

WOMEN VETERANS HISTORICAL PROJECT

ORAL HISTORY COLLECTION

INTERVIEWEE: Dora Ann DeHart Atha

INTERVIEWER: Therese Strohmer

DATE: November 16, 2010

[Begin Interview]

TS: This is Therese Strohmer, and today is November 16th, 2010. I'm in Eden, North Carolina. This is an oral history interview for the Women Veterans Historical Project at the University of North Carolina at Greensboro. Dora Ann, I have—why don't you go ahead and say your name the way you'd like it on your collection?

DA: Dora Ann DeHart Atha.

TS: Okay, sounds good. Well, thank you so much for offering to be part of our collection. I would love to hear—why don't you start by telling us about when and where you grew up?

DA: I was born right here on this same land, Daddy bought it in 1928 and didn't get married until the 1930s, and so we was [sic] all born in—across the line into Virginia, and I came back home, I was living on the same land.

TS: This—yes, we're right close to Virginia here, right?

DA: Yes—

TS: You said the cows are—

DA: The cows are in Virginia.

TS: The cows are in Virginia.

DA: You can almost spit across the line. [chuckling]

TS: So, you—so, this is kind of country out here, is that what it was—was it even more rural?

DA: Oh, we didn't even have paved road until I was about twelve, thirteen.

TS: Yes.

DA: It was all dirt road, and we were the last of everything for many, many years, there wasn't anything on below us. Now it's trailer city.

TS: [laughs] Was it—was it like a farm that was—that you had, or what was—

DA: It was eighty acres back there, and we had raised tobacco, and we never raised cotton, we raised our own garden and had our cows and our pigs and the horses, and—we had horses after Daddy died. He loved his horses. He was born in eighteen and ninety four, he was six years old at the turn of the century, in World War I, so you know, we were raised the old timey way.

TS: [chuckles] Did you have any brothers or sisters?

DA: I had four brothers.

TS: What are their names?

DA: Joe was named after his granddaddy Joseph Burgart, and Bob was named after Daddy, Bobby Gates, Earl was named—I'm not sure, Earl Wayne, and then Frank is Franklin Edward after Uncle Davis.

TS: And do you have—so all brothers, no sisters?

DA: No sisters.

TS: And you're the only girl.

DA: I'm the only girl.

TS: Where do you fall in that line?

DA: I'm the fourth.

TS: You're the fourth, okay. So, you're not quite the youngest.

DA: No, no.

TS: No. To have been the baby girl, that would have been maybe something, huh?

DA: Mama said I was spoiled, I said I didn't know when. [laughter]

TS: Now, what did you—now, did your dad just work on the farm, then?

DA: No, the mill, he worked for the Draper Sheeting mill, started out he worked for the woolen[?] mill, and I think World War I picked him up and took him off and he came back, and then worked mill and farm.

TS: You said Drapen—

DA: Draper-sheeting.

TS: Is that the name of the company?

DA: It was Fieldcrest.

TS: Oh, Fieldcrest, okay. But that was the type of work that they did, then?

DA: Well, we were three cities, we were Leaksville, Spray, and Draper. And so it combined all into Eden, so when you say Draper, you're talking about ten miles down the road.

TS: What's that middle one, Spray?

DA: Spray. S-P-R-A-Y. We had the Spray Cotton Mill—that's a traffic circle. Yes.

TS: Now, did your mom work at all?

DA: No, she raised—

TS: Not outside the home.

DA: No. Five kids and cows and pigs and calves and gardens, she had her hands full.

TS: She worked. [laughter]

DA: She worked.

TS: She just didn't get wages.

DA: She made all of our clothes.

TS: Oh, did she?

DA: She made my coats and hats and pocketbooks when I was a little girl. I still have some of them.

TS: Oh. Well, so what was it like growing up here?

DA: Well, it was back in the late 40s and early 50s, and it was sort of just—there wasn't hardly anything here. There was no 14 [highway], there was no fast food, just a whole different world from today. We didn't even have running water except for two [legs?] and lights. Virginia wouldn't run lights, because we were too far away from everybody else. North Carolina wouldn't run lights because we was in Virginia. So we never had lights until I was about thirteen or fourteen and we built this house over here, my Mama did.

TS: Really?

DA: Yes. So, we grew up without a whole lot of things that people can't imagine today. I still have a wringer wash machine. I don't use an automatic.

TS: A wringer wash machine, is that like the—

DA: No, well, it's electrical, but—

TS: But yes, it cranks it through or what does it—

DA: Yes.

TS: Yes, okay. What did you think, as a girl growing up out here? What kind of stuff did you do?

DA: Well, you didn't know what to think, because nobody else had anything either. I can remember the first time we had a—we had a battery radio when we lived out in Virginia, and Daddy would listen to Gabriel Heatter. And nobody touched that except Daddy, because it had battery, and it would go dead. And he listened to that Gabriel Heatter, and he listened to the Grand Old Opry. And that was a big thing in our life. And then there was a bus that used to come around every hour on the hour and it was ten cents to go to town, but we didn't go to town very often. [chuckles]

TS: And where would a town—

DA: Well, we'd go all the way over into the town of Leaksville or on Boulevard.

TS: I see. Okay. Now, did you—we were talking a little bit earlier, before I started the tape, about where you went to school. You want to talk about that a little?

DA: Well, Virginia, we lived in Virginia, but Daddy wouldn't drive us all the way to Axton, Virginia, which is about a twenty-mile round trip, and this—you're talking about, well, Joe was born in 1936, so '42, and he wasn't going to start driving him twenty miles in 1942. So he just sent us down the road and we caught the North Carolina school bus and we went to North Spray School, which went up to seventh grade, and it's about three miles away, then we went to Leaksville-Spray Intermediate School, and then we went to Morehead High School, so those were our three schools, and so the people that we knew were—we all went to the same schools, we all knew the same people all the way through our whole life, really.

TS: Did you—and did you like school?

DA: Oh, yes.

TS: What'd you like about it?

DA: Well, I just enjoyed school. I was good with English and Earl was good with math, so I did his English and he did my math. [laughter] Not what they would approve of today.

TS: Well, I don't know that that still doesn't go on today.

DA: [laughs]

TS: But so, did you get to play any kind of intermural sports or anything like that?

DA: We didn't really have too much of that stuff that I know of, until you got up into high school, and then we didn't have really—the older boys, Bob, Joe, and Earl, they were taken, as soon as school would allow them to be out, which was about eleven o' clock in the morning, Daddy would pick them up at North Spray and take them to Draper, where he had another farm, and then he would tell them what he expected them to have done before dark. So, then they would do that, they walked ten miles. Well, I don't remember, may not have been ten miles, they probably walked about five miles, and got in an old car and waited for Daddy to get off at eleven o' clock and come home. They went to bed and went back to school the next morning, Daddy was waiting at eleven o' clock to pick them up to take them back to Draper. And so during the fall, especially, you know, they were well occupied, and we just didn't do things like that. We didn't have ROTC when I was in school.

TS: No?

DA: No. So, my wanting to go in the army was just something that I had wanted all my life, and it really had no way of getting out 'til I joined. [chuckles]

TS: Why did—[clears throat] why did you want to go in the army all your life?

DA: I really don't know. Daddy was in World War I and we had his old helmet, I've still got it, out there in the building. And we had pictures of Daddy as, you know, as a soldier, and just—he didn't really talk that much about it, but there was—I just always wanted to go.

TS: Because you would have been born during—when the war was on.

DA: Forty-two.

TS: Too young, really, to remember it, I would think.

DA: Yes. I don't really remember anything about it. It was just—it was just something that I had always wanted to do, I just—it was a lifelong dream.

TS: Did you have any uncles or anything like that that had been in?

DA: Oh, we had a lot of cousins and then, too, by the time I got up to join, a lot of people around here, Gene Hutson and you know, different—and they had the draft, so people, by the time you got ninth, tenth grade, all these boys were being drafted in. As a matter of fact, when I was wanting to get into service, I kept going to the post office, and they had the [United States] Air Force and the Marines and the Army, but no WAC.

And I kept saying—they kept saying “Oh, you come on with us, you know, your friends are in the navy, your friends is [sic] in the air force, your friends is [sic] in the Marines.”

I said “No, I only want the army.”

Didn’t even know what they were called, but I wanted it, so finally they gave it up and said “We’ll get you a recruiter here.” My own recruiter.

TS: Oh, is that right?

DA: Yes.

TS: So, they got [laughing]—you solicited for a recruiter.

DA: Well, that was the only thing I wanted. When I was in eleventh grade, we had to make a career booklet. And I made a career booklet—that’s how I got those pamphlets I was telling you about. I got all those pamphlets and made a career booklet. Well, Mama had heard the army so much that she refused to allow it to be mentioned anymore. It was not allowed in the house anymore. Don’t even talk about it.

TS: How long had you been talking about it?

DA: Probably all my life, I can’t remember—I can remember as a little girl, my Aunt Rosie, Daddy’s sister, lived across the street, and that was where we’d go get water a lot of times, because it was—down under the hill was a spring, but I guess eventually Mama then just sent us—thought to send us out to Aunt Rosie’s.

TS: Well, it’s too bad we’re not doing a video interview, because everybody’d see that you’re sitting here in your uniform. [laughs] That you still fit into!

DA: [laughs] I love my uniform, it makes you feel patriotic.

TS: Well, it looks good, it looks good.

DA: Thank you.

TS: Well, let me go back just a little bit, before we get into the army. Did you—so you were good in English, is that what you liked, English? And did you have a favorite teacher or anything like that?

DA: I don't know that I had a favorite teacher, but I'll tell you one thing, there was a lady called Miss Ivy, and she was eleventh grade English teacher, and she'd make you get up in front of the class and tell what—give us books to read, then we'd have to get up and give a book report on it. And I never was one that—I like to talk, but I don't like to get in front of people. And so we had to do that. She also taught us that rats gnaw and humans say no. You don't say “cheer”, but “chair”. You don't say “chimeley”, but “chimeley”. Actually, I probably still didn't say it right, but anyway.

TS: Which one is that?

DA: [laughs]

TS: Chimney?

DA: Those—those were the things. And she talked about—there was a hotel over in town, but I mean, who ever went to a hotel? I had never even been in a restaurant until I went in to apply for a job after I graduated from high school. Had no idea what they did.

TS: In a restaurant?

DA: Yes. Didn't know how to behave in one, either. But she did a lot about trying to tell us, you know, what was on the outside world.

TS: Right.

DA: She talked about tips, she talked about hotels, and bellhops, and how to act, and how to sit, and she did a lot of things that—a lot of people didn't like her, but she really was a teacher that tried to bring us out of the country and get us prepared for the city life.
[chuckles]

TS: That's interesting, that's interesting. Did you—so, what kind of things did you do—so your brothers are all working pretty hard, though maybe your younger one, he's not.

DA: No, he didn't do—

TS: He got away with it a little bit.

DA: Because he was five years younger than I was, and Daddy was—Daddy was 65 when I retired [graduated] from high school. So, they were older parents to start with, so.

TS: Right. So, what kind of things did you do around the house and things?

DA: Well, Mama could keep you busy; that was for sure.

TS: What's your mama's name?

DA: Clara Fay. And so, she—she believed in work, and there was plenty of work to do, because she tended mostly to the garden, she did all the milking, and she used to get me up out of the bed sometimes at twelve o' clock at night because she'd be so tired that she didn't milk, maybe that afternoon—at six o' clock, or whatever.

She just milked in the mornings, and she did all the milking until she got about sixty, and she said "You know, I've had it, I'm through, I'm not milking anymore." She'd milked her whole life, and she was raised up in Patrick Springs, and so she was the second of about ten boys. So, she felt like she had already raised one family before she started us, she said one time. She said "I've been raising kids my whole life." But she would get me up and we would go out in the pasture and go run the cows up and milk them. Well, she let me go back to bed, but she'd make me go with her.

TS: [chuckles] At midnight.

DA: Yes.

TS: Oh, goodness—because she had to get them milked.

DA: Yes, they had to be milked, and the next morning, she had to get us off, and Daddy never got up, because he worked second shift, so we never saw him, but—I never saw much of Daddy, because we were in bed by the time he got here from work, and then we went to school before he got up. He said one time he wasn't crazy enough to get out there in the middle of that mix. [laughs] Five of us trying to go to school.

TS: That's right, that's right. Now, do you remember anything, because—so, your school years would have been kind of during the Cold War, like the height—the tension with the

Soviets that we were having. Do you remember—did you have any of that duck-and-cover, any of that kind of stuff?

DA: I don't remember any of it.

TS: No?

DA: No. As a matter of fact, we did, as we got on up older, I think we had some hurricane—you know, told you what to do, but that's been so long ago, that may have been my children had it [laughing], I'm not—

TS: Oh, instead of you, huh? Do you remember anything about that, politically? Did you have any political discussions at home?

DA: Well, we didn't have television, we only had a radio we wasn't[sic] allowed to listen to. We never knew anything about what was going on in the outside world.

TS: No?

DA: No.

TS: Just like the local community and things like that?

DA: That's about all—and I was raised in the era where children shut their mouths. They didn't get in there and mess in between the parents talking. My mama and daddy said that little girls belong outdoors and you went outdoors. You didn't—you didn't sit around and listen to what adults had to say. But honestly, I think all they talked about anyway was cows and pigs and horses. [laughs]

TS: What was going on with the farm.

DA: Tobacco and the prices and I mean, you know, we was pretty well self-contained, I think.

TS: Did you have to help a lot with that, with the tobacco?

DA: Oh, tobacco, yes. I never did string a lot, I was doing—I was mostly handing, I did a lot of the handing. My brother—

TS: What is that, what do you do with handing?

DA: You picked up three leaves, and you handed them to the stringer. And I never really did want to be the stringer, because that string ran through your finger—

TS: Oh.

DA: And you had to loop one and wrap the other, and loop one and wrap the other one. And it would just cut your fingers all to pieces, even with Band-Aids and all. So usually, a lot of the times, the older girls would do—most of the girls did the stringing and the handing; little girls did the handing. And Daddy didn't care how much you talked as long as sister you keep those hands going as fast as your mouth.

TS: [laughs]

DA: So, I know how to work and talk.

TS: That's a good line. So, all right, let's go back to—you're in high school and you've been thinking about going in—

DA: I made my career booklet.

TS: You made your career booklet, and you wanted to go in the army. Did you ever have any thought of any other possible thing that you could do with your life? What'd you think of—when you're sitting there as a little girl thinking about the army, what kind of expectations did you have?

DA: Who knew? I was—Daddy was in the Calvary and we had horses, I might have been in the Calvary, I don't know!

TS: That's all you—

DA: But Miss Ivy, when we did our career booklet, and I had the military on it, and I had all these pictures of these girls in these uniforms and they looked so nice, you know, and all of this. As a matter of fact, I still have my career book.

TS: Do you really?

DA: Yes. And she said "You'll never go to the—" Oh, and the other thing was, I was going to join the army and go to Germany, because my Granddaddy Burgart was a German.

TS: I see.

DA: He wasn't born there, but his parents were. And so, I had always wanted to go to Germany.

And she says "You'll never do it."

So, after I joined the army, a couple of times when I was home, I thought "I ought to go in there with my uniform and tell her, "Here I am, I did it!" And I even got to go to Germany.

TS: Did you tell them—did you come—

DA: No, I never did.

TS: Didn't want to, like, put it in their faces?

DA: Well, you know, it's—

TS: Too, you were being polite. [laughter] Well, let's talk about, so you get through high school, you graduate from high school, and then what; what happened then?

DA: Well, I needed a job, and so I went into the Boulevard Restaurant to see, there between Leaksville and Spray, there's a little town called Boulevard. And I went in and applied for a job. Didn't have any idea what there was doing or how to do, I certainly didn't know anything about setting tables, because we didn't set tables, we just—we drank out of paint jars, we never drank out of glasses.

TS: Out of what jars?

DA: Paint. P-A-I-N-T. Paint, yes.

TS: What kind of—oh, really? Paint jars?

DA: Paint jars. You know, like quart jars, paint jars.

TS: Were they—what were they made out of?

DA: Just glass, Mason jars.

TS: Mason jars, okay.

DA: And we had plenty of cows, so we used to drink—it was nothing for us to drink a quart of milk each, because you drank two pints, it was a quart. So—but anyway, I went in and I applied for the job, and they sort of looked at me. I was seventeen; I graduated from high school at seventeen. And we were picking blackberries the next day, and my little brother Frankie come running down because somebody, out here I guess, had a telephone. I don't really remember how, somebody, anyway, got hold of us and said they wanted me to come to work the next day. So, I went in, and I had no idea how to serve anybody, how to do anything. And I worked a big party—I didn't work but that summer, because they started beer in September, and I wasn't but seventeen. I had to move on, so I moved on to the dime store. But right before I had to quit, they had a party, you know, with these men and it was steak[?], and I had a handful of silverware, and I had to go behind them and put the silverware in the proper place, and this silverware fell out of my hand and right down the back of the guy's jacket. [chuckles] When that happens, you don't expect much of a tip. Not that many people tipped you anyway, back then.

TS: No, they didn't.

DA: But whenever they started the beer, then I went to Leaksville and applied for a dime store job. And I loved candy, and I was put on the candy aisle.

TS: Oh, goodness.

DA: But I didn't stay there long, I don't know why, they sent me on to the material, I couldn't eat the material. [laughter] There was sort of like a—not a full upstairs, that the bossman, the owner, set up there, and that was where his office was. And so he was like at the end of the store here, and the candy counter was right here as you came in the door. So, he had perfect watch of me.

TS: Were you sneaking some of that candy?

DA: Oh, I probably snuck quite a bit of it. I mean, you know, you had to fill it up, and so—

TS: How often did you get a chance to have some candy?

DA: Well, let's not even think about that one. Like I said, he moved me to the material.

TS: The material.

DA: I didn't work there long.

TS: You kept your job, though.

DA: Oh, yes. Well, this was in—I must have started to work there in about October of '60, I graduated in June of '60 and I worked in a restaurant until it was probably—I wasn't, I hadn't turned eighteen, so I had to quit in September, because I turned eighteen in September, the last of September. And so this, maybe, was about October when I started at the dime store, so worked through the Christmas. Well, in that following April, April of '61, was when I joined service. When I had started in December going to the post office to talk to the recruiters, you know, and so I quit my job and I had my ticket to go to Charlotte, North Carolina. And I had never been out of town.

TS: This was when you were—

DA: I just had turned eighteen.

TS: And so were you waiting to turn eighteen to join, or?

DA: No, I just hadn't turned eighteen, and I really never thought about it in that respect. I just got a job and that job ran out, I got a second job, and I was right close to the post office, it was right around the corner, and I saw all these recruiters, and it just got me going again, wanting to join. And so I didn't tell Mama, because she already said, after I made my career booklet "I don't want to hear it anymore, don't want to even hear the word." So she didn't.

TS: What was the reason that she didn't want to hear it anymore?

DA: She was tired of it; she didn't want me to go.

TS: That's what I was going to say, now, how did she feel about you when you actually—

DA: Oh, well, we'll get into that one later.

TS: Okay.

DA: I told the boss lady that I was going to Charlotte, I was joining the army. I talked about it all the time, except at home. It was never mentioned at home. And I had a car, I had a '50

Ford. And Mama had come, the last day that I was going to work—I don't know when I thought I was going to tell Mama that I was going to Charlotte.

TS: Maybe you weren't going to. [laughter]

DA: I probably hadn't got that far.

TS: [unclear]

DA: But Mama came, and she was going to ride home with me. And as we was going out the door, because then, everybody closed at six o' clock. And as I was going out the door, Mrs. DeHart—it was really DeHart Dime, he was a cousin, but—an older cousin that I didn't know he was a cousin until I worked there, and one day he told me.

But I was going out the door and Mrs. DeHart said "Now, Dora Ann, if that doesn't work out going to the army, you always have a job here."

And Mama says "What? What are you talking about? What is she talking about?"

I said "[clears throat] Let's just go home, Mama." [laughs]

TS: You ignored it?

DA: Well, no, with Mama, you didn't ignore things too much. She was not very happy.

TS: Was she giving an earful on that ride home?

DA: Whoof! She was upset with me. But I left, I went on Monday; I took off. I had my ticket and I went to Charlotte.

TS: What was her objection?

DA: Well, she really didn't say, she just didn't want me to go. I mean, I was her daughter, I was her only daughter and [chuckles]—you know, too, the men came back and they talked a lot about what went on. And to be honest with you, I was saved as a young girl. I was saved when I was about twelve or thirteen, I went out to the gospel tabernacle right down the road. And Mama sent me to church my whole life. Now, the boys didn't go, but I used to drag my baby brother. And a lot of people, when they found out I wanted to go, they started talking about what all goes in, and how you screamed and how you cussed and this and that and the other. And to be honest with you, that was the only thing I dreaded. I dreaded going in and being cussed at, because we just wasn't accustomed—we didn't grow up cussing.

TS: Right.

DA: People didn't cuss when I was young, except men. And women just didn't do it. But I dreaded it for that, but I wanted to go so badly that I just figured I could handle that.

TS: Now, how did your dad feel about it?

DA: Well, he never had anything to say about it. I don't think they thought it would really happen, because I went on down to Charlotte, and I was met by a Sergeant Faircloth. And she had a brown coat on, and it was tied in the middle, and it was sort of loose at both ends, and a silly little hat on top of her hair. She was brown-headed. And she poked her head on the bus, and I'd never been out of town, and she said "We're looking for a DeHart." Well, I'm the DeHart, and I had a little AWOL bag, a little bag, that—we didn't even own suitcases. I had borrowed it from a neighbor out here, who had joined the army before I did.

TS: What's an AWOL bag?

DA: It was just a small plastic little round bag, and it had two handles on it, and you put your overnight—and I had gone out there to Gerald McGuire's and borrowed it. And so I got off the bus with that and she said who she was and that she was a recruiter and so she would take care of things for that day. And I was told that I would probably have to spend the night, so I had, you know—I had my flannel pajamas in there.

TS: [chuckles] Okay.

DA: But I don't remember too much about what happened in between when she got me, which had had to have been after lunch, and then I was given a lot of tests and stuff, because I had written in my papers that I was hungry and tired. And they took me to a hotel, they took me to the Mecklenburg—she took me to the Mecklenburg Hotel. And they were doing remodeling.

And she said "Now, I can't go around where—the front's closed off, so I'm going to have to let you off here. You've got to walk around to the side."

Well, that was no big thing. And so I take my little AWOL bag and I'm walking around the sidewalk to the side of the thing, and this big colored man, he had shoulders—honestly, he must have been that broad. He had hands like beefsteaks, and had pearly white teeth. This black man, we called them colored then, he came up to me and just sort of grabbed my suitcase and took off with it. And I thought the joker was

stealing it, and I thought to myself, that's not even my bag, and you're not going anywhere with my bag. And so I took off behind him [makes clicking noise], I had on high heels and a spring suit, a little green—little suit. And he—I thought, when he turns this corner, I'm going to jump straddle his back and I'm going to beat the stew out of him and I'm going to get my bag back. And I'm going to run. But as we turned the corner, I saw that he was headed for a desk, and Miss Ivy had tried to teach us about the outside world, and I decided, okay, this guy's got to be a bellhop. He's not stealing my bag, he's helping me with my bag to the desk. But I remember she told us about tips, but I didn't remember what she told us. I mean, this was two years ago, when I was in the eleventh grade, and I didn't remember what she told me about tips, because after I got signed in with all my papers from the army—

TS: Right.

DA: He put me on an elevator, and I'd only been on an elevator when I was a little girl. And here I am on this little tiny room with the door shut, and this room starts moving up. But I did have enough sense to shut my mouth and stand there, and so we get to the—I don't know what hall we went to, and he takes me to a room and sets my bag down and stands there and waits. Well, I knew what he was waiting for, but I wasn't prepared to pay any tips, I didn't have [chuckling] any idea what to do. But I'm not sure quite exactly what I did do about that, I'm sure I gave him something, but I don't know what. And he came back several different times. They were really very helpful, because other military people—personnel were put there. I didn't meet another WAC, but I did meet a WAF.

TS: A WAF.

DA: Women's Army—Air Force.

TS: Now, you had—this was just where you were enlisting, right?

DA: Yes, I was just taking the test and—

TS: Okay. So what happened there?

DA: Well, they sent a girl up that they thought I'd be interested in. But the next day, we had more tests, and then I was sent home. I was told, and I knew from my brother Earl that had joined a couple of months before I did—and that was another thing Mama wasn't happy with. She'd already lost a son to the army, and it wasn't but about two months later, and I'm trying to go in. So, that does not make for a happy mama.

TS: Right.

DA: I knew that I would have to come home and stay a few more days, and Mama had to sign papers. Even though I was eighteen, Mama had to sign papers.

TS: Because you had to be twenty-one as a girl.

DA: Twenty-one, then, yes. And so, we got my stuff all done, and I caught a bus and came back home. Mama had the silent treatment. [laughs]

TS: Oh, did she?

DA: But I had my papers, and she had to sign them, and I was hoping she'd have them signed by the twenty-fifth, because that was when I was supposed to do it. And finally she told me that she didn't want to hear any more about it, and she wasn't going to sign them. Daddy had to sign them too.

And so I called Sergeant Faircloth and I said "Well, Mama's done made up her mind, she's not going to sign for me."

So, that Monday, I took off and went to town with a boy that was in the air force that was home, and come home several hours later and found out that Sergeant Faircloth had come up anyway. And she was enough country, and had had enough sense—well, I mean, let's face it, how many people had she already enlisted? She knew how to handle these little old ladies. [chuckling]

TS: Okay.

DA: And so when I came in, I was shocked that there she sit.

TS: There she was.

DA: And she had been there for several hours, she must have come shortly after I left. And we didn't have cell phones, so there was no way for anybody to call anybody, you just showed up.

TS: Right.

DA: And she'd talk army, and Mama'd get hot. And she'd talk farming, and cows, and pigs, and horses, and tobacco, and Mama'd cool off. Then she'd talk army, Mama'd get hot

again. [chuckles] So, after I came in, I was a little uppity, I'm sure, because I didn't hardly know how to go around Eden, much less anywhere else.

I told Mama, I said "Well, if you don't sign, I'll just pack my things and I'm going to Greensboro." Now, Greensboro was fifty, sixty miles away, I'd never even been there. I said "I'll just get me a job in Greensboro." That's sort of a dumb thing. But we finally sort of coerced her into signing. She finally did sign.

TS: Coerced her. [chuckles]

DA: But my daddy—

TS: She wasn't still happy about it.

DA: Oh, no. But Daddy, we said—I sort of suspect that this came sort of from the recruiting sergeant. She said that we didn't exactly know where Daddy was. Well, that wasn't exactly the truth, but it wasn't exactly a lie. Daddy was down at Draper, but we didn't exactly know where he was in Draper.

TS: Oh, you need him to sign the papers.

DA: To sign the papers. So, the boy that had—Bobby Gilley, that was in the air force, that I had gone to town with, he had to sign and I don't really know why he had to sign, but I read that in my paper, that he signed for me.

TS: For you?

DA: Yes.

TS: On behalf of your dad, basically?

DA: I really don't really know.

TS: Huh.

DA: So, Sergeant Faircloth helped me get my little pack together and we took off to—back down to Charlotte, and I still had a couple of days that I had to—

TS: Was your mom still hot, as you say?

DA: Do what?

TS: Was your mom still hot?

DA: Well, I think she just cried.

TS: Yes. Now, what'd your brothers think?

DA: Well, they weren't around.

TS: But they knew that you were going to do this, right?

DA: No, well—

TS: They didn't?

DA: They knew that I—they knew that I had applied, of course they knew that I had been to Charlotte, and my older brother had already passed away, he got killed in Florida when he was twenty-one. I was still in school when he passed away. So, Bob was the oldest, and Bob worked in a mill, and Earl was already in service, and Frank, he wasn't but fourteen.

TS: Younger?

DA: So, he didn't—he didn't care. [laughs]

TS: Let's talk about, then, so you go down to Charlotte, and you're going to go in the army, now, right?

DA: Yes.

TS: Tell me about that experience.

DA: The closest I came to walking out—I don't know if you want this on the tape or not.

TS: Yes, we want it all on tape.

DA: [laughs] I had to have a physical.

TS: Okay.

DA: And I'd never been to a doctor.

TS: Oh, goodness.

DA: And I refused to take off my clothes.

TS: [chuckles] So how did that go?

DA: [laughs] It didn't! They told me I could either do it or leave.

TS: Right.

DA: So, I had to do a lot of contemplating on that thing, whether I was going to leave or not.

TS: Was it a male doctor that you had?

DA: I—probably, yes, I'm sure it was.

TS: Might have made it more difficult.

DA: Well, and I didn't know that, then, I just—I was just sent into the doctor's office and told, you know, take off my clothes and put this little gown on. Well, I took off my outside clothes, I didn't take off my inside clothes. [chuckling] But anyway, we got through that, and then I went back to the Mecklenburg Hotel. That was where the campus—and a girl, Marylou Coddle, was sent up to my room. Like I said, they were really nice about [tending?] other personnel. And we—I had already had supper, but she went out to eat and I went with her, and we compared the list that Sergeant Faircloth had given me of what I could have at the army and what she could have, you know, in the air force.

TS: Right. Were they about the same?

DA: Basically, they was [sic] about the same thing.

TS: Yes.

DA: And so the next morning, we met for breakfast, and I never did see her, I don't really know what happened to her after that, but I was sworn in that day.

TS: But you remember her name!

DA: I also have her picture.

TS: Oh my goodness. [laughter]

DA: I have her picture.

TS: Did you know her before this, or just—

DA: No, no.

TS: Okay.

DA: When I was there the first time, there was a little short girl who was being sworn in, she actually was two weeks ahead of me. She was from Gastonia, and all I knew about her was her name was Farrar, and she was a whole lot shorter than I was. Well, I had on heels, and she was short to start with, so I was tall and slender and over her, and she went on into basic before I did, and believe it or not, I met her in Fort Sam Houston. We was at the laundry sink washing clothes, and I was talking about this little bitty short girl that I had met in Charlotte, North Carolina that had joined the army before me.

She says “Well, I’m the girl!” [laughter]

TS: She looked a little taller then?

DA: Well, no, she was still a little bitty short thing. We’re friends to this day.

TS: Is that right? Where does she live now?

DA: She still lives in Gastonia. She called me the other night, and I told her that you were coming, and she just—

TS: Oh, we’ll have to get her name and—

DA: Well, try. But she—bound and declared, she didn’t remember anything about it. I—because I was asking her if she remembered the cadence.

And she says “No.”

I said “Don’t you remember? [in cadence, singing] Here comes Grandpa, across the field, one-two, driving his Ford [unclear] automobile, three-four, bring it on up, one up two up three up four—”

She said “Nope, don’t remember any of it.” [laughter]

TS: Not even after you gave her a little song for it, huh? Well, I’ll have to write that down.

DA: Oh, I love cadence. They used to—

TS: Well, tell me though, okay, so you get—you’re—you join the army, you put your hand up and—

DA: I was sworn in and I was sent off.

TS: And you’re sent off and where’d you head off to for your basic training?

DA: Well, they put me on a plane, and I’d never been on a plane before.

TS: Oh! Tell me about that experience.

DA: Oh, that was scary. I didn’t know what to do with all this. People were going everywhere, but you know, you had to pretend like you knew. I mean, after all, I’m old enough to join the army now—

TS: That’s right.

DA: —I got to pretend like I know what I’m doing. It was like getting on a bus, and I found my seat, and got on it and sat down, and a little guy, a little short heavysset guy with a bald head sat down beside me. And I guess he decided that he had to take care of this nervous little kid, because the plane cranked up, and it was—I guess we rolled back just a little bit. But the buildings around me wasn’t going anywhere, but we were shaking just a little bit, not really much, but I mean, you know, you could feel it.

TS: Right.

DA: And I’m thinking “Wow, what’s happening here? How can we be flying, we haven’t—the buildings are still standing?”

He said “We’re warming up.” [laughs]

TS: The propellers were just kind of going around?

DA: Shaking us, I guess. And so—and then when they brought us, they brought us shrimp. And I'd never eaten shrimp, didn't know what it was except it—just little squiggly things. And he, I guess, decided that all people need to—

TS: Try?

DA: Try it, so he had me to eat it, and I ate it. But I think my nerves—because I got so sick.

TS: Oh.

DA: But I didn't throw up on the plane, I did afterwards. But I think it was my nerves. For a long time, I couldn't eat on a plane.

TS: Yes.

DA: But we had a layover in Alabama—I mean, not in Alabama, in Atlanta, Georgia. And then I got on a little ol' bitty plane, and it only held nine.

TS: How big was the one that you were on before?

DA: Well, I don't know, but it had more than nine seats! [laughs]

TS: Okay.

DA: And so this one only had nine seats on it, that's what I—

TS: See the pilot up there, right?

DA: Well, you know, I don't know. I took a picture of the plane—of a plane, I don't know if it was the plane, but it probably was.

TS: We'll have to look through and see that.

DA: And see that. And there was a girl named Bender on that plane, I met up with her, and she was going to Fort McClellan, Alabama, also, this was sort of, I guess, a hop from Atlanta to Fort McClellan. And we—when we landed, we had a number to call. When we went in—what is really an airport, it's probably like Shiloh over here, it's just a little drop-off

place. And the man said “We’re closed, and you have to sit outside on the baggage carts.” Well, we didn’t have anything but our little layover bags—

TS: Until when? How long were you—

DA: But we had a number to call for somebody to come pick us up. So finally, this Jeep comes, and a boy is driving it. And he’s just tickled to death, I mean, you know, here are these two raw recruits and I’m sure we looked—I probably looked green around the gills. And so, it seemed like it was a long ways, I really would love to go back to Fort McClellan and just see, you know, how it could have been. But we get there to the WAC detachment and he’s just full of joy. He’s laughing and teasing and oh, y’all are really in for it, because he probably was a greenhorn just out of basic. And we were just going into it. And he said “Lots of luck!” Yes. So, we go in, and there was this tall lady with a black shirt and a black pair of pants, and she had very short hair, they all looked like everybody had short hair, sort of. And there was these girls running around, black ones and white ones and Mexicans, and they had their hair all tied up in kerchiefs and rollers and they had on shorts and a shirt.

They were scrubbing and mopping and it was like monkeys, they were cleaning the walls and I thought “I’m in a woman’s prison.” [laughs] I had decided maybe this wasn’t—this didn’t look [like] those photographs I had seen. And this lady, this tall lady, she kept saying something about a number. I don’t remember what she said, but she kept saying we had a number, we had a number, and all we had that I thought about was a telephone number, but that wasn’t what she wanted. She wanted our serial number.

TS: I see.

DA: Which was [serial number redacted]. Believe me, when I learned it, I never forgot it. But that was what she kept wanting. And we didn’t—

TS: But you didn’t know at that time.

DA: No, we didn’t know what—we had them, because she knew we had them, but we didn’t know what they were.

TS: Right.

DA: So, she goes up three flights of stairs, and we’re trying to follow her up, and I’m thinking, “Boy, she really thinks she’s something, don’t [sic] she? She don’t [sic] even bother to help us.” Little I knew about the army, didn’t I? But we get up there in this big hall, and

she goes into this big room and there's just bunk beds, iron bunk beds. There's two rows here, there's an empty aisle, and two rows over here.

And she says "You go to the next bed and that's your bed." And she said "Is there anybody in here that wants to show these ladies around?" And she said "Don't everybody offer at one time," because nobody offered. And finally one girl said she would. But all we actually saw was a big bathroom, it just had, you know, stalls and then sinks on the wall, and then she took us to a room that had washing machines and ironing boards. It was about twenty-four ironing boards in there. And then we go back and lights was [sic] out at ten o' clock, and she said we could take a bath, but lights was going to be out at ten. So, the lights was cut out while we was trying to get a shower, and then we had to find our way back down the hall into the bed and find the bed, and when I hopped in my bed, I looked over and there was a colored girl and she had gold teeth. And there was enough light in the windows or something that her gold teeth kept shining at me.

TS: [chuckles]

DA: And then somebody—they—somebody said they were hungry, and that was about all I really remember about it.

TS: From that first night?

DA: Yes, and I put on—oh, Mama had made me a pair, that winter, probably was my Christmas present, of [unclear] lime green pajamas. Homemade, in Anniston, Alabama, in April—the first of May. I had them on, and I crawled in my bed. [chuckling] I got a lot of teasing about that. When the girls got to where, you know, we got more familiar with each other, they'd tell about the first night they saw you and what—Culp was the girl that was beside me, and she said, "Oh."

TS: What'd they think of you? Did they tell you?

DA: Oh, they thought I was country.

TS: Were you?

DA: Well, what do you think? [laughs] And talk about Southern accents. There was a lot of them from the north, and my Southern accent, I got teased about that the whole—all the way through the army, all the way.

TS: Did you?

DA: Yes. Now, people tease me about how I don't talk so Southern. I don't know.

TS: What—so that was your first night, and then—what other kind of memorable things do you have?

DA: Oh, I remember the next morning!

TS: Well, let's hear it.

DA: They called us out and told us we was going to go to breakfast, but we were going to first make a formation. And they had you to line up, and we were in our, of course, our civilian clothes, and then we was to line up behind the person—three rows—well, it was only about two rows then, but we were to line up, you just put your hand out, and you was to stay that distance, and you were supposed to be in line with this fella here. So, you—that's how you kept your lines straight, and you kept it at a certain thing. It had rained that night, and so there was mud puddles, or rain puddles, and we were going to go to the mess hall, and I still wasn't feeling good from the night before. I just did not feel good at all.

TS: Well, you thought you were in prison.

DA: Yes, but I think I was just sick from my nerves and everything and having eaten that shrimp that I didn't know what it was, and anyway, so we—she told us that we was to put our head up, look straight ahead, not at the ground, and we were not to walk around or step over mud puddles, we were to go over.

And I thought "Not on my dollar shoes, you're not!" So, I held my head up, put my eyes down, and I just took giant steps over any mud puddle that was over there. And we got in the mess hall, and you had to pick up your tray and you went through the line. And I had never seen sausage links. Well, don't ask me what I thought they looked like.

TS: Okay.

DA: They were burned.

TS: Okay.

DA: I didn't eat them. But anyway, we had to—they'd fill up the tables. And after that, we went to the quartermaster's to get our uniforms, to get uniforms, and nothing was civilian

size. I wrote in my paper, and that's how I found out what the different sizes was. I wore—some things were sixteens, and some things was [sic] twelves, and my hat was an eight, and it was large, my gloves was large, [unclear].

TS: They didn't give you what they had?

DA: No, that was the only way it'd fit you.

TS: Yes.

DA: And it was just—[unclear] with those papers. It just—everything was different. You'd fit what fit you, and the jackets were one size, the skirts was another size.

TS: Well, how'd you feel about putting that uniform on?

DA: Oh, I loved it. But oh, they were way down long because they hadn't been hemmed, you know. We was all having a lot of fun out of it and giggling and so that was—that was a thrill to go get it.

TS: Well, is there anything in basic training that you did that was physically difficult for you?

DA: No, I was from the farm. [laughter] We had formation and a lot of parades and practice and stuff, and one day, they finally put me in the lead. The girl on the right was always the lead, and I was ahead, they were supposed to be following with me. And they said "Left flank". I took a right flank. When I looked around to dress, there was nobody there, they was all headed down the other old field. So, I took off and run and caught up. Well, they just had a ball out of me then. By the time I got ready to get in step, you had to skip to get in step, they just flipped the whole platoon around on top of me. And so they just—and then by the time you got over that and tried to get back in step, they'd just flip it another way.

TS: They were messing with you.

DA: Yes, they messed with you. They had a lot of fun out of the recruits. And then another time they let me be the lead, and we was doing cadence. And I was heading out down that field, boy, little Sergeant Allen—we had a Sergeant Allen and Sergeant [unclear]. And Sergeant Allen come running up, she was just a [unclear] and she used to tell us about how she almost couldn't get in because she wasn't quite five feet. And what they did to make her five feet.

She comes running up, and she says “Dehart, Dehart!” she said “You’ve lost the whole platoon!” [laughter]

TS: Again?

DA: Again! Needless to say, they didn’t put me back on lead anymore.

TS: No? Well, you had a shot at it.

DA: I did, but I was taking too long of steps and I was moving too fast, I was singing and a-marching.

TS: I see.

DA: I left the whole platoon behind.

TS: Oh, so there, you were just moving too fast.

DA: Oh yes, I was moving on, so.

TS: Now, how about mentally? Was it mentally challenging for you?

DA: We learned a lot in—we had classrooms where we learned about army history, how they wanted—they only wanted two creases in your skirt. You pulled that skirt tight and sat down and you’d better not have but just one crease on each side. And you crossed your legs, and all of this stuff. But they also—we did some combat type things, not like the army—like the boys did, but one day we was called, it was probably close to the end, we was called out and we was on the outdoor bleachers, and the stage down there, and it was a warm day, and I was so sleepy. And they was [sic] telling us all this stuff, and I didn’t know what they were saying, and all of a sudden the lieutenant or captain or something come running up on the stage and says “Cuba has invaded the United States!” See, this is when Cuba was—this was in ’61—so when Cuba was an active force down there. “They’re already into Florida!” Well, hey, I don’t know where Florida is from Alabama, but it must be awful close the way they’re carrying on. [laughs] And so, she said they were going to call up recruits, and you come up front, and so we went running up front and we’d been training about gas—

TS: Gas masks?

DA: Yes, the gas mask, and poison gas, and all of this stuff. So they gave us a poncho and told us that we were to run across this field to the buildings out there, but if a plane came over and dumped any kind of chemicals on us, we were to fall on the ground and cover our heads and our feet and be all covered up. Well, we'd been practicing that and all. So, they sent a bunch of us, and I was one of them, out down through the field. Well, sure enough, here came this plane over top of us, and it's blue and pink and I don't know what all colors the dust was, it come [sic] falling—you know, you looked up and it came falling down. You talk about falling on the ground, I made a tiny ball on top of that ground and then they come along and they tapped you and told you it was all right to keep running. But when we got up to run, we was [sic] running past people who had blown off legs, who—it was fake. But you was too scared to know whether it was fake or not, we just saw—

TS: At the time, you didn't know, right?

DA: Yes. We didn't know what was going to happen, and then they tell you—I mean, here this plane has come over here and you've ducked down, and then they tell you to keep running. Well, you better believe you kept running. But these people were laying out there on the ground moaning and groaning and had big holes in their legs and big holes in their chest, and oh, it was something else. Of course, when I got to the building we found out the whole thing was fake, about the people and them—

TS: Was an exercise, right?

DA: That it was an exercise, yes. But let me tell you what, it was a scary exercise, you didn't forget that one. And then we had a night march, and we had had day marches and we had—the backpacks had to weigh forty pounds. Now that cut into your shoulders, that was not comfortable, and you had on your canteen and all of this kind of stuff. And the straps—the women, the next time we had one, we put pads under the thing.

TS: Under the straps?

DA: Yes, trying to help it. Come to find out, the sergeants didn't have anything in their packs. I heard it was newspapers folded up, because their pack looked like ours, but it didn't weigh like ours. And so we—but we had this one night march, and you were supposed to stay one hand length in front—arm length in front of the person—behind the person in front of you and one on the side of you. And they took us out down through the woods.

Well, all of a sudden, this woman, this girl right in front of me, she falls down on the ground and starts screaming “Snake bit me, a snake bit me!” Hey, I don't know

whether a snake bit her or not, but I wasn't standing around. And they kept telling us, you know, one of the things we were trained, you don't stop, you keep going.

TS: Right.

DA: You know, you just step over them and keep going. And then—different things, the people were screaming and hollering, all through that night march, and this one girl, she just took off down through the woods.

TS: Just started running or something?

DA: Just started running and started screaming. Well, when we got back, we found out all that was fake, too. Except the sergeant made the remark that she didn't know who had been contacted to do this acting.

TS: I see.

DA: And so when that girl went running down through the woods, she actually thought the girl may have lost it. [laughs]

TS: Oh, so she went after her?

DA: Yes, they all went after her. And of course it was just playacting, but.

TS: This was just to make sure that you all kept following—

DA: Knew what to do, and—

TS: Following what the orders were telling you to do, and—I see.

DA: What to do if we were ever in these situations.

TS: And so, did you just do what you were supposed to, then?

DA: Well, I guess we did, we all got through it, one way or the other. But it was—you know, that was toward the end, and so we found out that it was all just playacting, but it didn't feel like playacting at the time, I can tell you.

TS: Right, because you didn't know what to expect at all.

DA: No, you didn't. We just was [sic] going out on night march, and all these people start screaming. Whoo!

TS: What'd you think about the army so far, while you're in basic training?

DA: I liked it. After I found out I really wasn't in prison, but we might as well have been for how we was allowed to—you know, the men had a chemical MOS [Military Occupational Specialty], and that's where they took their training. I mean, it wasn't just WAC training there, there was [sic] others. So, we'd be marching home from school or whatever, and there'd be—men would be on a truck; they got to ride, we had to march. And they'd be marching by us. Well, of course, they were coming on our left. They'd holler "Eyes right", so we had to look this way and the men would go that way, and we'd try to see them, if we could see them. [laughs]

TS: They'd turn your heads away from them.

DA: Oh yes, so we couldn't watch them. And so it was just things that they did to, more or less, mess with you a little bit. But you remember the Pinky Dinky?

TS: Go ahead.

DA: The Pinky Dinky ice cream machine? Do you remember? Well, there used to be a little truck, and it was pink, and it sold ice cream, and it had a little bell on the back of it; it was called Pinky Dinky. It was allowed to come on the base, and I would assume it went around to the men's places and all that, but it also stopped at the WAC detachment. And I guess that would be for the sergeants or the lieutenants or whoever wasn't in actual training, basic training. Because it would stop down there and ring its bell. Well, it got—this also was sort of toward the end when we got sort of a little crazy. And some of the girls would go to the window and holler, "Just a moment, I'm coming!" like it was their date waiting for them; as if we got to go to a date. And you know, Mother's Day came in May.

TS: Yes.

DA: And I asked permission to call home. And when I went to work in a dime store, I bought a telephone, and I told Mama I'd always pay for it. Well, that lasted until I went in service. [laughs]

TS: [unclear]

DA: We still have the telephone number and still have the same telephone?

TS: Is that right?

DA: But anyway—

TS: In this house over here?

DA: Over—yes, the house, because we moved there in the ‘50s. So, Mama—so I called. I got permission to—because we couldn’t leave the base and the telephones was in another place. So, I got permission to call. Well, I’ve always woke up early, so I wanted to give Mama a call early.

So, I go in and I call and I said “Hey Mama, you know who this is?”

She said “How many daughters you think I got?” [chuckles]

So, we talked, and I said “Mama, the sun comes up on the wrong side of the earth down here!” I was just in Alabama! But it always came up in through the windows.

TS: Right.

DA: And it didn’t come up through our windows on the base. But anyway—so we fell out for formation that morning, and the sergeant said “Recruit DeHart, did you call home this morning?”

“Yes ma’am.”

“Did you use a telephone?”

“Yes ma’am.”

She said “Why didn’t you stick your head out the window? As loud as you was hollering, you didn’t need a telephone.” [laughter] So I probably busted Mama—I guess I busted Mama’s eardrums.

TS: That’s cute.

DA: So, they liked to pick at you. The sergeants really weren’t mean, and they did not cuss you, they said “You are ladies, you will be treated as ladies, you are expected to act as ladies,” and we were.

TS: What’d you think about the women that you were training with?

DA: The sergeants or the people—oh. I’ve got pictures of every one of them, I guess, or maybe not everyone except out of the group, but I’ve got pictures of them, and we only knew each other by last names.

TS: Right.

DA: Bender and Culp and Eckerson and—Eggerstons and all of this.

TS: Well, what was that like, having been raised up in this area where you say you didn’t even really go to Greensboro or anything?

DA: Well, we didn’t really—we were very restricted to our A3, we were A3, Company A3. We had to learn how to answer the squawk box, they called it up there, and we—just—you stayed together so tight, and you didn’t have time to dislike anybody, because you had so much to do.

TS: And it was an integrated unit, right?

DA: Yes, that was—

TS: Was that different for you at all?

DA: Well, we had not gone to school with the blacks, but there was a family that lived right out here, just the next road over, and my brothers used to swim with them, and then raising tobacco, Daddy used to have different colored people that worked for him. So we—I was accustomed to them.

As a matter of fact, that was one of the things that they really talked about when I was joining, was, you know “What do you think about the blacks,” well, we called them colored, and “How do you get along with them?”

And I said “Well, I actually was basically raised with them.” And Daddy had a—when Mama got married back in the early ‘30s, Daddy had a black boy named Snowball. He was as black as the ace of spades, but he was called Snowball, that worked for Daddy for many, many years when he bought this place out here in Virginia, and lived out there as a bachelor. And so Snowball lived in the next road and he kept—and actually—

TS: Oh, before he was even married. I see.

DA: Yes. And actually, while I was in service and Mama was at the woodshed, because she had a wood cookstove and all, and she was at the woodshed and this car came up and this big black man got out of the car.

And Mama said “Oh my,” you know, “Who in the world is this?” And he kept coming, just coming right to her. It was Snowball.

He said “Well, Mrs. DeHart, don’t you know who I am? I’m Snowball!”

And she said she grabbed him and hugged him, and she wanted to go to town. And he put her in the backseat of the car after she got dressed and took her—drove her to town. Yes, and Snowball had retired from the military.

TS: I see.

DA: But he had come to see if Mama—if the DeHarts still lived here, I guess, and maybe if his old homeplace too.

TS: Right.

DA: And so he came up on Mama, and so it was—that was fun.

TS: Oh, nice. Did your dad get to see him too?

DA: I think Daddy probably must have been in Draper. Daddy died in the ‘70s, so he stayed down at the Draper farm. He always called this farm Mama’s and he always—he called that one his. He retired when I graduated from high school in 1960; he retired at 65 from Fieldcrest. And so he would go down in the mornings and come back. As a matter of fact, when I joined, I left before Daddy was home. Well, my car was sitting in the driveway, of course, so about dark, Daddy asked Mama where I was, you know, where’s Dora Ann. And she said something, I’m not sure. And then when it got—we always went to bed nine thirty, ten o’ clock, I mean, everybody did. And so it got bedtime and I still hadn’t come back, he demanded to know where I was. And Mama told him I had joined the army, had left that day. She wrote me in a letter, she said the rooftop is still floating weeks later. [laughs] And she always said, I guess to the day she died, she never believed I liked the army. I did, I loved it.

But when people would ask me, you know, what do you think about the army, I’d say “Oh, I loved it.”

My mama’d say “She always says that, but she really didn’t.” But she always said basic training and Fort Sam Houston and Fort Bragg, she’d write me every once in a while “Now, if you really don’t like it, I’ll get you out, your daddy didn’t sign.” But—no.

TS: She thought that was her way to—

DA: Get me out. I think it would've been a little harder. We had a girl in basic training, really nobody thought anything different about her. She was a little earlier than I was. She fixed some of the girls earbobs, pierced them, put a potato behind it and stuck it with a needle.

I said "Ugh, I believe I don't want to go that route."

And she, you know, didn't talk any different from the rest of us, but toward the end of basic, she decided she wanted out. So she went to the commanding officer and told them that she was only sixteen years old. That she had used her sister's birth certificate. And she thought they would just say "Well, excuse us, we are so sorry, we'll send you home." They put her on full-time KP ["kitchen patrol"]. She went to the bathroom, to the latrine, and cut her wrist. They took her to the hospital and clamped it. I still remember how it looked. They just clamped it.

TS: You went to see her?

DA: No, they sent her back home. They clamped her up and sent her back home. Cut her wrist.

TS: Back home—

DA: Back to the base. Back to the base. She went to the hospital and they just sent her back to the unit, back to us. And I still remember her skin being pinched up and just metal clamps in it. The next morning, they got her up, sent her back to KP. Taught you a lesson. You want to know what KP was like?

TS: Sure.

DA: They—four o' clock in the morning, they come get you. You put a towel on your foot locker so they knew who to come and wake up, because the whole bay didn't have to get up. And they would come and shake you, and you got up and you put on your PT uniform, that's the brown uniform, and then you went to the mess hall. You were shown around the first time, more or less this and this, big kitchen, and you was allowed to eat before the others come, then you were put on the serving line or different things. We never did do the cooking, we just mostly did the serving. The fun came after we served. Three times a day—this was just harassment. We tore down that dish machine, and thankfully, you didn't have to pull a KP a whole lot. And they had lemon with salt, and you took that lemon and salt and scrubbed all the different parts of those machines, three times a day, you did that. And it just ate your hands up.

TS: They didn't have gloves for you or anything?

DA: I don't remember us wearing gloves. I just remember how that burned your hands so badly, that lemon and that salt. Then, you thought that was bad, but if they sent you outside to do the trashcans, that was bad. You about had to crawl in it. You had to take just a small scrub brush, with no handle, you didn't have something like a toilet brush with a handle on it, it was something you had to hold in your hand. And you had to crawl into that thing and scrub the bottom and scrub all the way up, three times a day. Now, I don't remember that you had the dish machine and the trash cans at the same time. I just remember how the dish machine was and how the trash can was. And I know that one time I had to serve, it was supper time. And I had to serve potatoes. And I stunk so bad. I stood way away from the table and I picked up that spoonful and I put it on their plates. I was ashamed to get up next to anybody, anywhere around anybody. That was the day I had cleaned the trash cans twice. You got back to the bay about eight o' clock.

TS: That's interesting.

DA: That was—that was not a good job.

TS: That part of the army you weren't so crazy about.

DA: Thankfully, after you got out of basic, it wasn't that bad.

TS: Now, did you know what kind of job you were going to have?

DA: I told Mama that if she would let me join the army, I would be—I would take office work and I would work in the office. I really thought that. When we graduated, and we were standing out waiting to get our orders, this was at the time of graduation, I'm not sure how it fell in there. We were standing in line, and they would call you out and they'd say, these people were to be MOS [Military Occupational Specialty] was medic, or clerical, or scientist—or different MOSs that you had.

And so when they got to my name, they said "DeHart," said "You're going to Fort Sam Houston under medical."

Well, I didn't even think about where I was or what I was doing and I said "No, I told my mama I was going to be a secretary, I can't go to medical!" [laughs]

TS: What kind of reaction did you get to that?

DA: Well, thankfully, they weren't cruel to us. How would you think that.
But she said "Well, do you have—did your recruiting sergeant give you a certificate stating that you were to go to clerical?"
"Well, not that I know of, unless it's in my papers."
"Well, then if you don't have the promise that the army has given you that you're going to clerical," Which would have stayed at Fort McClellan, Alabama, "Then you will be going to medical."
Oh, my mama's not going to be happy about this one, I know. But I had also, along with joining the army, my three things was to join the army, be a nurse, and go to Germany.

TS: Okay.

DA: So, going to Fort Sam Houston, the Lord just took care of the nursing part of it, and I was shipped to Fort Sam Houston. Mama never said anything about me, whether—that I had said I was going to be a secretary.

TS: It doesn't sound like she would have been happy no matter what job you had.

DA: [laughs] Well, as far as—as long as she thought that I was all right, I think she was all right—

TS: Safe.

DA: Yes, safe, too.

TS: You think she had—there was any, in her mind, anything about like the stigma of women in the military?

DA: Well, I'm sure it was, I'm sure—because like I said, when I was talking about it and the preachers, the different preachers, and they say "You don't really want to go in. You know, you're not—you're a Christian, you don't need to go in." But I found it entirely different, I really did. We were treated nicely. Now, they harassed us, with the little things.

TS: Right.

DA: But we were never screamed at.

TS: Right.

DA: I mean, about the worst I ever got screamed at was “Recruit DeHart! You lost your whole platoon!” [laughter]

TS: And that was that one. Well, how was Fort Sam Houston, then? And where was that at, Texas?

DA: Texas. Sam Houston, it’s in—

TS: Is that why your—you have that Texas cover on there?

DA: Yes.

TS: I was wondering about that, okay. That’s a scrapbook that she’s got, a Texas—

DA: And it started out with Alabama.

TS: Okay.

DA: See, this is all the girls in the uniforms, and then it goes into Fort Sam Houston. And I got ten day leave between Fort Sam Houston and Fort McClellan, Alabama. Well, they may have flown me to Alabama, but they put me on a bus and sent me back home.

TS: Oh. You mean after basic training?

DA: A train; on a train after basic training.

TS: Okay.

DA: They sent me back home on a train along with other military personnel who were headed up the east coast, and I had to get off in Greensboro.

TS: Okay. So, before you went to Sam Houston?

DA: Yes, before I went to Fort Sam Houston. And they had bus tickets for me, and I went down with an AWOL bag, I come back with a duffel bag which weighed sixty-some pounds, I want to say it was sixty-two pounds. That was all my uniforms and everything. And it weighted sixty-two pounds. So, they put me on a bus, but I could only go to

Leaksville, over there on Bridge Street to the bus station. And then I could either catch a city bus or whatever, but I decided, it wasn't but five miles, I'd walk. So, I left my duffel bag at the bus station.

TS: Oh, okay.

DA: And I took off walking. And I went down Boone Road, around to Spray Traffic Center, and passed through the Spray cotton mill and the Spray bank.

And all of a sudden, I hear some woman hollering at me "Get on, get on, I'll pay your fare!" And the bus, the city bus, had stopped, and there stood my mama on the steps of the bus. She must have run off that bus, hollering "Stop, stop!" I'm sure she had seen me coming up the sidewalk.

TS: Oh! Did she know you were coming?

DA: I don't really know whether she did or not. She may have.

TS: She was just headed somewhere and she saw you.

DA: She was headed to town and saw me. And so she was on the bus, bottom steps, and she was hollering "Get on, get on, I'll pay your fare!"

TS: Oh, wanting you to get on.

DA: Yes. And so she put a dime in that thing and everybody was just a-laughing and carrying on. And talking and everything, and I don't remember, I'm sure my brother had to go pick up—Bob had to go back and pick it up.

TS: Duffel bag.

DA: So, I stayed my ten days here, which basically wasn't ten days, and she had to take me back to Greensboro to the train station. And my brother Bob, who worked in a mill on first shift, was the one that took us. And as happy as she was when she saw me, down in Spray, she was that sad when I had to leave. I think she was on the verge of crying.

TS: Yes.

DA: But we got there, it was late when we got to the train station, and it was empty. As a matter of fact, I wasn't too happy either. I just—it was scary, because I mean, it was like

a big space and Mama was really sad and you looked around, there was very few people there. It was sort of scary for that, but then I went to Fort Sam Houston.

TS: And how was that?

DA: It was a whole different world from basic, because we were allowed freedom. We no longer had to stay just—we had a place assigned and we had school, but we could go to the PX when we wanted to. In basic, we could only go twice. And one time, we were allowed in basic to go, and we hadn't had candy in weeks. And they told us not to bring any candy home, so we get smart. We put it on top of our head and put our hats over top of it. You know, you're dumb. Eighteen years old, we thought we knew something. These sergeants had been in there for years, and they'd been dealing with these eighteen year olds. When we got back to—got off—came back from the PX and walked back to the dorm, well, lo and behold, she asked us to pull our hats off. That was—I mean, we lined up.

And she said "Take your hat off." Well, she had a good snack, lots of good snacks that night. And so that was—so we were free to go and come at the PXs, you know, within limits. It was sort of like a job. And we trained medical.

TS: And what were your—you were in the barracks?

DA: We were sent to barracks, yes.

TS: Was it the same as basic training with the big open bay, do you remember?

DA: I don't remember that, but would suspect it probably was.

TS: Pretty similar.

DA: And we had—I have a pass where I went to—meal pass that I went to—you had to present to go to the mess halls and things.

TS: I see.

DA: And we were allowed—we were allowed to look at men! We could even talk to them!

TS: You don't have the head turned right.

DA: But we were only there, it was about nine weeks, it was about like basic. It wasn't a real long time. And it was strictly how to be a nurse's aide.

TS: Okay, I see.

DA: And so—and I got a paper that said—I found it the other day, it said “superior”.
[laughter]

TS: Excellent.

DA: But I—

TS: And did you enjoy that training, then?

DA: Yes, yes, I did.

TS: So, this was like—this was the thing that put you into the nursing?

DA: The part, yes. And we worked a different—didn't work different shifts, we mostly had school, and training on the wards. And they had open wards then, and we gave baths and took bedpans. That's what, actually, we called ourselves, the bedpan commanders. That was later on in Fort Bragg and all and you strictly did that type of stuff, we just called ourselves the bedpan commanders. But we just learned how to take care of the people. As a matter of fact, there was a colonel's wife that was on one of my wards. And she and I were really good friends. I had washed my hair in Halo soap one time, and it broke my face out terribly.

When I went into work, she said “Honey, what in the world has happened to you?”

And I said “I don't know,” you know, I had washed my hair.

She said “What in?”

And I said “Halo shampoo.”

And she said “Well, I don't think you need to wash your hair in that anymore, because apparently you're allergic to it.”

TS: Had a reaction, yes.

DA: And so, I wrote her for several years, and she had a bad heart, and the last letter I got was from her husband, he was a colonel, very nice, and he said “I don't remember you, but I'm sure she does.”

TS: Aww.

DA: And that she had passed away, so.

TS: Aww. What a nice letter to get back.

DA: That was where I met Farrar, the girl that I was talking about from Gastonia.

TS: Right.

DA: That, when I—she was enlisting when I first went in to start taking training. And I don't know, did I tell you how I met her?

TS: It—when you were in Fort Sam Houston?

DA: Yes. Did I tell you—have I already told you that?

TS: Yes, that you were standing kind of next to her talking about her and she said “That’s me”?

DA: Yes, I didn't know whether—

TS: Yes, yes. Well, I wanted to ask you, too, a little bit about—okay, so when you were telling me earlier, you said you didn't really, in your household, talk about politics or anything like that. Did—as you're being exposed to different cities and different people, did you have any more of a world view? Because you had the Civil Rights Movements going on, and—

DA: [laughs] Yes, but we was too controlled for that.

TS: Yes?

DA: [unclear]—in basic training—

TS: Kennedy's president, and—

DA: Well, I would assume he was probably elected in '60.

TS: Right.

DA: So, he would have been elected that October when I joined the next six months later.

TS: That's right.

DA: So, I knew about him, but like in basic, we were not allowed to read any books, magazines, newspapers. We were not allowed radios, TVs of course. Only what somebody wrote you was all that you knew, and of course Mama only wrote me about my brothers, horses, cows, and pigs. [laughs] And then in Fort Sam Houston, we was only there a short period of time, and it was basically learning the anatomy and learning all the stuff that they was throwing at you—

TS: Had a lot to study.

DA: Yes, and then practice—when you wasn't studying, you had to go on duty and all of this, and then you did your own laundry and your own ironing and we wore nurse's uniform type things, that we had—they were tan instead of white, but we didn't have to have them as starched as the white uniforms, that—

TS: That the nurses had?

DA: Yes, but they still had to be some starched and ironed and all that to do on our own. So you really didn't do a whole lot of going out. The PX was about the farthest you—I did make one trip to Randolph Air Force Base with some—I don't really know how I got in with them, but some girls who wanted to know if I wanted to see something of Texas, actually we never really saw Texas.

TS: Oh, I see. No, not much?

DA: We did get to go to—I met Geraldine Farrar, like you said, at the laundry sinks one day, and we did get to go to Fort—not—the Alamo.

TS: Okay, in San Antonio?

DA: Yes. Into town. And so she and I got to see that, and that's about all that we actually—see, there's the Alamo.

TS: Got some pictures of it, yes.

DA: And so—that's Gerrie, there. But really didn't get into politics there, and even when I came—Gerrie came to Fort Bragg two weeks ahead of me, and then I got transferred to Fort Bragg—you put out three places you wanted to go, so Gerrie wrote me back and said that they took her on the first place that she asked.

She said "You put down the second place you really want to go, you may get your second place." So, I put California down as first and Fort Bragg down as second, I don't know what I put down for third. And I got Fort Bragg.

TS: How did she know it would be your second?

DA: Just from talking, just from talking to people, and I don't know, we was just all guessing and praying.

TS: [chuckles]

DA: Because she and I wanted to be together.

TS: Well, that's nice.

DA: When I got to Fort Bragg, they were army barracks that were old hospitals.

TS: Okay.

DA: And we had just a walkway, like a wooden sidewalk, and this was one building that just extended out and up here was another building.

TS: Okay.

DA: And so we got into the same building, and these was an old hospital, I guess, back in World War II, that they had converted into army barracks.

TS: I see.

DA: And we didn't even have walls, we only had—we only had a partition, it was from your knee up to your head on one side between you and the other person, and then you had a half of a partition, and the doorway was no doorway, it was just an open space.

TS: I see.

DA: And you just had a bed, and you had—

TS: They just separated you a little bit; little bit of privacy.

DA: That—yes, you could see.

TS: Oh, I see, there in the picture, you're showing me a picture—

DA: Yes.

TS: So, this is the one, the knee to your head, here, the partition?

DA: Yes, and so you just had a—this is a foot locker. We had a foot locker and we had a—this dresser, and then we had a half bed, and that was all we had. And so, it was a whole different world, but now we could have a car and we could go and come and all we had to do was attend our hospital duties and we did have to pull—I don't really remember pulling KP there, but we had drivers, we had to do drivers—you were the designated driver for that weekend, and anybody who called from whatever barracks, wanted to go somewhere—the ladies, you transported them.

TS: I see. Well, let's do—let's take a short break, okay?

DA: All right. [recording paused]

TS: I'm—well, we're back again, with Dora Ann, and we're going to continue with the interview here. Now, you had just got to Fort Bragg, and you—when we took this little break, you were describing how the rooms were a little different, you want to start by telling about that, how those rooms were a little bit different?

DA: They—they used, I don't know whether they had been World War II army hospital and each—there was a building and a long broad boardwalk, sidewalk was a board, and then there was a building out at different places and it was just one building, and that was where—that type of sick people were put in, so that they didn't mix their diseases.

TS: Oh, I see.

DA: And the germs, so they were separated through space, in these long—it was just a long building out there, and on both sides, it had cubicles. And it had a partition that was about your knees to about your head.

TS: And you said it was—you said there were four to a room, right?

DA: No, no, that was in Germany.

TS: Oh, that was in Germany. Oh, that's right.

DA: This was just your own—you had your own little cubicle.

TS: Okay.

DA: You had a half bed, and you had a foot locker, you had a window, and you had a window and you had a dresser. It wasn't really a dresser, it was a chest of drawers, more. And you had no door, and you was just divided by these partitions, and what went out to the hall was just another short partition that had a space for a door.

TS: Okay. Yes, I guess you did describe that. I am thinking of Germany, that's what I was thinking about. Well, could you describe a typical day in Fort Bragg? Like a regular workday for you.

DA: We worked eight hours, and they—I was put in a medical clinic, so I worked all day shifts from eight o' clock until five. I worked with Dr. Roper, who was a urologist, and then we worked in a surgical clinic, and I was just the receptionist-type, I made their appointments and I assisted whenever they needed someone to help with a doctor—especially with doing those colonoscopies.

TS: Oh.

DA: People would just pass out. They didn't do them like they do them now, they put them on a table and turned them up in the air and stuck that tube down them. And so some of them would pass out, you'd have to hold their hand or wipe their face or just try to do what you could to comfort them. And then the urologist clinic, there also, so sometimes you had to fix the patient for him. And you—I don't remember pulling KP in Fort Bragg. I did in Germany, but I don't remember in Fort Bragg. You did have designated drivers, about once a month, or maybe six weeks, you had the whole weekend from like five o' clock Friday, Saturday, and Sunday, and you would go and pick up any WAC from their

barracks or from the library or wherever they were, and you'd take them anywhere on post that they wanted to go. And they would—you had—you was in the CQ[?] quarters, and you just stayed there with your vehicle. And when they would call, you'd go get them and take them wherever.

TS: Like a 72-hour duty or something, something like that?

DA: Yes. You did that. And basically, we had no nighttime curfew. We did have to be in the barracks at six o' clock in the morning.

TS: Oh, that—[chuckles] [unclear]

DA: You could stay out all night, but you better be there at six o' clock in the morning.

TS: Now, did you have formation, then?

DA: No, they just came through and—a sergeant would just come through and see—

TS: Make sure you were in your bed and things like that?

DA: And that. So, that was basically all that I remember as far as Fort Bragg went.

TS: Did you like your job there?

DA: Yes, I had an older sergeant that was over me, and he was just like—I think a lot of them, because we were so young, or at least I was so young and probably so dumb, that they just sort of took you in like you was their child, you know. They would try to tell you, don't do this or don't do that, don't get into trouble. They tried to, pretty much, I think, look over you as they would their own child.

TS: Well, now, this is the first time that you actually have some freedom, so what'd you do on your off time?

DA: Oh, I had a sewing machine, I used to sew, and especially put stripes on different uniforms and stuff like that. And I found out, you know, we could [coughs] attend[?] to boys, so we had a few boyfriends around. And then Gerrie, the girl that was from Gastonia, we roomed not together but in the same barracks, and so we did a lot of double-dating, and we just really—we weren't very wild, we weren't wild children.

TS: What'd you do, like go to the movie or dances or?

DA: I don't really remember that we went to very many movies. I used to rent my car out, gas was fifty cents so they had to bring me in at least a dollar's worth of gas. [chuckles] And I rented my car out to quite a few people.

TS: Is this the car you had up in—up here, you went and got it?

DA: Yes.

TS: Okay.

DA: I took it down to Fort Bragg, and my brother Earl, who had joined in the spring, before I did, probably in February or March, before I joined in April, he was also stationed at 82nd Airborne, in Fort Bragg. So, we came home, and that was another thing, if you pulled driver's duty, and then I lived so close to home, Mama thought I was supposed to come home every weekend, so it didn't leave you a whole lot of time—and you work five days a week, it didn't leave you a whole lot of time to get in trouble. [chuckles]

TS: Did you come home fairly often?

DA: I came home about every weekend.

TS: Did you?

DA: Most of the time.

TS: That you were there? So, that was about a year?

DA: Little over a year, about a year. I left in—I went to Fort Sam [Houston] in July of '61, and I think I got to Fort Bragg in October of '61, and I left in September of '62. So, I basically was there about eleven months.

TS: That was just before the Cuban Missile Crisis, then, wasn't it?

DA: When all of that, and people were being sent to Vietnam, but it wasn't quite as bad—

TS: So, the advisors and stuff. But do you remember about the Cuban Missile Crisis? You might have actually been going to Germany then.

DA: Frankly, I don't know.

TS: Don't remember any of it, huh?

DA: No, except in basic training. [laughs]

TS: Oh, that's right, when you said—

DA: I do remember "The Cubans are invading, they're in Florida!" "Where is Florida? We're in Alabama!" [chuckles]

TS: Well, so now, how did you figure—how did you get the opportunity to go to Germany?

DA: I kept putting in for it.

TS: Did you?

DA: I put in for it, I started Christmas, I got there about October and I started Christmas, putting in for Germany.

And the sergeant used to tell me "Why you wanting to go to Germany so?"

And I'd say "Well, that's where my granddaddy's people are from, from Baden-Baden, Germany."

So, he would tell me, you know, "Well, wait."

And I was anxious, "They're not sending me to Germany."

"Well, you haven't given them time."

I think I applied three different times for it, I was determined to go, but I didn't tell Mama I was going.

TS: Okay.

DA: So, when I got my papers to go Germany—to Germany, my brother had gotten papers to go to Korea.

TS: Oh, my!

DA: So, he left the 82nd Airborne and he was shipping out to Korea, and he came home with me sometimes, we didn't all—he didn't come every weekend with me, but he came with

me some. But when he was to go to Korea, and he shipped out to Korea, we was home that weekend together. But—lost my train of thought.

TS: But you said your mama didn't—you didn't tell your mama.

DA: That I was going to Germany, and she was just—

“Oh, here Earl is going to Korea, and here you are, now you're going to Germany, so far away?”

I said “Mama, I asked to go three different times!” That was the wrong thing to say, I should have kept my mouth shut.

TS: Oh, what'd she say?

DA: Ooh, she went up in the air. “What in the world you mean, you asked to go to Germany? Why couldn't you just stayed in Fort Bragg?”

TS: Oh, she thought maybe they were sending you there against your will. Oh, okay.

DA: [chuckling] And she found out that no, I had asked to go three different times. So, I was at home, I think I had about twenty days off between shipping out to Germany, so I was home and I painted about half of Mama's house. The ceilings and the walls. She kept me busy. But I flew out of Fort Dix, New Jersey.

TS: Okay.

DA: And we flew into Frankfurt, Germany, and—

TS: Did your friend Gerrie go with you to—

DA: No.

TS: Okay.

DA: She had met a boy, her name was Geraldine, we called her Gerrie, and she had met a boy that was named Jerry, and—Jerry Vother. And they were going to get married, and I was leaving that part of the country, they could just have their marriage, they was [sic] going to get married. He found out within a few days before their marriage that he had a—some kind of terrible disease, I don't know what the name of it was. They gave him a year to live.

TS: Oh, my goodness.

DA: And he told Gerrie, he said, you know “They’ve only given me a year to live,” he says “I’m not going to hold you to, you know, getting married.”

And she said “No,” she said, “I love you and we’ll just go through this, we’ll have a year.” He only actually lived about four months.

TS: Oh.

DA: But he got out and went to Wisconsin where he was from and she went with him, and she lost a baby, that—they were going to have a baby, and she lost it.

TS: Oh, she had a hard, difficult time, then, huh?

DA: So—I went on to Germany, and this all happened, of course, after I had left.

TS: Right.

DA: Because they were getting close to getting married, making their plans when I left, and so all of this happened then.

TS: I see.

DA: And so, she wrote about every week, we wrote each other, and she told about how the boy Jerry—we always said the boy Jerry and the girl Gerrie—the boy Jerry, how he suffered with that. So he said, never again—that he would never recommend—the army gave him step-by-step, what was going to happen to him. He said he never would recommend that for anybody.

TS: Know what’s going to happen?

DA: Step by step, what was going to happen to him. But anyway, when I got then to Germany, it was already in the fall, and it was in October when I got there, the end of October, and so we had to get used to a lot of cold weather. Snow was already coming.

TS: Yes, you pretty much had not been in a cold weather climate.

DA: Not a lot, no. Not like it was over there. And we were put in German barracks. It still had the swastika around on the ceilings.

TS: Really?

DA: Uh-huh.

TS: In '61?

DA: Yes. It had been a German-occupied hospital, I guess the whole thing, but anyway, it still had the swastikas around on the ceilings. And we had huge rooms—

TS: What hospital was it that you were with?

DA: Ninety-seventh General.

TS: Okay.

DA: In Frankfurt.

TS: You had huge rooms?

DA: We had huge rooms, and it was four girls to a room, and we just each had our own corner.

TS: Oh, okay, that's your living quarters there, that's where you're—okay.

DA: Yes. And we didn't have any partition. [laughs] It was just four girls, one of us in each corner, and we just sort of made our own partition with our chest of drawers, you know.

TS: I see, divided.

DA: She had hers turned to her and I had mine turned to me.

TS: Backed up against each other, sort of?

DA: No, we had them side-by-side—

TS: Oh, I see.

DA: To make us a wall.

TS: Even longer, right?

DA: Yes, make a sort of a wall. And we got along well, as far as I know, there was never any problems with the four of us. I mean, we were all different as day—Karen drank a lot, and—

TS: Where were they all from?

DA: You know, I don't really remember. Karen, she would come in and we'd have to get her into bed, because now we did have bed check there.

TS: Okay.

DA: I want to say it's ten o' clock. And a lot of times, she didn't come in until nine thirty, and it was all we could do to get her up the steps and—we were supposed to be undressed, and in the bed. And there were times where she wasn't undressed and we weren't either, we was all in the bed with our clothes on.

TS: Oh, because you hadn't had enough time?

DA: Yes, by the time she got in or whatever, she came in and she was difficult to—she wasn't mean, but she was soused a lot, and you just couldn't—"Come on, Karen, we got to get in the bed."

"Ah, you know I don't need to go to bed," you know, and on and on it went. And—but she'd be up and at work the next day.

TS: Did they all work at the same place that you did?

DA: All of us were medics. And it was a huge hospital. I worked on E4, I worked on a surgical clinic at E4.

TS: Oh, what was that like?

DA: It was a whole lot different from what I'd fit into! We actually—that's where—there and at Fort Bragg was where we'd come up with the bedpan commanders. And we had to take the bedpans, and you pull down some [door light?] and you slid the bedpan in it, and then shut the door—it sprung back up, actually, and then you, like you flushed a toilet,

you know, and it would flush it and clean it and all of that. And it'd be hot when it come out, temperature. So, somebody told me that we had about thirty thermometers, and we had to put them in—for like iodine. And they told me, they said that “Just take your paper towel and wrap a bunch of them together,” and then we had to sling them down, you had to snap them. And so rather than doing thirty individually, we were doing—but every once in a while, at least on me, they never said about it to them, but on me, it—the paper towel broke. A bunch of the thermometers got broke, too. They didn't make—that didn't make the lieutenant happy.

TS: But that's why you wrapped them in a paper towel, was in case they broke?

DA: Well, it was—no, it was so you could hold thirty in your hand. We didn't put thirty in it, it was about ten or fifteen that you were just wrapping in the paper towel. And then you would sling them, but when you would sling them, of course—

TS: Knock against each other, okay, I see.

DA: And paper would tear sometimes, on the end, when it was too wet.

TS: I see.

DA: But I enjoyed it, I never—I never liked to ride the elevator, so I ran up and down the steps, and we was [sic] up on the third floor, so I would—I would run backwards and forth on the steps. And they would always laugh, I would take the patient down on the envelope, because [laughs]—not on an envelope—

TS: The elevator?

DA: Yes, the elevator. But I'd always run the steps back up.

TS: Oh. [laughs]

DA: Run all the way back up the steps, and they'd always laugh at me.

TS: You sound like my mom, she never liked the—she never liked an elevator.

DA: It was too slow, I wanted to keep going. And I played volleyball part of the time in—

TS: Oh, did you?

DA: Yes, but to do it, they put me on third shift, and I've never been able to stay awake at night. I mean, we went to bed with the chickens almost. And so it was quite a problem to stay awake—when you went in, they had a list of things for Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday, Friday, whichever night you went in you had to do whatever was on that list. And it was enough stuff to keep you busy to about twelve thirty, one o'clock. Well, okay, you know, you can handle that. But then from one o'clock until four thirty, whenever you had to start giving out pajamas and things, you didn't have anything, a lot of times, to do. Well, my eyes just would not stay open, and I'd fall off to sleep. And one morning, I woke up and a colonel was standing over top of me. I had my head back, I was sawing some logs, probably, and I opened my eyes and there she stood.

I said "Oh, I was just thinking, I'm just thinking."

She said "Well, you better get up and move while you're thinking."

TS: So, you didn't get in trouble?

DA: I mean—there's no telling how long she'd been standing there, no doubt she knew I was sleeping. But I had a hard time, and I was not a very quiet person, either. I had a girl—I worked for her for a long time, she was just a nurse, she was civil[ian]. And she was from Maine, and she was a real quiet, dignified nurse.

And she said "DeHart," she said "I honestly believe if they put you inside of a barn, you'd have to make noise."

TS: [chuckles]

DA: She was always trying to tell me to be quiet, be quiet, be quiet. Because you had things to clean, you know, and move stuff, and I just went on with it. So, I made a lot of noise, apparently. She told me one time I couldn't even be quiet in a padded cell. [laughter] I probably couldn't.

TS: Well, how was the—how did you like the different relationships that you had with the officers and things like that, how did that go for you?

DA: Well, we didn't really—they had an officers' club and a EM club, which is enlisted males, and we didn't really fraternize much with them. I tell you, though, we went to a wedding, and when you got them out where they didn't have on the uniforms and things like this, you know, you didn't have to do—you wasn't [sic] scared of them, you didn't have to salute them and all, you found out they were really just human. And they were funny, a lot of times. We was [sic] at this wedding, and I didn't smoke, I never smoked, I

never drank. And this officer had a cigarette, and she looked around and she couldn't find an ashtray and the cigarette got longer and longer, you know? Finally, she just put a hand down beside her leg and just knocked it off, and then she just took a foot and just twisted it.

She said "It's good for the carpet." [both laugh]

I'm like "Oooh." So, you learned they were human, and the doctor that did my ears when—[unrelated comments redacted] And he—I found out that he was just plain; just plain country. I just—I fell in love with—[unrelated comments redacted]. But I had the audacity—at this time, President Kennedy had gotten shot right after I got over there in the spring, I got over there in October of '62 and then he was shot that spring. [fall—DA corrected later. President John F. Kennedy was assassinated on 22 November, 1963.] And—

TS: He was shot in November.

DA: Yes, he was, wasn't he?

TS: You would have been there, I think, like a year. [both talking at once]

DA: We was on—we was pulling that flying squad duty, and—

TS: We didn't get that on tape, what was the—

DA: Flying squad? It was where a female attendant had to go on the bus that went to Rhein-Main Air Force Base to receive patients that were coming back into 97th General. And if any time they were going to have a lady, then you had to have a woman attendant to go. And they had—the seats were out of the busses and they had places that they could suspend the—

TS: Stretchers?

DA: Stretchers. And then they had some seats for the people who were ambulatory. And so, they had a list up, and they could call you at any time, and you would just be pulled off of duty and you would go get on the bus and Rhein-Main Air Force Base was a good ways out there, but you had to be there an hour early, and you had to stay—if you was getting them, you had to be there an hour early. If you were taking them, you had to stay an hour later. So that if the plane got turned around, you know, they didn't have to send somebody else back out there. So, every time I turned around, it looked like they was calling me off of the—onto the flying squad.

And I'm like, you know, "Why in the world am I always getting it?" But every time I'd get on it, this same nut was the one that was driving, and he was from Georgia. And he would just laugh, you know, and that hour, we could just fool around in the hospital and walk around, so a lot of times, we spent time like just down in the break room or whatever there in hospital. So, that was how I got to meet him, and I called him Georgia Boy, because his name was Atha. And I had no idea how to remember it, nor how to say it. So, he was Georgia Boy for me for a long time. And so, the flying squad was—I enjoyed it, I liked it. A lot of the girls didn't, and I don't know why, because it was—hey, that was free time. You got to ride for an hour—all except one time.

We brought back a boy, and the major called me off of the bus, and she said "We've given this patient enough medicine to knock a mule out, and we can't knock him out." And she said "Whatever you do, you do not argue with him. Whatever he wants to do or say, you just leave him alone."

Which scared Atha to death. Atha said "Oh, my," you know, "What kind of nut have we got on here?"

Well, the boy was on a stretcher and they had him chained, his hands and his feet was chained. But he could talk. And he started out saying "Come over here and talk to me." So, you better believe I got down there and I talked to him. And he kept—just different things, he talked pretty good, I mean, really he wasn't out of the line, but he kept saying "I'ma[sic] get better. And when I get better, I'ma take you out."

And you better believe I said "Yes, yes." I didn't say "No way," and we got to the 97th and they took him off first. And took him on to the psychiatrist ward, I assume. We thought that was going to be the end of it. I don't know, it was probably two or three months later, I was in the mess hall, and I was in the mess hall with Atha, and I looked up and through the door came that boy. I like to fell under my chair. He came right straight to me, now he'd never seen me except that one night, that I know of.

TS: Right.

DA: And how he picked me out, that whole mess hall full of WACs wearing their little silly little hats and their brown uniforms—he came right straight to me and he said "I'm better, and I'ma take you out."

I said "Uhhh."

Atha said "She's my girl, you're going to leave her alone." And I never did see him anymore, so I don't know what happened to him. But most of the time they were very pleasant, sometimes they would want us to recite Bible verses or sing songs.

TS: Right.

DA: So, it was really a very good experience for me.

TS: So, you had met Atha?

DA: I did, and he was a talker and carrying on all the time, a bunch of junk stuff. And he always say “I’m going to marry that girl.”

I said “Yes, yes,”

And he’d tell people “I’m going to marry that girl.” Well, we did finally get married. We got married in Switzerland, because German marriage wasn’t accepted in the United States.

TS: Oh, is that right?

DA: So, we had to get married in Switzerland.

TS: What year did you get married?

DA: Sixty—’63. September of ’63. So, I would have been married when Kennedy passed away. Well, we was [sic]—we was [sic] on the flying squad when we was waiting at the air force base, and that’s when we heard that Kennedy passed away. Everybody says they can remember exactly where they were when they heard it, and that was where I was.

TS: What’d you think at the time?

DA: We were just in shock. You didn’t know what to think, I mean, you just—just seemed like all the blood just went right out—the president got shot? I mean, Lincoln got shot, but I mean, that was years ago. You know, you just couldn’t believe that it really happened. And of course, we didn’t even have television, over there, then. We just had radios, but the people come running down the hall, and was telling us that Kennedy got shot in Texas.

TS: What had you thought about President Kennedy?

DA: I wasn’t voting at that time, so I didn’t really—

TS: Have any thoughts one way or the other?

DA: No, we kept up with it, you know, that he was young and people had had Eisenhower and they were ready for a younger president that they thought might would have more vim

and vigor and of course we knew—saw his pictures, he and Jackie, and everything. So—but as far as thinking about him, I don't remember that I even voted. I probably was in Germany anyway. No, '60, I wouldn't have been, but I wouldn't have voted.

TS: What about Germany itself, what'd you think of Germany?

DA: I loved it. The barracks was cold.

TS: Was it?

DA: Oh. Used to run a tub of hot water and go get in that tub of hot water and get warm. You couldn't warm your feet up, you couldn't wear enough clothes to get yourself warm in there. But because it was my grandfather's land, you know, country, I never really learned to speak German too much, though. I couldn't—good morning and goodbye was about the best I could—oh, and you didn't say "Macht schnell". Macht schnell meant to go fast.

TS: Oh, is that right?

DA: Yes, and you didn't want to get on the Autobahn and didn't want to tell a taxi driver "Macht schnell" either. But we enjoyed the food; the bloodwurst. Well, once I found out what bloodwurst was, that wasn't too good. [laughing]

TS: Or schnitzel and—

DA: Oh, yes. Yes.

TS: Things like that.

DA: We enjoyed things like that. And we got to go to East Berlin.

TS: Oh, did you? What was that like?

DA: We applied.

TS: Oh, you applied. Tell about the process, that's—

DA: Oh, we had to apply to go, we had to be only—if we had—enlisted personnel, or personnel, we had to have on our uniforms at all times. We went in and took a tour into

East Berlin, and we got to go into the square and Kennedy had already made his appearance there. As a matter of fact, Kennedy came through the 97th General Hospital. I have pictures of that—where I was in the parade when he came through there.

TS: Is that right?

DA: Yes, I forgot about that. And the first time that we had ever seen these—I don't—you see them now all over the place, the lighted signs that has the tape runs across there? That was the first time we'd ever seen anything like that.

TS: And that was in East Germany?

DA: It may have been in West Germany that we saw it, right there on the border.

TS: Oh, I see.

DA: Because we would just stand there, just—Atha did pretty—

TS: Was that like the Charlie crossing [referring to a crossing between East Berlin and West Berlin that was nicknamed Checkpoint Charlie] where you had to go through?

DA: That's where—we went there, and saw the horses coming. And—

TS: You saw the horses coming?

DA: [laughs] You know, the gate has got—

TS: Oh, on the—

DA: The chariot.

TS: I see.

DA: And they took it and turned it into East Berlin and said everybody's wanting to come into East Berlin. I've got pictures of that, too. We got on a bus, the only way we would go—allowed to go into East Berlin was, we had to ride a special bus. There were other people that were not in the military, because I don't remember how many other people may have had on uniforms, but there was just a lot of, just, Germans. But we were not allowed to get off, we were not allowed to take pictures inside of East Berlin.

TS: Oh, you weren't?

DA: No.

TS: You were only on the bus, you couldn't—

DA: It was only on the bus, and we were not allowed to take pictures through the windows and stuff like that. I don't remember that we ever got off of the bus on that tour. It was—we saw a Russian mother, she was a statue of a woman weeping, because she was weeping over her children who had been lost in the war. Of course, we saw the horses and were told that the horses had been turned to go into East Berlin because everybody was wanting to go into East Berlin. They had had—at this time, they were having a lot of escapes over the wall. The night before that, they was [sic] telling about some people that had attempted to escape, and some did make it and some didn't make it. But we stayed—we didn't stay a whole—the whole trip wasn't a week. And we drove into—near the Berlin Wall where we could stay.

TS: How'd you get to Berlin? Because that's in East Germany at the time.

DA: Well, there's West Berlin and East Berlin.

TS: But Berlin itself is in East Germany. How'd you get there? Because there—

DA: We drove.

TS: Did you?

DA: Yes, we drove a Volkswagen, because we stopped at like a guard station, and Atha went in because he spoke German and I just sat in the car, and he came back—we were already married. He said "Dora Ann," he said, "Would you believe they look just like us?" [laughs]

TS: That was probably the Russian guards, there. So you drove through—

DA: You know, you heard of the red Russians! I don't know why, I don't know what he thought they looked like, but he was so funny. He said "Dora Ann, they look just like us!"

TS: So, you went through—you drove, probably, through the corridor, then, going—

DA: I really, I just—

TS: So, you actually drove through East Germany to get to Berlin, then. Interesting.

DA: I really just, I'll be honest with you—

TS: Never thought about it.

DA: And that was fifty years ago, I don't know, but I do know that we took a—we had a little green Volkswagen. And we took our little green Volkswagen. And I do know that he had these places that he had to stop, he could go only so far and then he would stop and he would go in the little—they called it a shack, but—

TS: They timed you to make sure you weren't spying, to see—so you drove, and then you had a checkpoint you had to—so they could see how far you went, make sure you weren't going off course.

DA: Ahh!

TS: So, that's why you had to stop and do the checkpoints and things.

DA: I never really have even thought about it, I mean, we just—we got permission to go and we did. And then when we got there, in West Berlin, then we took the bus into East Berlin, and like I said, the main thing that I basically remember, of course, they only took us where these, you know, apartment buildings were. And Mother Russia, I remember her. As far as—and they talked a lot about Kennedy, they had pictures of Kennedy that he had been there on the border, Charlie Gate, Charlie whatever, and then when we was in West Berlin, that's where we saw that ticker tape thing. And we was just amazed by it. We didn't—we mostly walked around, and we didn't take actually too many pictures, but I bought pictures, you know.

TS: Oh, like postcard pictures and things.

DA: Of it. And we just—we just mostly went around and looked at buildings and stuff. That's about all, really, I really remember about it.

TS: Did you do any other travel? Well, you went—where'd you say you got married?

DA: Switzerland, Basel, Switzerland.

TS: Oh, Basel, okay!

DA: Yes. We went to Holland, we went to Paris, France. We wasn't married when we went to Paris, France. We went with another couple that—they were married, so they chaperoned us.

TS: [laughs]

DA: But we went on a bus and took a bus to Paris, France. And we really enjoyed Paris. And they had a fountain that if you stuck your feet in it, you'll come back.

I said "Well, I'ma stick my feet in it, but I don't care anything about coming back," Because I got one of the worst sore throats I had ever had in my life. And all they did was drink. Everybody was drinking, everywhere you went, you know, [unclear]. But we got to go to the follies[?]-well, I didn't, my throat hurt so bad that night.

Atha was going to stay there in the hotel and I said "No, you go, somebody's got to go see what goes on, because I can't." My throat hurt so bad, so he came back and was telling about the dance, you know, and how they was kicking up and everything. But I did get to go to the Eiffel Tower, I got that sore throat about the last day that we were there. And so Barbara and Scotty, and I don't remember their last name, they chaperoned us, they wanted to make sure we didn't do anything wrong, let me tell you what. They stayed right up on top of what we did. We first got there, we went to a winery, and went down in the earth—not like in a cave, but—

TS: A cellar.

DA: Yes, down into a cellar. Everybody got to taste it, which—I never did—I didn't drink, so I didn't bother. And then we took tours around Paris and the art center, where—

TS: The Louvre?

DA: Yes. We went into that. And it was a guided tour, we saw Paris at night, which—I mean, the lights is beautiful, I like lights. And the Eiffel Tower, we went all the way up to the top of that. So, we had everything—everything was sort of just planned out, and we enjoyed that. But then we—after we were married, Atha and I went to Holland, Amsterdam. And of all the places that we went, that was our favorite.

TS: Why did you like it so much?

DA: They had a little city—again, we took tours, we took tours from Frankfurt and just caught the bus and went into Amsterdam, and while we were there, then we took—every day, we took another tour to go to different things. And we saw where Bayer aspirins was made on the way to Amsterdam. But the little city, and I can't remember what it was called, I got pictures of it. They wasn't knee-high. And it—everything in it worked. There was a church with a wedding, bride and a groom went in, there was an airport with airplanes taking off and coming in. And—Madurodam. It was—it was really something to watch. We also got to go up on—where the cheese, Alkmaar Cheese Market. And we paid a quarter to go up these steps, and it was like—bats and things was all along. When you went up the steps, they were just flying out over your head. It was a dirty place, too. But once you got up there, it was sort of like a balcony, and you could look right down on the Alkmaar Cheese Market. And every—every farmer or company had a different color, it was like a stretcher on rockers, and it had two—the front and the back of each end of the stretcher, or rocker thing, it had some kind of a leather or some kind of a strap.

TS: Like a harness?

DA: Some kind of a harness that they could pick those things up, it was somebody in the front and somebody in the back, and it was just tons of round cheese wrapped in yellow paper and blue paper and stuff. So, it was really quite fascinating to go—once we got up the steps to look down on it and see it, and we bought some of that cheese. We also bought the—I've still got them, wooden shoes.

TS: Oh, yes.

DA: Yes, we had to get us a pair of wooden shoes. We went out to the little city, out on the island, they had a couple of islands where they still dressed like the old Dutch did. And the kids was [sic] playing on tricycles and we took a boat out to them. And they said that they wore regular clothes, though, when they went in—they went into Amsterdam, they just wore regular clothes like everybody else. But out there on the island, they were dressed in period clothes, I guess you would call it.

TS: Were you there during tulip season at all?

DA: Yes, and I sent all kinds of tulip bulbs home. I sent them to my mother in law and I sent them to Mama and Granny, and nobodies—they never did come up.

TS: No?

DA: They didn't have good success with them.

TS: Maybe it wasn't cold enough.

DA: I don't know what the problem was. But yes, we've got pictures of us wandering through the tulip fields, just huge, huge fields of tulips like that. And they were quite beautiful.

TS: Did—was there anything, you thought, at the time, that there was like a difference between American culture and the culture over in Europe at all, did you notice anything?

DA: We liked—we liked our continental breakfast. [laughs]

TS: Why?

DA: Well, they usually have a lot of breads and crusty breads and coffee and eggs. We thought that Holland was one of the cleanest places. I mean, it looked like they was out there cleaning on windows all the time, you know, and cleaning everything with—and Paris was just the opposite. Paris was not clean, I didn't think. We didn't think it was clean. And Holland, Holland was very clean. But wherever we went, we found that people were nice and friendly, but then, where we went to were people who were accustomed to tourists.

TS: Because you were on the tours, right? I see, okay.

DA: [coughs] And everything was pretty much—we didn't have to deal with tickets or getting late or anything like that. So, we found that they—we didn't go anywhere that we didn't find people were not friendly, and—

TS: Well, it was only about fifteen, sixteen years after the end of the war. Did you see any remnants from that?

DA: Oh, yes. We went—We took several car trips and I've got pictures of those towns, some of those towns, still piles and piles of bricks and stuff that was just torn all to pieces.

TS: Rubble?

DA: Yes, rubble, yes. I've got a whole scrapbook full of Paris, and—

TS: Well, we'll have to look at some of those pictures.

DA: So, yes, we saw a lot of—a lot of that.

TS: Now, you had—you had said earlier that you really wanted to be in the WACs, in the army.

DA: Yes.

TS: You wanted to be the nurse, you wanted to get to Germany. You got any other goals that you came up with after that?

DA: [laughs] Well, not really. I got married, so you know, everybody—they look forward to getting married, and I did. Wasn't really planning on getting married over there, but Atha wanted to get married over there, so that's how we wound up—but my brother Earl.

TS: Yes.

DA: That went to Korea when I left shortly after that, going to Germany? Well, lo and behold, he showed up in Manheim, Germany.

TS: Oh, did he catch a hop or something to get—

DA: Well, no, he went TDY [temporary duty].

TS: Ah!

DA: So, he came out of Korea and came to Fort Bragg, and Mama, who was tickled to death, she was writing all about him, and then all of a sudden I get these letters and she says that she hasn't seen Earl, and she tells how many days, and she didn't know where he was. So, I called Red Cross. They found out that Earl was in transit to Germany, and so he hadn't been writing. Mama expected those letters every week.

TS: I guess she did. [chuckles]

DA: Yes. And when they didn't come, Mama didn't get—Mama was not a happy Mama. And so, they contacted Mama and told Mama that he was all right, that he was on his way to Germany. And so he showed up in Manheim. I, meanwhile, didn't know where he was.

TS: Right.

DA: I really wasn't worried about him, but you know—

TS: Let your mom worry about him.

DA: Yes. And so I came in one night, and this was before we were married, I came in one night and somebody said "Your brother was here, at Frankfurt, Germany."

And I said "What brother?"

And she said "I don't know, but if that picture on your table is your brother, then he was here."

And I said "Well, you know, okay." Come to find out, he had come and of course nobody knew he was coming, and we weren't there, so he had to go back to Manheim before he got—

TS: In trouble.

DA: Yes. And so we took off in a car and went to Manheim and found him. And he was sitting out there waiting for the gate to open up, we didn't get to see just a minute or two and talk to him. So, when I got married then, he gave me away.

TS: Aw, how nice.

DA: Because we got married a second time in Germany. And I had a church wedding in Germany. When we got married in Switzerland, we were lined up and there was other—we were the only true military couple. The others were—most of them were boys marrying German girls. We were lined—

TS: Military boys, you mean?

DA: Military boys. And we were lined up, and this woman came in a black suit and this is in Basel, Switzerland, and she starts to telling us all about this business of marriage. And I'm thinking "Hmm." [laughs] She's putting a different spin on this thing from my little fairytale. Of course, I knew that I had the prince of all of them, you know. These things weren't going to apply to me.

TS: What kind of things was she saying?

DA: Well, just how, you know, as the wife, we were supposed to, you know, honor our husbands and we were to just be good wives and I don't know what else. But anyway, we

was preached to pretty good right there. Then, the first two couple stood up, and you were witness to that couple.

TS: I see.

DA: And then the next couple stood up and they were witness to that couple, and we really don't even know who our witnesses were. I mean, they were nobody we knew. And that was how we went down the line.

And then she said—as soon as you were finished, you sat down. And then she said “Now I pronounce you man and wife.” So, we were all pronounced man and wife at one time. [chuckles]

I always told Atha “Well, I married you twice. By George, if I ever divorce you, I want two alimonies.” [laughter] But then we came back to Frankfurt, Germany, and I had a church wedding, because I had always attended church. And at that time, I was Pentecostal, because the Gospel Tabernacle down here was Pentecostal. And I didn't really know anything about an educated preacher. We had preachers that couldn't even read, their wife would get up and read the Bible and he'd explain it. Well, Pentecostal, anybody's Pentecostal, they'll know that it's a lot of hellfire. You know, everything—everything is, if you don't do just exactly what God tells you to do, you know, you're going to hellfire. So, I was raised Pentecostal, but Atha was raised, not just Baptist, he was raised conventional Baptist. Southern Baptist, where they went in and played the organ and everybody sat down and everything was calm and cool. And my church was exactly the opposite. But whenever I would date anybody—I went to church.

And if I dated them, if they wanted to go out, if it was Sunday night or Sunday church time, I said “No, I go to church, you can go with me.” And none of them would. And so Atha, being from the south, from Georgia, I don't know, I just assumed everybody was Pentecostal.

TS: Right.

DA: I didn't bother to tell him that they do shouting in this church. So the first day—the first time that he went with me, you know, we was singing our songs, and Pentecostal, they love to sing, and they sing it up and they sing it down, and we was all going with it. And when they got to preaching, this guy—he was military—but this guy on the aisle over here jumped up all of a sudden and started shouting “Praise the Lord!” I thought Atha was going through the roof. I had to grab him by the belt and pull him back down.

I said “What are you doing?”

He said “I don't know, but I'm getting out of where that man is.” [laughter]

And so anyway, I got married the Pentecostal part of it. It was really an army chapel, but you—whatever religion you were, you could go in and have your own service. So, that—we had our services about two or three o’ clock in the afternoon, after the army got through with it, and it was Pentecostal. So, Atha got indoctrinated the rough way into that. But when we got—after we got married, we stayed with that Pentecostal group, but then when we came back to Columbus, Georgia, where his mama lived, we didn’t go back to the Southern Baptist church, but we started going to just a regular Baptist church. It’s a little looser, but not as loose as Pentecostal. And then I’ve been a Baptist ever since then. When we came back to North Carolina in ’70, Atha went to Piedmont Bible College and while he was there, he met a girl, Linda Harrell[?], and went home with her in South America, and he came back, and he said he was going to be a missionary.

I said “That’s fine, I’ll put you on the plane and I’ll wave goodbye, but me and the kids are staying right here.” [laughs]

TS: Well, before you get back to Georgia, and you’re in Germany, we had talked a little bit when we had a little snack earlier, that—how Atha wanted to get out of the army and you wanted to stay in.

DA: Oh, yes. He—do I dare say this? He did not like authority over him.

TS: Oh.

DA: [laughs] He only got out a PFC [Private First Class], but I believe he must have worn out PFC stripes before I met him a whole lot. Because it seemed like every time he’d get PFC, he’d wind up getting into trouble. He liked to talk too much, he liked to talk more than he liked to obey the army. But he—he extended six months. He had joined six months before I had, and so when we got ready to get out—he—we got married, he was supposed to get out shortly, but I wasn’t to get out until spring. And believe it or not, as much as he disliked it, he extended. He didn’t re-enlist, he just extended.

TS: Was that just so you could get out together?

DA: So we could get out together.

TS: And PCS[Permanent Change of Station?] out together, okay.

DA: Yes. And so we spent the whole—we spent the whole winter. It was the coldest winter that Germany had had in years, the Rhein River froze over. Our apartment was two separate rooms. No bathroom, it was downstairs a flight of stairs. So you had a kitchen right here, with a coal cook stove, like C-O-A-L—

TS: Oh, I see.

DA: And you had a room right here, and it had a half bed. Didn't even have a whole bed, and it had a big wardrobe and it didn't even have a stove in it. So, believe me—we were just married, and we were tight. It was cold. Everything you could put on you, you put on you. And then you had to come out of those two rooms and go through just a little short hallway to go into what would be your kitchen. But if you came in at—you had to go down the steps about three or four stairs to go to just a bathroom, and all it was was a toilet, period. You took a bath, you went back upstairs to your kitchen and took a bath out of your kitchen sink.

TS: Oh, is that right?

DA: Yes. And there was [sic] three doors on this little block, so we had a kitchen and we had a bedroom living room type thing, but it wasn't anything but a bedroom. The third door was a little German girl, and she just had one room, she just stayed in the one room. And they said the Rhein River had not frozen over in years and years, but the year that we got married, it froze over. And so we were—when we were married, Atha wore fatigues all the time. I had my army uniform, the nurse's uniform—nurse's aide uniform that I had to wear. So, I didn't wear fatigues. One day, one day for some reason, we did not have his uniforms fixed, cleaned, I don't know, I don't know what happened, we didn't get the fatigues in. So, we didn't think anything about it, I gave him my fatigue shirt.

TS: Uh-oh.

DA: Which, we wore about the same size. Never thought about I was a Spec[Specialist?] 4 and he was an E-3.

TS: Ohh. [chuckles]

DA: And he went in—he went into work that morning, pulled off his coat, and those people started howling. They said “Whoa, you're an E-4, when did you get that, how did you make Spec 4?” [laughs]

TS: What'd he do?

DA: They didn't—the sergeant didn't say anything.

TS: He just wore it all day?

DA: Yup. He probably wore his jacket, I'm not sure about what he did. He probably wore his jacket over it the rest of the day. Pulled the lining out of it, maybe. I don't know. But believe me, after that, we didn't let his uniforms get out of shape, that's for sure. But it was right funny, he came home. I never even—I think I was working third shift. I never even thought about it. I didn't do well on third shift, though. I was pulling—no, volleyball, I did before we got married, I did one session on the volleyball. Because I loved to do anything that moved and go, you know. And they put me on third shift for that thing. Whoof, I didn't do well on third. I wanted to sleep too much. I would—after about one o'clock, we'd get whatever we had done. So, from then to about four o'clock, like the day that colonel found me. But then when I'd go home, I'd go to the mess hall and eat breakfast. I'd go to the barracks, which we just had to walk up a hill to the barracks. I'd go to my room and lay down. And I would sleep until, most of the time, dinnertime. I'd get up, put on my uniform, go back down to the hospital and eat dinner. I'd go back up there and go back to bed, and I'd sleep and—I'd usually pass suppertime. But at ten o'clock, they fed another snack-like meal. So, a lot of times I ate supper, but a lot of times I skipped supper. And I had slept all the way up to time to just get on my clothes to run down to—

TS: Get to work?

DA: To eat my supper, my night supper, to go to work. So, when I worked third shift, there wasn't much of me around.

TS: So, you got up to eat. [laughs]

DA: I got up to eat. [chuckling]

TS: Now, would you have wanted to stay in the army any longer, in the WACs?

DA: Oh, I think—well, then, when you had children, you couldn't stay in. But actually, I would have been happy, I think, to have stayed in twenty years. Although we had a friend, and one time we was talking about—she was on her second reenlistment.

She says “Well,” she says, “I’ll tell you, DeHart,” she said, “You’re all gung-ho that first three years, and you love it and you just, oh, you want to go again.” She says, “But the time you get to that second and third—end of that second one and on to that third one,” she said, “You begin to lose a little of that thrill.”

TS: Is that right?

DA: So, who knows, but I think that I could have. Although I ran into Sergeant Allen, who was my basic training sergeant; I ran into her in Germany.

TS: Oh, did you?

DA: And we was in the hospital, I don't remember, I may have already been married. And she said "DeHart, what are you doing here?"

And I said "Well, I asked to come, my grandfather was from Germany, he was German." And I said "Why'd you ask?"

She said "We didn't think you'd had enough sense to get out of basic training!"
[laughter]

I said "Why'd you think I wouldn't make it through basic?"

She said "As country as you was, we didn't think you could get anywhere."

TS: Well, you proved them wrong.

DA: And proved Miss Ivy wrong, too, didn't we.

TS: That's right, Miss Ivy, that's right. Well, what—do you think what you liked—tell me what you think it was about the army that drew you to it, that you liked so much?

DA: I don't really know. I mean, why, from the time I was a little bitty kid, when I would go across to Aunt Rosie's, one time I remember telling her—and I probably—I may have been thirteen, I wasn't a little bitty kid, thirteen, fourteen years old, because we already had the house and was over there getting water. She was talking to me. And I remember telling her that I'm going to join the army, and she laughed at me. I don't know why I always wanted to. Just did.

TS: Do you think that it treated you fairly?

DA: Oh, yes. I don't think, basic training, oh, I hated—I didn't like KP, I'll tell you that right now. And especially didn't like cleaning those machines with that lemon and salt, but it was training, and if you couldn't do that, how were you going to do anything else? And if you couldn't take the orders, how were you going to be—well, I didn't want to go to combat, but I mean, you know, you had to do what they told you to do, and they didn't—they didn't hurt us, by any means.

TS: Did you consider yourself a fairly independent person before you went in?

DA: Well, I thought I was grown and knew it all. [laughs] I knew more than Mama did. But I never regretted—I don't think I, other than when I first walked in and said "This is a women's prison,"

TS: That's right.

DA: That physical, that's the only two times that I thought that maybe I might better turn this thing around a little bit. But I don't know, I never—I don't remember being homesick. Now, I liked to write, I wrote Mama, and I liked to, you know, get her letters and all. And I enjoyed the girls, the girls were all nice, I didn't—I don't remember us ever, even after we wasn't under such strict control, like in the—at Fort Bragg, everybody just sort of went their own way and everybody got up and went—now, if I had my radio on and you had your radio on, it went all over the whole barracks. Because there was no partition. You didn't go in your room and shut your door.

TS: Right.

DA: It went everywhere, and I don't remember—except for—I was raised, whatever you did on New Year's Day, you do for the rest of the year. I would set my clock on New Year's Day for six o'clock in the morning. And the girls got up and had a fit. They wanted to sleep, and there my clock was going off at six o'clock in the morning. [laughs]

TS: They might have been up a little bit late.

DA: Probably had been, because the night before—

TS: They were drinking, and you didn't drink, right, so?

DA: They were out partying, and so—that was—but I don't remember—they weren't mad at me, they just said [yelling voice] "Cut that radio off, that alarm off, DeHart!" Because it was on a radio, the radio would come on, that was my alarm.

So I said, "Well, it's time to get up, it's six o'clock in the morning!" [chuckles]

TS: Did you ever think of yourself, at this time that you were in the military, when there weren't that many women in the military, in the 1960s, did you think of yourself as a pioneer at all?

DA: No, no.

TS: No?

DA: We had our twentieth—we had our, I think, if I'm not mistaken—it was May of 1942, I'm almost sure, was when it became—the year that I was born, and I believe in '62 would have been twenty years, and we had our twentieth anniversary, and we got to go—well, I was in Germany, and we got to go down the Rhein River and see the castles, and we took a tour, the whole WAC detachment took a tour on a boat down the Rhein River. Of course, we'd take a boat if it was going down the Rhein River. [WAAC, the Women's Auxiliary Army Corps, was created in May of 1942, and became the WAC, the Women's Army Corps, in 1943.]

TS: Oh, so it was the WAC anniversary? I see.

DA: Anniversary for twenty years. No, I was just thrilled to death to be there. So, it was just—

TS: One of the other things we talked about a little before, is you were mentioning—for your daughter, which you do have a daughter.

DA: Yes.

TS: If she had wanted to go in the military, when she was your age—seventeen, eighteen, what would you have thought about that?

DA: Well, at that time, by the time she was eighteen, I probably—

TS: Would have been in the '80s.

DA: I probably would not have thought too much about it until I found out that they'd already—I didn't find this out until just a while ago, that they'd already done away with the WAC. I know—I had heard several times that they were talking about the men and the women and they were having their problems with illegitimate babies and things.

And I said “Any fool knows you can't put men and women in the same building and not expect some fraternizing and all might be going along.”

But probably, at that time, not knowing any better, I wouldn't have cared if she had—been all right if she'd have gone in. Not now.

TS: Why not now?

DA: I don't think that you can put young people too close together without sufficient supervision or sufficient separation and expect them to keep the moral standards that they should have.

TS: Hmm. What about the jobs that women can do now, compared to when you were in?

DA: You know, I sort of like being a lady, because I can say "That's not my place, Atha, that's the man's place." And I learned pretty quick in marriage that the more I could do, the more Atha let me do, so I had to stop doing so much if I wanted him to do more. And I don't really have a problem—see, they were not allowed, females were not allowed to go into combat. They only took over the clerical jobs and the jobs to free the men up to go to war. I think I sort of liked that deal.

TS: You liked that better?

DA: I'm not—I don't think, I don't care a whole lot about thinking about going out, somebody shooting at me, quite honestly.

TS: So, the women that are now, like, fighter jet pilots and things—

DA: I think—well, jet pilots, I think would be nice. I saw something on Channel 4 about a group of women that was never commissioned in the army, but they were pilots, and they even trained a lot of the men to be pilots, and they're just now getting recognition for what they did. Because when it was over with, in World War II, they just let them go. They told—how many female pilots there were. I don't really—and like nurses, being a medic, there was always the possibility that we would be sent to Vietnam, as medics, and that would—that wouldn't, I don't think, bother me, being medical personnel. But I don't think I would care a whole lot about just getting out there and raw fighting.

TS: Yes? Like foxholes and things like that?

DA: Yes, I think I'd rather be a lady. Act like a lady, we treat you like a lady. You are ladies, we're your mother, your father, your brother, your sister, is what they told us.

TS: Well, now, would you—do you think your life is any different because you went in the military?

DA: No, I mean, I don't—I don't see where that—

TS: If you'd just stayed here, on the property that you grew up on—

DA: I'd probably still never have gone anywhere, because after we were married, and Atha being in Georgia—never lived in Georgia, never been around Georgia 'til I met him, married him. And I worked at Fort Benning as a civilian while we was [sic] in Georgia. Then coming back here, to North Carolina and going to Piedmont Bible College and then going to Brazil, which I finally—the Lord had to work on me a good little bit, but I finally went to Brazil. I probably would never have left this area. More than likely, I would have married a local boy, I would have raised a family right here, and I probably wouldn't have—

TS: So, maybe that's how—well, you wouldn't have met Atha.

DA: No, I sure wouldn't have. But as far as changing, I—

TS: I mean, who you are, on the inside.

DA: Inside, it didn't. I went to church while I was in the army, I've gone to church ever since—I don't remember when I didn't go to church, and I found that in the army, I had friends that went to church, I had friends that didn't drink, I had friends that did what I did, you know. And so we just stayed in our little—not necessarily our group, but we went our places, because that was what we did.

TS: You gravitated to people like—that had—like-minded.

DA: That's right.

TS: Like values and things like that.

DA: And so—and Karen, Karen was a good friend, and Karen Inuit[?] was her name. And she actually got married to a boy at another—in another unit, away from Fort—97th General. And they never would let them live together, so she would—still had to stay in our dorm, but she was married to a boy in another one. I don't know how long.

TS: Is that right? Oh.

DA: You know, that stayed, but. Yes, but—I think—I think the army probably was good in that it gave me, I think maybe, a better understanding of people. But the people in the army were good, some were bad, some came out with honorable discharges, and some—there was a girl in Frankfurt, I have no idea why she pulled this dumb stuff, but

she decided she wanted out. She went up to the MP [military police] shack and took her fist and busted out the glass, cut her hand all to pieces. As a matter of fact, three of her fingers, she'll never be able to use. All because she decided she wanted to get out, and she wasn't going to wait. She didn't have but just a few months. But she decided she wasn't going to wait. So you saw, you know, people who made some very, very bad choices. But I'm just really thankful, and I came back on a boat. I never had been on a ship.

TS: Oh, is that right, coming back?

DA: Yes, coming back.

TS: How was that?

DA: Hmm. They—we thought that Atha was going to come back when I did. Well, I flew over, he went over on a ship, before we knew each other. So, we—he extended his six months, and he just assumed that he'd come back when I did, together.

TS: Right.

DA: Well, they sent me back through Bremerhaven, Germany, on a ship, and ten days getting in to New York, and he was sitting at Frankfurt waiting for an airplane to fly. So I come in, I think Fort Hamilton up there.

And I got discharged, and I said to that sergeant, I said "I'm supposed to wait for my husband," I said, "I don't know how in the world—you know, where am I going to go, what am I going to do?"

He said "Well, aren't you a dependent?"

I said "Well, yes, come to think of it, you know, I'm his wife." I had never thought of it, you know, you just think of yourself as military personnel.

TS: Right.

DA: And so, he got me into the barracks and all to wait for him. And it was a ten day ship, and I babysat some, we had stage—I was talking to my brother Bob about this the other day. They had a stage up there where—that they had acts, you know, come in, people that had performances and things. I'm sure that it's nothing like these cruise ships that you're hearing about now, but it was—we wasn't down in the belly like Atha and them said, they was all the way down in the bottom of the ship. We had a—there was two other girls, they were army, that was in the same cabin that I was in. And we had assigned

tables, and I have a picture of—they were Mexican, they were army, but he was Mexican descent, and his family, I had to eat with his family every day, and it was an enjoyable experience, really. Except one night—one morning, I woke up, and the ship was in a total wreck. I mean, everything on the decks was just scattered. They had a bad storm, and I just slept through the whole thing. [laughs]

TS: Well, that's good.

DA: Some of them thought they were dying, and I just slept right on. I didn't worry about it.

TS: Well, do you still like shrimp?

DA: I can eat fried shrimp—[chuckles]

TS: Never been able to eat that raw shrimp since then.

DA: No, no. I look at them sometimes and I laugh. But the man was really—I think, when I think back through my life, to be honest with you, even before the army, it seems like that I always had somebody who just had your interest—and I'm sure this happens to a lot of people—had your interest at heart. You know, they just wanted to help guide you. I think those police—the preachers—I don't think they meant anything by it, they didn't know what they were talking about, and I sure didn't know. But I had heard from the men, you know, about the different treatments, and—

TS: I'm not sure what you mean, what do you—

DA: Oh—reputation.

TS: Oh, okay.

DA: You know, the preachers didn't—

TS: Oh, oh, originally, when you were going in, and they said "Don't go in," because—

DA: Yes, because of your reputation and stuff like that.

TS: I see.

DA: So, I—the preachers, and then at Fort Bragg, I had the sergeant over me that when my ears got busted—punctured, through the ear clinic, and he tried to guide me, you know, he didn't want me to get—lose all my benefits by going to a civilian doctor and all.

TS: Right.

DA: And then, even in Germany, there were just people all along the way that was always—I found the military people to be just very nice. And most of them really just wanted to look after you. I mean, not really take over your life, but just look out.

TS: Right, help guide you through.

DA: Yes.

TS: Well, we've talked about quite a lot today. Is there anything that you'd like to add about your military service that you haven't—that we haven't talked about?

DA: [laughs] Oh, me. You're talking about putting three years into it. There's a lot of things, a lot of memories, and a lot of stuff that went on. But I'm glad I went, and even though Mama never, to the very end, I don't believe ever believed that I liked it, I did. My son is in Brazil, and been in Brazil for nearly sixteen years. All three of his sons was born in Brazil. But he's married—he married a girl from Piedmont, who's from Virginia actually. And so he—I said something one time about—I don't hardly ever see Byron, every two years I go to Brazil. And he comes home about every four years with the children for about six months. But my daughter has moved to the Virgin Islands, about five years ago. So basically, because Atha passed away in 1991 of a massive heart attack, and so basically I'm pretty much down to me.

TS: Right.

DA: And I said something to Bob about it one day, and he said "Huh! You started it!"

And I said "Started what?"

"Well, you just had to go to—you just had to join the army," and said "You just had to go to Germany," and said "You just killed Mama," said "She just never could get over you leaving." [chuckles]

TS: Well, he has a point. [laughter]

DA: I've had to—had to shut my mouth, though, because then of course we came home, we was only home ten years and we went to Brazil for ten years, as missionaries. So, Byron was actually, he's been most of his life in Brazil. He was fifteen, about fourteen or fifteen when we went. He graduated from high school, Faye graduated from high school in Fortaleza, Brazil.

TS: Wow, well, that's really good. Well, if there's nothing else you'd like to add, we can go ahead and I can end the interview, if you'd like.

DA: As far as I know, I don't know anything else. [laughs]

TS: Well, we'll take a look at some of your pictures and stuff and see what you want to go ahead and share with us for the collection.

DA: Okay.

TS: Well, thank you very much, I really appreciate it.

DA: Oh, you're welcome. I love to talk about the army. [laughs]

TS: Well, thank you, Dora Ann.

[End of Interview]