as well, and

you had to pass swimming. And those of us that never took swimming lessons had to learn how to swim. Well, I didn't take swimming lessons, but they had this little mini swimming lesson kind of thing there that I went to.

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And you had to swim the length of the pool and back, and this was like an Olympic sized-pool, without stopping. So I decided, "Okay, if I don't pass, I'm going to have to stay another two weeks in boot camp, but I am not going to do this." [laughs] And their swimming suits were absolutely horrible. They were like tank swimming suits and some of them had holes in them and stuff. It's like every time you went in you got a different swimming suit so you didn't take your own swimming suit. And they were horrible. They were blue and they were awful. [laughs] But it was only women that were there, and it was only women instructors, so you know, that was okay. So I did manage to--I swam down and back and they kept trying to get me to take this pole. I says, "I am not quitting." I made it. I went up and back and I passed my swimming test, and we had to jump off this five-foot platform and take dungarees. And we had to tie--after we got in the water, we had to tie knots in the ends of the dungarees, and then you pull them over your head and you put air into them and those were, like, floats. And they still use those to this day. They still teach that in swimming, because you never know. You might be out in the middle of the ocean some place and all you got is your pants. [laughs] That's the only way it's going to hold you up.

Like, we were never allowed on ships. We weren't even supposed to be down on the docks and the piers where the ships were, but that was the criteria for swimming. So we all had to pass that, and we were all very glad to pass swimming. And every week, there was a graduation ceremony for different companies, and everyone had to go, and you were in your dress uniforms. And it was really kind of cool after we weren't in our civilian clothes anymore, after we finally got our uniforms and we had gotten measured and we were issued our uniforms. We felt really proud of ourselves to be marching in this big drill hall in our uniforms, and with our shined shoes and all that kind of thing. And they had an army band that came every week, and they played patriotic songs. We marched all around the drill hall. And of course, the graduating company was in front, so it really was really kind of neat. And everybody had their own song that they would sing when they were marching, and ours was "Doo Wah Diddy," only we changed some words around to fit our purposes. I don't even remember how to sing that song anymore. [laughs]

But I remember we were company thirty-eight and the little short people got to be what's called guide-ons and they would carry these company

flags, and then we also had a--oh, I'm trying to think--color guard, and you had to be picked special for this color guard. So I was glad I was never picked, because it was extra stuff and you had to be absolutely precise in what you did and all that kind of thing. But that--every week we had to do that, so--and everybody was really proud when a company graduated and stuff. And the first week that we were in boot camp, we were all in civilian clothes and we were set on bleachers, so we could see this is what's going to be happening. So that was really, really quite interesting. I think I remember some of that stuff, you know, the smell of the drill hall and, you know, the wax that was used on the floors kind of thing, and to see the little army band there with a couple little horns and a drum playing a song. So it was kind of fun.

Thompson: So after boot camp, what was your first assignment?

Parkin: My first assignment--while we were in boot camp we got to pick what we wanted to do, and there was not a lot that women enlisted were allowed to do. We weren't allowed to go overseas, that kind of thing. We could be yeomen, which was clerks. We work in personnel and that kind of thing. You could go into the hospital corps. You could go into air traffic control, and there was one other, but I can't remember what it was. And so you'd sit down with a counselor and you would decide between you what you wanted to do.

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So since I had not worked other than as a part-time clerk in a store and done babysitting, I'd not really had a job because that wasn't common at that time, that when you're in high school that you had a job, you know, kind of thing. So I decided I wanted to do Hospital Corps. I had a couple aunts that were in the medical field and I decided I flunked typing in high school, they wouldn't let me take any type of secretarial courses because they figured I probably wouldn't pass them, because the same teacher taught all of them and since I flunked her first-year typing class, she decided I wasn't going to do that. So I decided, "I'm going to go in the Hospital Corps and I'm going to learn something that's going to be useful in my life and I'm going to go on from there." So then my first duty station was Hospital Corps School, which was in Great Lakes, Illinois. And that was kind of handy, because I could take the bus or I could take the train and I could be home to Toledo in no time, because it was only like a five-hour drive. Or I could take a plane in, you know. In an hour I could be home.

So there were many weekends that I would just go home and I'd take a girlfriend with me. You know, and we'd just kind of get out of our uniform--

[break in recording] [00:31:24]

Parkin: So we would go home, like I said, occasionally on weekends, and I met a fellow that we got kind of serious about each other. He was a gunner's mate and he was in gunner's mate school at Great Lakes, and took him home to mom and said, "Mom, this is, you know, so and so and such and such." And he wanted to get engaged and I decided later on--and I'll talk about that later--that I just was too young. Nineteen years old is just too young to take this big step. [laughs] So unfortunately, I broke the poor guy's heart. I felt kind of bad about that, but I was thinking at that time, "I need to decide what I need to do and what my life is going to be like," and decided nobody's going to stand up for me. Nobody's going to look back on my family and say, "Oh, you're such a horrible person," or anything. So I was going to act like I felt that I needed to act, and I was going to present myself as a halfway decent person.

So over time I just kind of got into that. You know, it was me for a while, and so like I said, I was at Hospital Corps School, and that was from December, I believe, through March, only the coldest months in the world at Great Lakes, Illinois. [laughs] And it was brutal, that cold weather, and the men were stationed on one side of the hospital and we were stationed on the other. And you could interact if you needed to, but they were stationed where all the classrooms were, so we had to march from our barracks over to the other side of the hospital, over to the other side of the compound to classes every day. And we had mixed classes. It was men and women in the classes, because we were all going to Hospital Corps School. The women, we knew that we would never go to Vietnam but the men would. So they had extra training for the men that we were not privy to, because they--you know, being enlisted, we're not going to go overseas and they're not going to put us on hospital ships because they did not want us interacting with men.

So, and whenever we were assigned to a hospital, you were assigned to the women's wards, or pediatrics, or OB/GYN. We were never assigned to any male wards at all. They figured that was playing with fire, I think. [laughs] So after I left Hospital Corps School in Great Lakes, then I got stationed to Jacksonville, Florida. And we were still in dress uniforms in Jacksonville. I mean, the whole service was still in winter uniforms. So it was fine when you were in Chicago where it was bitterly cold, that kind of thing. I got off the plane and in Florida in Jacksonville, and it was like a hundred degrees outside.

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And they opened the door, and you got to the edge of the door, and it was

just like somebody hit you at the door. The heat was just tremendous, and the smell of the air was like old canvas tents. And I found out later it had to do with the kinds of trees, and the Spanish moss, and all this kind of stuff. Once you got used to it, you just never noticed it anymore, but that was my first impression of Florida, was, "Oh my God, it's stifling hot and it smells horrible." [laughs] And you had to--there was nobody traveling with me, and so trying to find--this is a really late night flight. I got in like 11:00, 11:30 at night. And so I was going to get a cab over to the base. I mean, it was the only thing that I could think of that I could do. You know, they weren't meeting me by any means with any kind of transportation. And there was a fellow that was at the airport, and he says, "Are you going over to the hospital at NAS?" And I said, "Yes." And he says, "I'll give you a ride over there. I'll give you a ride to your barracks. I know where it is." And he said, "You know, if you want to." And I said, "Oh, that's absolutely wonderful." [laughs]

So he was in civilian clothes. He'd been stationed there for some time and he was learning to be an aircraft mechanic at the main base, and the hospital at Jacksonville was old World War II buildings, and there was one barracks after another, and there were walkways that went between all these different buildings. And these were wards, and there was like two wards in a building. So I was assigned to women's ward and they always assigned a experience Corps WAC to be with you when you were first working with you to make sure, yeah, you really could take a blood pressure and you really could, you know, make a bed and those kinds of things. But they also taught you things like starting IVs. We did a lot of our own lab work that we were not taught in Hospital Corps School. What we were taught there as on the job training.

We had to draw all our own labs to send to the lab. We had to do all our own urinalysis, all those things right there on the ward, so it was very interesting learning all that stuff. And fortunately, I was one of the few people that really could start an IV on the first try. So they always called me to get these IVs started for them. So that made me feel kind of proud.

Thompson: It must have been all that patch sewing helped you out.

Parkin: Exactly, sewing all those patches on. [laughter] So those were skills, later on, actually, as an LPN that I was not allowed to use. When I was in the service, I could do lots of things as far as patient care that I was not allowed to do in the private sector. You had to take extra training in the private sector to do those kinds of things. And when I was working nights at Jacksonville there at the hospital it was interesting because there was a possum that would come out at night. It was the only time you would ever see it. This thing was humungous. I swear, it was about three of what our possums are. It was really big, and what it was doing at night, it was going

along, because patients would be out on their own porches and stuff, and they'd be eating things and things would drop. So this little possum came out. He's like a little vacuum cleaner. But when you came up against him, you know, you see this thing--huge thing right in the middle of where you're walking. It's like you got walked and you walked up the gravel and you walked around him. [laughs] Fortunately, he had these little sparkly eyes that would glow at night so you could see him. But so everybody kept hoping that you would not see this possum, because he was really ugly. [laughs]

Thompson: So what was your typical day like there?

Parkin: During a day, a typical day is you had to be on the wards at seven. So you got up at 5:30 or so and you get yourself dressed, and we each had our own private rooms at Jacksonville. It's the only time that--after I was out of boot camp, there was Jacksonville and there was Philadelphia.

[00:39:58]

They took the officer quarters and gave them to the WAVES and had officers living off base. So the women got the old officer quarters, so we all had our own rooms. We had a little sink. We had, you know, the bedroom you could fix it up however you wanted, as long as it was neat and it would pass inspection. So you could have your own bedspreads and you can have your own towels and things like that. So you get up and if you decided to make cereal for yourself in your room, that was fine, or you could go to chow. And the breakfast was very good. You just went through the line and picked out what you wanted, and you had breakfast. And then as long as you were on your ward at the time you were supposed to be, and signed in, and the other people signed out, and you get your patients up in the morning, you know, for bathing or treatments or whatever needed to be done. You draw your labs, you know, you get whatever other lab work like your urinalysis or whatever from the patients, and get all that, you know, shoved off to lab.

It was general patient care, and sometimes you were assigned to the same ward, sometimes you weren't. But it was always--at this hospital they had two female wards that were both med-surg, and they had a pediatric, and they had an ICU unit. And those are two other units that we worked on. They usually didn't have--I shouldn't say didn't--they occasionally had men working in pediatrics. They needed that experience as well. And I never worked ICU. I signed up to give blood one time, because they had someone coming in that was really, really, really needed a lot of blood. But there was factor in mine that didn't match, and I have A-negative blood which is really--it's not rare but it's uncommon. But there was some other little factor that they checked that didn't match, so they ended up not

taking my blood, but you know, they said, “Anybody with this type of blood, come on over.” So, you know, I went on over and went through all the testing they needed to do.

But like I said, I didn’t work ICU, if I did, it was very rarely, enough that I think maybe once, and that was because there was a female in ICU. So whenever there was a female in there, they always had a Corps WAVE that came over, and you were strictly to take care of that person. And so it was just a typical on the ward kind of day, and then there was playtime at night. After you were done working, you get to play. So we spent many nights down on the beach at Mayport on the beach, and had all night beach parties, and then come back to work for seven o’clock in the morning the next morning. So I could do about one of those and that was it. I was--I had to rest. [laughs] And we had fun things at the barracks between all the girls. At Christmastime we’d get a tree and we’d all decorate the tree, and have a party, and exchange, you know, little gifts. Everybody pick a name and exchange gifts and all that kind of thing for the people that weren’t going home.

And if you did something wrong, it was always, “Oh, you have to go up and you have to dust luggage.” You know, if you were late showing up to work or something like that they’d say--put you down on report, so you’d have to either stay in the barracks and not go anywhere, stay only in your room--and the person that was on watch made sure that you stayed in your room, except for chow. [laughs] They couldn’t make you not eat, or like I said, dust luggage, just something so that, you know, the men I’m sure they had them do other things or you’d, you know, run the mop around the aisle way, or clean the bathrooms, or whatever, other than regular. Everybody had their set of duties that they had to do every week. And there was a petty officer that was in charge of the barracks and we stood the night watches, with the female petty officer was there and kept order, more or less. [laughs]

Everybody knew that they had to be good. You know, so I mean, sure there was a few gals that would push the limits and that kind of thing, but that’s anywhere.

Thompson: What were some of the most interesting things that you did in that assignment?

[00:44:57]

Parkin: I think that the learning of the different duties that were expected and when there was hurricanes, thinking of that, when there were hurricanes, there were--they had certain boxes that they would bring in that were watertight, and you had to make sure that all the charts were in there,

everything was charted, everything was ready to go. You had to put all your meds from your med cabinet into boxes, et cetera, in case of evacuation. And you had to make sure that you were ready to evacuate with your patients. And your patients always came first. You know, you made sure that the patients were set up and ready to go, and especially the people that were in IVs or had breathing problems and things like that. That was an interesting thing. There was one hurricane that I experienced, but fortunately we didn't have to evacuate. We still had to go through everything to make sure, but it was scary, and it was night, and there was only two of us on nights. And it was very scary thinking that, "Gosh, we might have to evacuate." And you know, I've never even been in a tornado let alone--because where I'm from in Toledo, it's a valley. You don't get tornados in Toledo. And so it was interesting. [laughs]

And it was just general patient care that I would learn, and it wasn't any different than what I did in civilian life in a hospital. And I was actually surprised, my next duty station was Philadelphia. And that came about because I went on leave. It was the first leave I had in over a year, because that lieutenant that I was having a problem with refused to sign my leave request. That's when I went to the XO and said, "Enough is enough." I said, "I really don't even feel like I can come back." I said, "Maybe after I'm home for a while, you know, on leave for a while, it'll be different." I says, "But I just feel I have all these awful feelings about this place because of this." So that's how I got my leave. [laughs] And I had like a ten-day leave. So I went home and a couple of my friends that lived next door that we grew up together, we went horseback riding, because I learned horseback riding when I was Jacksonville. They had a stables that was only like less than a mile walk from our barracks, because where the barracks was, that was officer country. So they had all the special kinds of things back in there. So I learned horseback riding there.

And I learned--I said, "I'll learn western. That's okay." So you know, you go out and ride along the trails and you ride down by the river and stuff. It was really quite enjoyable for me to do that. So we went horseback riding and we were going back to the stable, and my horse stopped dead. And they said, "You know, he may do this." So I was kind of prepared for it, but he really stopped dead. It wasn't like he took two steps and stopped, he just plain stopped. I went over his head and landed and broke my back. And I had a compressed fracture at the second lumbar vertebra, and that's part of my disability. So they had to air vac me. I was in a civilian hospital for a week--a little over a week. And of course, the Navy recruiters came in and said, "You know, we need to air vac you but we need to air vac you to a hospital that is sufficient to treat your injury." And fortunately, while I was at the civilian hospital they fit me and gave me a back brace. So when they finally got the orders through, they took me by ambulance out to the airport. My mom was there and saying, "Goodbye," you know, kind of

thing. There was this huge transport plane and they were--Toledo was the stop that they had to make to pick me up. So this plane was going up and down on all these different places, all these different bases. It took us three days to get from Toledo to Philadelphia, and none of my uniforms would fit over my brace, so I was traveling in civilian clothes. And I had to lay down the whole time. They wouldn't let me sit, even with the brace. They said, "No, you have to lay down." So I have all these men around me with these horrible wounds from Vietnam, and I really--I felt very inadequate.

[00:50:02]

Here I am, you know, I was on leave and got injured, and here I am with all these people that have these horrible wounds, and you could hear them, you know, moaning and groaning, and they had IVs hooked up to all these people--you know, a lot of the men that were on this. I was the only female on this transport plane, and we went--oh, gosh, I can't remember the first place we went. Oh, it was--I think it was Wright-Pat Air Force Base. And they unloaded everybody, and there was another gal at that base that was also going to be air vac'd. So at least there was two of us, and so they took us to the ward. And, you know, we were only going to be there, you know, overnight kind of thing. And I don't think I slept the whole night. Just--I think it's just feeling strange, and out of place, and, you know, of course they wouldn't let me sit up in bed or, you know, all this kind of thing. You know, they'd go with me to the bathroom and that was about it, you know, and the rest of the time I was laying down. So you really didn't see a lot of what was going on around you.

And then the next morning they loaded us all up again and I guess it took us like two and a half days, not three--two and a half. Because then we went to Fort Dix, I believe it was, in New Jersey. We landed there, and everybody that was on that transport was going to Philadelphia, to the Naval hospital there. There may have been a few people that were going to the Army hospital but most of them were Navy and Marine. So they loaded us on school busses. And I still had to lay down. It really felt strange laying down in this school bus. So they transported us all from there to Philadelphia Naval Hospital. And they put me on the civilian women's ward. The main hospital, which was a beautiful brick multi--I think there was like seventeen floors in this hospital--it was a huge hospital that was all male. And that's where all the clinics were, and x-ray, and that kind of thing. So I was there as a patient probably three months, maybe, before they would finally say, you know, I didn't have to wear my back brace anymore unless my back bothered me. But I was still on restricted duty and so they had--at the Independence Hospital, they had their own lab and x-ray.

So I got to work in x-ray. I was a receptionist in the x-ray department. And

the chief that was there was a wonderful person, and he used to let me--you know, when it was slow he'd have me look at the x-rays and say, "What do you see on these x-rays?" And I kind of learned to read a lot of what the x-rays were. And the pregnant ladies all had to have chest x-rays, so I did all those chest x-rays on those ladies. They'd kind of line up and, "Oh yeah, here I am." [laughs] And they'd get their chest x-ray done. Before they were in labor--why they wanted to have a chest x-ray before they went in labor, I never quite understood, but that was policy, and I always stood by if they had one of the females--you know, the women came up that had to have special tests done. They have the radiologist from the main hospital come over and they'd do the special x-ray exams, and any time there was a female that was in for any kind of x-ray, I got to stand by. So I learned quite a bit when I was in x-ray there. And then they said, "Well, it's time that we decide--you know, the doctors can put you back on regular duty." They did a medical board, and--oh, while I was in Philadelphia, too, I slipped and I broke my elbow. [laughs] I was in my nylons and I went to step over between my door and the aisle way. It was very slippery. It was tile, and then they put rug on top of that. Well, I hit the tile and down I went. So that was another part of my disability, was my elbow and my back.

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It was quite an experience, too. So anyway, they decided that they needed to decide what they were going to do with me. And I got orders back to Florida, back to Jacksonville. So I went to personnel. I said, "I'm not going." They said, "Huh? What did you say?" I said, "I'm not going." I said, "Were these open-ended orders that they just needed a Corps WAVE or were these orders specifically in my name?" And he said, "No." He said, "They're open-ended orders." And he says, "I have another Corps WAVE that doesn't want to be here--stationed here." So he talked to her and she said, "Oh yeah, I'll go to Florida. That's great. No problem." So I got--was able to be assigned to Philadelphia. And they kept me in x-ray, as a receptionist in x-ray. And they eventually sent me over to the main hospital to be receptionist there. And I still had to wear my back brace at that time, thinking about it. And the nurses--orthopedics was on that floor. And the nurses in orthopedics were just having terrible fits about the fact that I'm an active duty Corps WAVE and I'm not in a uniform. And so my chief in x-ray, my second chief, kept saying, "When she's out of her back brace then she'll go back into uniform." So at that point I was kind of glad that I was finally, you know, going to be able to get out of my brace so I wasn't--oh, they were just--I don't know if it was jealousy or what it was, but they were just having fits at the fact that I'm standing at this x-ray desk and I'm in civilian clothes.

At first, they thought I was a civilian, but--so we got over that problem,

but I stayed working as receptionist in x-ray, and it was so very interesting. You know, the wounded men would come up and they could have a simple gunshot wound or they could be, you know, have three limbs missing, or some of them had very, very bad injuries where they were ending up with colostomies, and they couldn't urinate on their own, and they had to have all these x-ray studies done. They liked me because I was nice to them, and a lot of times they'd come up early just to talk, or they'd bring their wives up with them, which was really very wonderful to see that these wives would stick by these guys. I saw so many of these guys who'd come up and said, "Well, my wife doesn't want to stay with me anymore. She said she just can't handle this." And they'd be absolutely heartbroken. And I really felt badly for that. There was actually so many of them that the wives--they were young. They got married--you know, he's going to Vietnam so they got married. And I've never been a proponent since then of just because somebody's going somewhere in the service doesn't mean you need to get married. At least if he comes back and he's so badly maimed that you can't stand to be around him, you don't have to go through this whole divorce thing. You could just leave.

So it was quite an experience there. There were seventeen wards of psych patients, and a good share of them were so drugged up that, you know, they just literally shuffled back and forth. They'd take them over for chow, if they were able to be let out of their psych units. And you always tried to time going to lunch when they weren't. It was so very sad to see. And they also had seventeen-plus wards of amputees. Philadelphia was the Psych and Ortho Center for the east coast. So--and it was nothing--Fourth of July was always very interesting. You'd be out, you know, watching the fireworks and it was nothing for somebody to come screaming around the barracks, you know, and looking for a foxhole to get into because of the--and it's people that were allowed out. You know, they were rehabilitating and they were allowed out and stuff. They couldn't handle the fireworks, and the fireworks were not right on top of us. They were a little ways away, but it was nothing to see that happen. And, you know, if you're with somebody, you know, the guy go over and, you know, grab hold of him and, you know, try to comfort him and take him back to his unit.

[01:00:00]

Thompson: Describe for me what it was like during that time. Here you were a Naval medical professional, caring for wounded Vietnam veterans with a country that was--

Parkin: Against.

Thompson: Against the war, what were your emotions like and what was that like then?

Parkin: Very resentful--I went in the Navy with the fact that I knew men were going to Canada and doing anything to get out of being in service. And I said, "I'll go in and I'll take the place of somebody. You know, I'll be a warm body." And that was, besides the fact that I always wanted to go in the Navy, that was, you know, one of the other reasons I went in was because I needed to prove that not everybody needed to be getting out of doing these things to themselves or running off to Canada just because they didn't want to face being in a war. And part of it was their circumstances, but when it was getting close to time for me to get out of the service, I had felt a lot of resentment to the fact that I couldn't do what I wanted to a lot of times. They'd lock us down at the base. They'd have--they always had armed guards. I think there was two or three entrances with big iron gates and they all had armed guards. And there were times they would lock us down because they'd have protestors coming to, you know, put us down, you know, put the military down and stuff. "You're baby killers," and all that kind of stuff.

So I didn't experience it as much as the men did, but I still felt very resentful toward those people. I thought, "This is not fair. These men have served you. If they weren't going to Vietnam, if they were not going to, you know, where they were being sent and even today, if they weren't going to Iraq, you may have those people here, and you won't have these rights. You won't have the liberties that you have. If it weren't for these people that are suffering in this hospital that went over there with the purpose of keeping you safe, you wouldn't be allowed to protest." And I still feel that way, I think. I feel very resentful toward people like that. It's just it's not fair to the Vietnam vets that they be treated like crap.

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Parkin: When I came to Wisconsin, I did not see these protests and stuff when I was in Philadelphia, and I spent a lot of time in downtown Philly going to plays and movies, and I was there a little over a year. And I did not see that kind of thing going on in Philadelphia. If it was, it wasn't where--any place that I was. I came to Wisconsin and after I got settled in, the first place I started working was--well, back up. I had to take LPN training. I had to use a year of my GI Bill, because Wisconsin did not recognize my military training, even though I actually had more training in the service than I did in LPN training. So I had to take a year of my GI Bill, and I went to LPN training. And the first place that I started working was the Methodist Hospital when it was up by the square when it was still there. And there were times I worked nights, because I liked working the night shift. There was fewer people around, you weren't getting bugged, you know, and you knew all of your patients rather than just a few. So I worked mainly nights, and there were times when the supervisor came

through and she says, “Well, we can’t let you go home.” She says, “We’ll give you somewhere to sleep.” And this was for anybody that was on nights. “Because they’re having these protests and they’re going to be going up, you know, West Washington Avenue and they’re going to be going up around the square and it’s going to be too dangerous, we feel, for you people to be trying to go home. And there’s going to be a lot of people around, and we don’t know if it would be safe for you to get to your cars. And there was one night, they went by and I left. And after that I said, “I don’t give a rat’s butt if they’re out there protesting or not. I’m going home. I’m not going to stand around here and be punished because they want to protest Vietnam and the people--calling people, you know, the service people names and that kind of thing. That is just not right.”

So that’s--I felt very resentful at that time about that. I just don’t think it’s fair, and it just really rubbed me the wrong way. And here I am a civilian and they’re telling me I can’t leave work because it’s going to be too dangerous. If it’s that dangerous, why are they letting these people do this? And at this time, Paul Soglin, who’s the current mayor of Madison, was very involved with this. So I have nothing good to say about Paul Soglin whatsoever.

Thompson: So I want to ask you a question back in Philadelphia, if I may.

Parkin: Yes.

Thompson: How did you make your decision to leave the Navy?

Parkin: My term was up, and I got an apartment down in South Philly. And that was the place to be at that time anyway. That’s where Bobby Darren and Paul Anka and all those people came from. And it was an old Italian neighborhood. And I found this really nice apartment, and a girlfriend and I moved into the apartment together, and she was still being treated at the hospital. And she ended up--she was on a drug called Tolin, which they found later was extremely addictive, and they don’t use that with people at all anymore. And she really started having problems, and her family came up, and they had called me and they had talked to me and say, “What do you see with her.” And told them what, and they said, “We hate to do it, but, you know, we’re going to have to--we need to bring her home. We need to bring her home and have her treated. She’s so badly addicted.”

Thompson: Did you ever consider another hitch in the Navy or making it a career?

Parkin: I had thought about it and then decided, “Well, I do have someplace I can go and I’m going to try living as a civilian for a while, because you had so many months that you could sign up or go in the Reserves or whatever you wanted to do.” So I decided, “No, I’m going to stay here in Philadelphia.

I'm going to stay a civilian. I'm not going to go back in the service. I'm not going to think about it right at this point." So I worked at the Methodist Hospital, which was only six blocks away. So I walked back and forth.

Thompson: In Philadelphia?

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Parkin: In Philadelphia, so I walked back and forth, and it was odd having a Methodist hospital in the middle of a Catholic neighborhood. [laughs] I don't know why they did that. And so I decided not at that point--not to go back into the Navy.

Thompson: What was your out-processing like?

Parkin: It was just they handed you your papers and they said, "You know, this is when your final day is and then you have, you know, like two weeks to get yourself packed up and find someplace to live and figure out where you're going to go."

Thompson: What was your adjustment like, reentering the civilian world?

Parkin: It was interesting. It was just like, "Okay, now I kind of do what I want to do." [laughs] I had to find a job, and the Methodist Hospital there in Philadelphia, a lot of the Hospital Corps people actually worked there part-time. So I knew that they would hire. So I went there and I actually worked in pediatrics because I had worked in pediatrics part of the time when I was in Florida. So they assigned me to the pediatric ward, so that was kind of fun. And the LPNs were a little resentful because I was actually considered a med tech. But I was allowed to do everything that they do and my pay was equivalent to their pay. So they were a little resentful of that, but--and I worked mainly nights there too, so I didn't have to put up with it. There was usually two of us there, and my supervisor was very nice. And it was--my supervisor was black and two of the LPNs that I worked with were black. I was the only white person that worked on that ward, even though it wasn't a black ward. I mean, the patients weren't black. But it was a interesting experience working with them.

Thompson: So tell me about how you met your husband.

Parkin: I met my husband at Philadelphia Naval Hospital, and I was working in x-ray at the time, and he was working in supply. And we'd go to the EM Club at night, you know, to party or whatever, and dance.

Thompson: What is EM?

Parkin: The Enlisted Men's Club, and I was one of the few people that was allowed to go through the amputee wards. You had to have permission from the amputees to go through those wards, or they would bar you from going. That way you didn't have to go outside at all. Their wards were right before--the EM Club was at the end of their wards, and that was--I'm going to backtrack a minute here. The amputee wards were very interesting. They were very prejudiced about their own. They had a lot of good interaction between themselves, but if you were an outsider it was a whole different story. They almost made it, like, their own war zone, and they would protect people, certain people, like myself, they didn't mind. They liked me so they didn't mind if I went through their wards. You know, and it wasn't like you're going through the ward. It was an aisle way and the wards were shut off from that. You know, it was a walkway that went through. But they--there were some that stayed up and they watched people, and they'd stop people and say, "You don't come through here. This isn't your land. This is ours." And they had the attitude of if some--you know, an officer would get upset with them and they'd say, "You know, you're going to be punished. You're going to do this. We're going to do a court martial." They'd say, "What are you going to do? Cut off my arm? Cut off my leg? There isn't anything you can do to me at this point in time. There's nothing you can do. It's already been done." So they were pretty much left alone, and the nurses that worked those wards knew that, you know, what the lay of the land was. And they--if you worked down there it was fine.

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But if you didn't, they were just kind of, you know, kind of iffy about people. And there was a particular chief that was very nasty to these patients, and I think somebody got mouthy with him at one time and after that it was like, you know, "You can't do this and you can't do that." And he had a drinking problem, and he didn't make it through the amputee wards one night. They had to go and look for him, and he ended up as a patient for quite a while. And it was unfortunate, but who's going to admit to doing anything? You know, that's the kind of attitude that was there, and I felt badly for these guys when it was time for them to go home, because now all of a sudden they don't have a support group. They don't have anybody to talk to. They're going home, even though their loved ones may have stayed for a while at Philadelphia or they'd come back and forth and seen them, that kind of thing, it's different when you go home. And I had a couple of friends that would write me from time to time about their experiences after they got home, and it was very sad. There were so many of these men would end up on drugs or alcoholics, because they just did not have that support group. And they got home and people are saying,

“Oh, you’re a Vietnam vet, you know, that was a wrong thing for you to do,” you know, putting them down rather than building them up.

And that’s why a lot of your Vietnam vets have the attitude that they have. You know, if we don’t support our own nobody else is going to do it for us. And they have really pushed very, very hard to support the Iraq veterans that are coming back. It’s been a planned thing from the beginning, “If there’s ever another war we’re not going to allow this to happen.” So anyway, enough on that part. I met my husband at Philadelphia and he and one of his friends kidnapped me one day. [laughs] I was going over to get my paycheck, because we had to walk over to the main hospital, and they came up with one of the supply trucks and they said, “Come on, you’re coming with us.” And I said, “I don’t think so. I’m going to go get my paycheck and I’m--you know, I got to get back to work.” “Oh, that’s okay. We’ll make sure that things are taken care of, blah, blah, blah,” and it was like over my lunch hour. So we went down to the main base and it was like three hours later that we got back and I made him go in and talk to my chief. And the chief just laughed, but--I mean, it’s like at that point my job wasn’t really that important. This was when I was at the Independence.

I kept after him. I was so mad at him. I was just angry with him that they did this. But they were always at the EM Club, and there was a group of guys. There was four of them, and they were all named Dick. There was Big Dick, Little Dick, Middle Dick, and Dick from Supply, I think it was. I can’t remember what they called him. Oh my God, they were all drinking buddies. And we’d go to the EM Club and he’d come over and he’s sit down. And he’d start talking and I’d talk back. And there was always a group of us that went. And he kept coming over and he says, “You know, I’m going to marry you someday.” And I said, “Yeah, right.” I said, “I don’t think so.” And so we start--kind of start going out, you know, off and on. I was dating somebody else at the time, too. And he helped me move into my apartment, and a couple of the guys helped me move into my apartment and get things set up, and he had gotten orders to Quantico to the officer training at Quantico to one of the dispensaries. So he never went to Vietnam, and he felt guilty for the longest time about not being assigned to Vietnam. He was one of the few people in his class that did not get orders for ’Nam. But now he’s very glad that he didn’t, at this point in time. But anyway, I met him and we kind of dated back and forth, and we both got out of the service about the same time.

Thompson: When was that?

[00:14:57]

Parkin: That was in--I believe the date on my DB214 is August 28 of 1968. When

I signed up in the Navy, they were only signing women up for three years, rather than four. So he would call me on the phone, you know, from Wisconsin, and he'd write me and stuff. And so we did a lot of conversing back and forth. And so I finally decided, my lease was coming up on my apartment. It was coming up to be done. And I thought, "Do I want to stay here or do I want to go someplace else and experience life elsewhere?" Am I holding onto this because this is like a safety net for me? So I decided, "Well, I'll move to Wisconsin and we'll see what's going to go up." And my mom and my aunts always said, "Oh, you'll never finish your term in the Navy. You'll be getting out for some reason. You know, you'll be getting out. You'll get pregnant or you'll get a psych eval or something like that." And I said, "No, I won't." I said, "You can decide how you're going to live your life. If you want to, you know, go that way, that's fine." I said, "But I'm not. I'm not going to do this." I had my chance when I first got to Florida. My boyfriend wanted to get married and I said, "No, I can't do it." I said, "I'm only nineteen years old. I'm not gonna do this." I was--had just turned twenty-one in May of the year that I got out of the service. So those formative years for me in there, I had safety, but I was on my own. I always had something that I could fall back on at that point, and so this now, you know, living in Philadelphia as a civilian was my first civilian thing, other than, you know, before--when I got out of high school. And I went in the service just after I got out of high school. So--and I was not going to move home. I absolutely will not. I'll do anything before I decide I'm going to move home, because everybody kept saying, "You'll just come home," you know and, "We just don't think you can do it." And I said, "That's fine. I'm going to prove to everybody that I have some kind of responsibility in my life about myself."

So I moved out here and we dated, and I got an apartment in--well, at that time it was Chalet Gardens. It was before it was the ghetto part of the city. [laughs] It's the only way to put it. And I worked at the Methodist hospital and Dick and I decided we were going to get married. So we got married in '70, which is just I finished my LPN training in the spring and we got married in August--at the end of August. And we decided we wanted to have a family. Well, it was four years later. I was still at the Methodist hospital. So we got married, and during the time that we got out of the service, I moved out here, Dick was in the Reserves. He had done--when I met him in Philadelphia, he was doing his full-time Navy that he had to do so many years. And then he came back and he stayed in the Reserves. And he went to a Reserve meeting. You know, at this time I was working at St. Mary's Hospital. He went to this Reserve meeting, and he was a police officer. And he got out of going--his--even though it was small town Belleville that he was a police officer in, it was during those heavy riots in Madison, and he decided he was going to go to this Reserve meeting rather than going up on the square and having bottles thrown at him. So he went to this Reserve meeting, and it was this little Quonset hut building on

East Washington Avenue. And anybody that knows Madison way back when knew what that Quonset hut was.

[00:20:01]

Anyway, he checked in. He was in his civilian clothes, and he checked into his Reserve meeting. And one of the guys came in who was a Madison police officer, never checked his gun at the master of arms desk, and for some reason went to pull his gun out of his holster, God knows why. There's a bunch of these guys that are cops that were talking, and he went--he undid his holster and went to pull his gun out and it went off and Dick was standing right next to him. And they were having a disaster drill that particular evening, and they kept telling me that, you know, he got shot but they didn't want me going down to the emergency room. They were bringing him in to St. Mary's because that's where he said he wanted to go because that's where I worked. I was working PMs. So I went down anyway and he was--they--the bullet went in his right abdomen and came out his left hip. And actually, the bullet was sitting there and they couldn't take it out that night because he'd arrested a couple times on them. So he ended up as a patient at St. Mary's in their ICU. And fortunately, it was the floor that I worked on so I could not--I had to be very careful because I couldn't take care of him, of course. I could see him, but I couldn't take care of him. And so he was there for about two weeks, and then they transferred him to Great Lakes, good old Great Lakes Naval Hospital, which I was very familiar with. He was not, because he had his Hospital Corps training in San Diego.

So, and they're transporting him by ambulance and I couldn't understand why they were transporting him by ambulance rather than helicopter, because they had the helicopters over at the base in Madison at Truax they could have transferred him with. And later on when we were looking through his records, he had a blood clot in his lung. Now, why were they transporting him by ambulance to Great Lakes instead of flying him, unless they figured maybe the flight would cause it to dislodge or something. I have no idea. So he went to Great Lakes Naval Hospital. So on my weekends I'd drive down to Great Lakes Naval Hospital. We'd spend the weekend down there. I'd get a hotel room and he wasn't allowed off the ward, but at least, you know, I would stay for the weekend. And later on, it was--you know, we'd come back to Wisconsin on the weekends. He'd get his weekend pass. So when we got married, I went down and got him out of Great Lakes Naval Hospital the day before we got married, and he had already told the chaplain and he had told the supervisor that was on the ward there that he would have his discharge papers. They had been sitting for six weeks on some captain's desk, main side, not being signed, his discharge papers. So he said, "I will have my papers in my hand," he says, "Because I'm leaving and I am not coming

back.” And we actually even called Senator Kastenmeier and Proxmire’s office at the time. So he had his papers in his hand when I went down to get him.

And so the day before--like I said, the day before we got married I went down and got him. [laughs] And he was on crutches, and he was doing okay. He ended up not having to have a colostomy or anything like that. They were able to repair his bladder, repair his bowel. They had to do resections every place, and they finally got the bullet out. They had to take the bullet out because he was running high fevers. So they couldn’t take it out the night that he came in and they did all the surgery, so they took him back up and did a quick removal of that bullet, and his fever immediately went down. So then they were able to transport him to Great Lakes.

Thompson: All right, after you left the military and up until this time, have you joined any veteran’s organizations?

Parkin: No, I tried joining the veteran’s organization in Belleville and they said, “We don’t want women.” And there were several women that--in the town that had tried to join and they refused to let us join. So I just never joined anything.

[00:25:05]

Thompson: From your days of military experience, other than your husband, have there been any friends that you’ve stayed in touch with over the years?

Parkin: There’s only one.

Thompson: Tell me about that.

Parkin: He was actually--I met him in Philadelphia. He had a group of friends that--one of those friends was a patient. She was a female that was on the female ward, and I was at one end of the ward and she was at the other. So we just kind of met and we got this little group going. And I still keep up with him. He’ll call me from time to time, and one time he called me, he says, “Pam,” he says, “You wouldn’t have wanted to stay in the military.” He said, “It has changed so much.” And he retired from the Navy, and this is before he retired. He said, “It has changed so much. It’s just like going to high school anymore.” He said, “There’s no rules that get followed anymore.” He says, “You wouldn’t have wanted to stay in.” And over the years, I’ve still stayed in contact with him. And he was actually from Waukegan by Chicago. So--

Thompson: Well, looking back on your military experience, how do you remember it emotionally? I mean, what was there about it that stuck in your mind

throughout the years?

Parkin: I was treated a little differently, I think, than most female veterans would have been treated because with being in the Hospital Corps we had our own rooms. We didn't have open barracks that we had to deal with. We didn't have to stand watches in all these different areas of the base. Our watches were all stood--the hospital compound was its own compound. And I think that was a little different. The Corps WAVES when they would--if they were patients at the hospital they said, "You have it so lucky over here." Says, "I should have gone in the Hospital Corps," because they say, "You really have it good over here." [laughs] My overall feeling about the service is I'm glad I did it and I would do it again.

I think a lot of what you put into the service is what you're going to get out of it. If you're going to absolutely hate it and that kind of thing, you know, you're going to end up getting out because you just don't want to deal with it. And there are certain things. You know, there are things that you have to do. There are responsibilities that you have to have, and you have to respect that. There are certain things you can and cannot do, and you just have to go along with it and just do the best you can. The rest of the time, it's your time. It's like going to a nine-to-five job, or an eight to--a three-to-eleven, or an eleven-to-seven. You know, it's just like going to a job, but there are certain things that you have to do. You are still in the military. If there's a command change, you have to get in your dress uniform and stand in the sun for three hours. [laughs] There are just things that you have to do.

Thompson: What was especially challenging about your military service?

Parkin: I think growing up is the biggest thing, and realizing that I'm my own person and I have to make up my mind how I want to be treated and--what do I want to say? How do I want to put it? You make your own person. I guess it's just the only way to put it. You know, if you're going in the service with the idea that you're looking for a husband, you're not going to have a good time, because all the guys know that you're probably in it--there were several times they said, "Oh, you just went in the service because you want a husband." And I said, "I don't think so." I said, "I don't have a husband yet and I'm not planning on having a husband for a while." And I said, "That's not why I came in the service."

Thompson: Well, speaking of that, tell me a little bit about what your interactions in general were with the male service members and officers, if any.

[00:29:58]

Parkin: I had very little to do with officers, because officers and enlisted weren't

supposed to cross lines. And being a female, I wasn't dating them. [laughs] You know, a lot of--the male petty officers were dating the nurses. I mean, they were at an age where they could date and there was one instance when I was in Florida that there was a first-class petty officer and a nurse--she was a lieutenant--that decided they wanted to get married and they put them in--immediately gave them orders to different duty stations, and he was reprimanded harshly for dating an officer. So those lines weren't meant to be crossed. And most of the male officers that were there, they were married anyway.

[break in recording][00:30:53]

Thompson: Right, so after you left the military, did you join any veteran organizations or become involved in any type of veteran activities?

Parkin: I wanted to, but the--I was living in Belleville at the time, which is a small community just outside Madison. I wanted to join the Legion there, the VFW, and they wouldn't allow me to because I was a female. They didn't want females joining their organization.

Thompson: What year was that?

Parkin: That would have been in '71, maybe, and they didn't want any females. So I dropped that right then and there and decided--I guess I probably could have gone to another town or something like that, but I figure if this is the attitude then, you know, I'm not going to do it. I'm just not going to put up with that. I didn't put up with it when I was in the military. I'm not going to put up with it now.

Thompson: Any other organizations that you became involved in?

Parkin: Naval Sea Cadets, and that was a youth group organization sponsored by the Navy League in Madison, and it was for children ages, like, thirteen and a half through eighteen or when they finished high school. And it was a Navy--it was run just as if they were in the Navy. We had Navy uniforms. We were able to get surplus uniforms from Great Lakes, from people that were in boot camp that washed out, that kind of thing, and they had uniforms that were just there. So Sea Cadets was quite popular, especially in the Chicago area. And our son heard about it. He heard about it or saw a thing at school in high--when he was in high school. And he thought that would be something he would be interested in doing. So went there to the building, you know, to the ROTC center here, so he could see what it was all about and stuff. And he thought this would be good for him. He would like to do this. And my husband became involved with the group right away, and it was about a year or so after that I got involved with it. And so my military training kind of came back. It slowly started

coming back at me, because as my husband and I being in--with the Sea Cadets, we were officers. And we were--we started out as ensigns and then we went to lieutenants and second lieutenants and on up the line. And we were with this group for about nine years, and during that nine years we had several of our cadets that either went in the Marines or in the Navy, a couple into the Army. We had one of our cadets that's still a master chief on a nuclear sub, and he's stationed out of California right now. And he really--he's our very first chief in our Sea Cadet Corps, and he continued on in the service. He was just the nicest person, anyway. And so over those nine years, we did lots of things with the cadets. We did competitions at Great Lakes with other Sea Cadet Corps, which we won most of them. [laughs] We were actually at one time told that they didn't want us to come for a competition because they knew we were going to win. [laughs]

[00:35:03]

But the cadets were treated just as if they were in the military. They had to care for their uniforms. They advanced in rank in the Sea Cadet Corps, clear up through to chief. And we had several chiefs and we had two that were female chiefs that were in charge. The parents were allowed to come. We preferred they really not stay all day, but some of them did. But then if they were going to stay then we put them to work. We were at the Madison ROTC Center for a while, until we got too big, and then our commanding officer was--lived in Johnson Creek, and he was able to book us into the Army Reserve Center in Watertown. So we started going down there and we stayed all weekend. We had the cadets stay overnight, and as adults we patrolled. We assigned sleeping areas and they--we had a cadet that was on call--or that was on duty, just like if they were in the service. But we were also--we usually stayed up all weekend with them. So they would come on Saturday morning and they would leave on Sunday afternoon, late Sunday afternoon. And we cooked all their meals for them, and some of the cadets wanted to have duty helping to cook meals and stuff, and then they got little sniblets. You always tell the cadets that ate a lot. [laughs] They always wanted to do chow duty.

So we treated them just--and we had a gunny sergeant from the Marines that took care of all the drills and stuff. My husband was executive officer, and I was training officer and medical officer. So my nursing came in there. We had to do the medical officer from time to time, especially if we get a hysterical girl with a panic attack and things like that. And the training sessions, or as training officer, I would set up trainings for the cadets because they were able to go on two-week cruises on ships or at bases with the Coast Guard, as well as with the Navy. We had a couple cadets that thought they were really tough and wanted to try SEAL training. So we sent them out to California. They had a couple billets for

cadets out there, and decided they weren't tough enough. They weren't going to do any kind of SEAL training. And we had three of our female cadets went for two summers--went down to Florida with the Coast Guard. Whenever the cadets were on any ships or anything, they were treated just like as if they were crew, but they did have an adult assigned to them at all times. So they kept track that they weren't doing things that they shouldn't be doing--not necessarily in the way of partying, but things that they were too young to do as far as crew stuff goes. And the girls thoroughly enjoyed it. They go out in the ocean and they pick up the Cuban refugees that were coming back, the Haitian refugees that were coming back and stuff, and help process them through. And we had two of our female cadets that ended up as chiefs of our Sea Cadet Corps. And when we left, actually, after we left it started disbanding, because we were starting to have problems with parents thinking that we should treat their children like kindergartners. So some of us at--when we first started in the Sea Cadet Corps all of us were former military and most of us were Navy or Marine. So we knew what was expected and we had sixty cadets at that time. So it was a wonderful experience. It was a wonderful thing to do, and it didn't seem like it was--we'd been doing it for nine years. And our son, when he finished Sea Cadets when he was to the age when he couldn't be a Sea Cadet anymore, he decided there were billets for--Dick, what were they called?

Parkin: Midshipmen.

Parkin: Midshipmen, so he became a midshipman. And he got his, like, a petty officer uniform.

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And he had his midshipman insignia and stuff. So he stayed active with it for about three years after he got out. So it was a very interesting thing to do, and all that Navy stuff started coming back, all that training.

Thompson: Going back to your Navy stuff, as you look back on it what was especially challenging about your military service?

Parkin: The growing up, the maturing. I went in at eighteen. I was out at twenty-one. I did a lot of growing up during that time, a lot of decision making on my own. I didn't have my parents there to help me, and I didn't have any--I could go to a counselor if I wanted to, but I didn't feel I needed to, and just forming my life the way I wanted my life to be.

Thompson: Also thinking about your active service, you were in the medical profession. You were working some with Vietnam veterans. So what would you tell someone today who doesn't know anything about war,

based upon your experience?

Parkin: It's cruel and it's nasty. You can come out of it perfectly fine. Everybody's going to have a little psychological issue somewhere, whether it's the feeling of inadequacy, a feeling of guilt. Like my husband never went to Vietnam and he felt guilt for the longest time. And he's finally gotten past that, feeling that guilt. War is just a very nasty, cruel thing, and it should never happen. But unfortunately, it does and we've gone places where we probably should not have gone but, you know, the government made that decision that this is what--where we're going to go and this is what we need to do, and there were people that stepped up and said, "Yes, I'll do it."

Thompson: Tell me about your interactions with male service members and/or officers and, particularly if you're comfortable talking about it, any sexual discrimination or harassment that you might have experienced.

Parkin: I don't think I really ever experienced any sexual harassment, some general harassment, I guess you could call it, from female officers. I think they were--they knew that we were actually on an even footing being females, but being an officer they always felt like they had to lord it over somebody. I never interacted with the officers. Some of the men did. They dated the nurses, but there was really bad things that would happen if they got caught. The women would get mustered right out. They said, "That's it. You're done," and, you know, be treated like dirt, and that just wasn't a fair thing to do either. But the rules were set down. It was one of the rules. Enlisted don't cross the line with officers, and if you do you pay the price.

Thompson: Okay, so what has your military service meant to you?

Parkin: I served my country. I was proud to serve my country. I would do it again. If I was in the service today, if I was eighteen years old and in the service today, I would have much more opportunity to do things. I thought it was wonderful when women were allowed to go on ships. I had one incident when I was in Philadelphia that I went down on a dock to see a ship and I was in uniform and I was escorted off by the MPs. [laughs] And so I went down as a civilian and was treated like royalty. So you know, there was some discrimination there. The captains did not want females anywhere near their ships. We would contaminate them. And we had a girl in my boot camp company that got orders to a ship. It was very interesting. Her first name was Marion and I don't remember what her last name was.

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And it turned out that there was a male enlisted that had the same name, the exact same name, and he got orders to her A School. So she had to go.

It was out of California. I think it was out of San Francisco. She reported to her duty station and they said, "No, we're not going to do this," and they put her in just female cruise quarters until they could get the situation straightened out. And the male when he showed up to A School, that's when they realized that there was a problem because he had not put in for the school, but he thought, "Well, they gave it to me." So that's when they found out that there was a big problem. So they finally got their orders switched around and they got them to where they were supposed to be. [laughs] But I guess the captain of that ship just had a bit of a temper tantrum about the whole thing.

Thompson: Based upon your military service, how is your life different now or are you different for having served?

Parkin: Well, I grew up and had to learn responsibility, and decision-making, and I learned to stand up for myself and not to back down in certain situations, and learned respect for military people, especially Vietnam veterans, because that was the war during which I served. Even though I never went anywhere other than the states, I was exposed to the aftermath with the patients that I had, you know, personal contact with.

Thompson: What would you want people who listen to this interview to know? It could be somebody that listens to it tomorrow, ten years from now, twenty years from now.

Parkin: [laughs] The military is good for people. It's good for youth. If I had a way of doing it, I would have every single young person spend at least two years in the military. It would teach--get them out of this "I" mode. Too many of our youth have "I this," "I that," "you owe me, the government owes me, life owes me." They need to be taught that that's not what life is about, and they wouldn't necessarily need to go to war. I think they would need a couple years to grow up and learn that life is a compromise and that you need to learn how to interact in this compromise. You know, nothing is free. Nothing is going to be handed out to you. Unfortunately, our government tends to do that with some people. But, you know, you owe an allegiance to your country. You owe an allegiance to yourself. And that is--I think that's important.

Thompson: And I think this is my last question for you. Why was it important for you to do this interview? Why did you decide to do it?

Parkin: It's the only way my life is going to be put down in any kind of annals of history. [laughs] You know, I've always felt like, you know, yeah I've led an important life in some aspects, you know. But I have a chance to say what I feel. I have a chance to get in history, just like way back in the Revolutionary War, those people that wrote their memoirs and that kind of

thing. That's kind of like what this is.

Thompson: Well, before we end the interview, is there anything else that you would like to add or discuss?

Parkin: Well, go back to Sea Cadets. It was the fiftieth anniversary of the *Wisconsin*--USS *Wisconsin*.

[00:49:58]

And the Navy League in Madison sponsored our Sea Cadets to go out to Philadelphia and be on board the ship. They were going to be side boys. They were going to conduct themselves just as if they were in the service on the *Wisconsin*. We took sixty cadets, male and female, out. We had our officers, of course, went. And we had a couple other--the moms that went, and they stayed with the girls in their barracks. Officers got officers' quarters, and for my husband and myself it was like going back. I mean, it was just, you know, we went back to Philadelphia and it was like this was like home. I mean, it's where we met. It's where we, you know, interacted with each other, that kind of thing. And our cadets were extremely well behaved for having the age group of cadets that they were. And our daughter also went and our commanding officer said, "Well, she can't go," and Dick says--my husband says, "Yes, she can." He says, "I'm medically retired. I have full military benefits." He said, "She's a dependent. She can fly on any military transport and we were going by military transport." So it was interesting, and we had--the PR officer for the base in Philadelphia actually took our cadets on a special tour of the ship, and they were allowed to go up. They had the flag that was flying that had been a flag from the *Wisconsin*, like, fifty years ago. They're the ones that went up and retrieved the flag, and folded it, and presented it back to the Navy League at the banquet where they were side boys. They were actually the color guard for the Navy League banquet.

Marines were going to be, but there was a bit of a problem with the Marines. My husband, who was at Quantico, so he was stationed with the marines. He was the XO of the Sea Cadet Corps, and even though we were Sea Cadet we were allotted the same respect, et cetera, of a regular Navy officer. The Marines came on board the ship to do the color guard and they were a mess. Their uniforms weren't pressed. Their shoes weren't shined. They had a very lackadaisical attitude and it looked like they had been partying all night. So my husband went over to them and dressed them down about how they were dressed and he also told the PR officer that was on the ship with the cadets exactly what he thought about the thing. So instead of having the Marines come in as a color guard, it was our cadets that were the color guard. And they had done a color guard on the ship, and so they got a real nice tour of the base. And the Navy League

had arranged for a tour bus for us and our cadets. And we went down to downtown Philadelphia. And our cadets had their USS *Wisconsin*, the BB64 caps on, and they had their BB64 T-shirts on that we had for when they didn't have to wear their regular uniforms. And they lined up. They were at the Liberty Bell. Everybody went through and saw the Liberty Bell. And they lined up on the other side of the square right across from Independence Hall. I'm going to get emotional on this. And they were at attention and a gentleman came over. He was dressed up as George Washington, and he came over and asked if he could inspect the troops. Oh, it was something. There were--people were taking pictures that weren't even of our group. You know, everybody was standing there and watching this and listening, and he talked to every single cadet.

Thompson: Good memories.

Parkin: Oh, it was wonderful, and we later found out that this man has played George Washington for years. He has never stepped foot off the curb in front of Independence Hall.

[00:55:03]

And he came across and asked to inspect the troops.

Thompson: Very nice, very nice.

Parkin: Oh, it was just--it was so emotional, and then we did a tour. We did the different museums and we went to Betsy's Ross's house, and then to Independence Hall. And the cadets were allowed to go to the second floor. Most of the time people are not allowed on the second floor. They actually have a seismometer on the landing, because the building is fragile. They allowed the cadets to go upstairs and sign a copy of the Declaration of Independence. It was so cool. It was really neat. And they behaved so--and everybody--people would keep walking up to us and saying, "How do you keep these kids in control?" You know, these are teenagers, you know, and they stayed in the groups that they were assigned to and stuff. You know, and it wasn't like--they weren't marching by any means but they were very well behaved. And we got comment after comment from people about how well behaved they were. And they had an aircraft carrier that came in and the crew was staying at the same barracks that the cadets were staying in. And so they were down in the lounge and the crewmembers of the aircraft carrier were talking to the cadets, and if we had stayed one more day they would have been able to go on an aircraft carrier and had a tour of the ship, but we weren't there quite long enough for them to do that. And the crewmembers were just absolutely impressed with our cadets and how well they were, and their knowledge and stuff. So my Navy training kind of came back to me. [laughs]

Thompson: And you could pass it on to another generation.

Parkin: We could pass it on to the whole new generation, yeah.

Thompson: Yeah, well thank you very much.

Parkin: Oh, you're very welcome.

Thompson: Anything else you want to add before we close this out?

Parkin: If I had to do it over again, I would, and I think if I knew then what I know now I might have stayed in a little longer. Thinking back, one of my reasons that I didn't stay in is I had passed my exam for E3, petty officer 3rd, and there weren't--they refused to give it to me because they said the men needed it more because they were going to Vietnam so they needed it more. So they took my billet that I would have had and gave it to somebody else. I felt cheated. But it was a good experience. I would do it again. I did a lot of growing up. I did a lot of decision making in my life.

Thompson: And you did meet your husband.

Parkin: And I met my husband. [laughter] Dog gone it, I met Dick and here we are. We got married in 1970 and we're still married.

Thompson: Well, Mrs. Parkin, I want to say thank you very much. This has been very enjoyable, but more importantly I do want to say thank you for your service.

Parkin: Well, thank you very much.

Thompson: I appreciate it.

[End of Parkin.OH1687_file2][End of interview]