WOMEN VETERANS HISTORICAL PROJECT

ORAL HISTORY COLLECTION

INTERVIEWEE: Donna Barr Tabor

INTERVIEWER: Therese Strohmer

DATE: May 12, 2011

[Begin Interview]

TS: This is Therese Strohmer and today is May 12, 2011. I'm on Fort Bragg, North Carolina. I'm here with Donna Tabor and I'm here to conduct an oral history interview for the Betty Carter Women Veterans Historical Project for the University of North Carolina at Greensboro. Donna, how would you like your name on your collection to read?

DBT: Donna Barr Tabor.

TS: Well, Donna, thanks so much for being part of our collection.

DBT: You're welcome.

TS: Why don't we start out by having you tell me when and where you were born?

DBT: I was born at Fort Benning, Georgia when my father was in OCS, Officer Candidate School, in 1958 April 25. And I only stayed there a couple days. Once my mother got out of the hospital we went back to Massachusetts and my dad followed us.

TS: So you were an army brat?

DBT: Yes.

TS: So, did you—you didn't grow up on a base, or did you grow—

DBT: Oh sure, [clock chimes] we grew up both in the civilian community and bases like Fort Devens; we lived in Germany for about nine years total.

TS: How old were you when you were in Germany?

DBT: I was, the first time, like, five, six, seven, and then ten, eleven, twelve.

TS: And do you have any brothers or sisters?

DBT: Yes, I have an older sister, Debbie, a younger sister, Dottie, and my brother Jim is the baby.

TS: So there's four of you?

DBT: Yes.

TS: So you are second in line there?

DBT: Yes.

TS: Okay. Well, when you—what are your earliest memories of growing up then?

DBT: Mostly remembering a little post in Germany, Herzo base. It's in Herzogenaurach, Germany and it was a little German post during World War II and the Americans took it over. It had housing and some headquarters buildings but it was out in the middle of nowhere and it was just the cutest little place. We had the PX [Post Exchange] and the gym and the theatre and we just ran the post. We went wherever we wanted to go and we all had a blast and there was[sic] about 20 kids on the post. [clock chimes] There was another housing area further down the road with the—my dad was an officer and most of the kids on the post their dads were officers and then the enlisted guys lived off post.

TS: Really? So what did your dad do? What was he—

DBT: He was in the [United States] Army Security Agency which is kind of like military intelligence. Most of what he did we didn't know. When we would go see him at his office we had to go through all this security and we could see him through a glass window or something.

TS: You couldn't go back to where he actually worked? He would come out and see you? [speaking simultaneously]
DBT: No, what he did was always classified.

TS: Now, did your mom work?

DBT: No, my mom was a stay-at-home mom up until my dad went to Vietnam in '71 and '72. She worked then for a few years, she worked for Revlon and for—she traveled for Revlon to all the different mini-mart drug stores in the east.

TS: Oh, is that right?

DBT: Yes.

TS: How long was your dad in Vietnam?

DBT: A year.

TS: A year.

DBT: And when he came back he pretty much retired at twenty years. He went back to school and got a teaching degree and became a teacher for a couple of years.

TS: Well, I know if you ask people what was it like growing up being an army brat, obviously you didn't know what it was like not to be one.

DBT: Right.

TS: But what kind of—So you said when in Germany you kind of had a run of the base. What kind of things did you do as a kid growing up?

DBT: When it was time for them to take down the flag in the afternoon after school or on the weekends all the kids would hear the initial bugle call and we would race to the main gate where the young soldiers were going to take the flag down. Whoever got there first, the first two kids could take the flag down with the soldiers. So our whole day was based around trying to get to that flag at the end of the day. We rode bikes. We hung out at the PX restaurant and bookstore and read comic books. There was a tennis court. [click chimes] I remember when I was about six or seven they flooded the tennis court in front of our house and we could ice skate. And my dad, one day, thought it would be a great idea to put the bench on the outside right on to the ice inside and I slid into it and knocked out my front tooth. So, that's one of the things I always remember. We had a chimney sweep that used to come and do all the chimneys on post because they still were using coal back in the sixties and we used to chase the chimney sweeps because they were good luck.

TS: What do you mean by chase them?

DBT: You touch them. When they were riding their bikes around post we would run after them and touch them and get good luck for the day.

TS: The actual sweep?

DBT: Yes.

TS: I see.

DBT: The person.

TS: Did you get good luck from them?

DBT: Of course!

TS: Okay.

DBT: When I was little I remember, I was like five or six, and I remember in Germany they have Saint Nicholas come to visit and he has an angel that comes with him. And one day Saint Nicholas actually came to our house and brought us little bags of candy and little toys. And he brought his angel and apparently they were two people that worked on the post that went around to all the kids' houses. But I remember that very vividly. We lived across the street, when I was a little older, we lived in front of the dispensary where all the medics worked. We used to go there and the guys—you're talking about, you know, twenty-something guys and they're homesick they don't, you know, they hang out with the kids and everything and they would put casts on us and let us use their stethoscope. I remember we were sitting on the stoop outside the dispensary which is in the walkway to go to our house. And my dad's the second in command of the post and we are sitting with two of the soldiers just talking and one of them was using my stilts that I had gotten for Christmas and he's making a fool of himself trying to stay on them and everything. And my dad comes around the corner and he about fell on his butt on the sidewalk trying to salute my father while holding on to the stilts. I just remember that was really cool too.

TS: [chuckles] That's pretty funny. Now did you get off base very much?

DBT: Yes, my dad's a big history buff and I can tell you that we most likely saw every castle. And every—

TS: What part of Germany were you in?

DBT: Herzogenaurach, that I remember most, was over near Nuremburg and I guess that's on the east side of Germany. But we used to go to Garmische[-Partenkirchen] and Bergisch Garden[?] for vacations.

TS: What was that like?

DBT: Oh, it was awesome. Going to the Neuschwanstein Castle. That was my favorite. We used to go to Bergisch Garden[?] and swim in the lake and see the mountains in the winter and we didn't ski; my dad was afraid of skiing. We ice skated and tobogganed a lot. We weren't allowed to ski but we used to go to all kinds of historic places. My dad wasn't a, you know, we didn't go to amusement parks or anything you had to go see something, a museum or—oh that's another thing, when we lived in Frankfurt, as a kid we went to the natural museum and they had this huge room and the whole room, in the middle of the room was a giant boa constrictor eating a wild pig. They stuffed him that way and I believed that is the point at which I became scared of snakes. And have been ever since, even though I was in the army. You know, I've had drill sergeants tell me they

could make me get into this swamp and walk around and I'm like just shoot me here, I can't do it. I'm scared of snakes. But it's my only absolute fear.

TS: Your big phobia is snakes?

DBT: Yes.

TS: Now did you—How about school? Did you go to school on base then or off base?

DBT: Yes. Herzo didn't have a school; we drove to Nuremburg. No, not to Nuremburg—that was a hospital—to Erlangen and we went to school. The medics I was telling you about, they built a swimming pool at the youth center for us, so we hung out at the youth center and had parties and swam at the pool and things like that. In Frankfurt we walked to school. There was one right down the end of the street and I remember walking to that school. I think I was, like, fifth grade maybe, and when they told us that Robert Kennedy had been shot I always remember walking down that street. We actually went back there, with my husband, we went to Germany for three years after I got married and we went back and checked everything out. We didn't go back to all the castles. We went to all the housing areas where we used to live and things like that.

TS: Like nostalgia?

DBT: Yes. My parents came over and we went to every place we'd ever lived.

TS: When Robert Kennedy was assassinated do you remember how you felt about that? Living in Germany and being military?

DBT: I remember hearing—We had little transistor radios and I remember hearing it and as we are going across the football baseball field to the school the crowd around us got bigger and bigger until when we got to the school it was this big crowd all listening to the radio. But being an army brat, you're very patriotic. You feel all that because the people you are around all the time are that way.

TS: But how did you feel? What do you mean patriotic?

DBT: Well, you felt really sad that it was somebody that was part of our country and government and all of that. I remember being sad but everybody was just shocked. I know when John Kennedy was killed my mother and father were at an officer's club dinner or something and we were in the living room with our—my brother was like two or something, and he had a nanny—a Germany lady and we watched black and white German T.V. so we never knew what was going on. But she stood and sobbed in front of the T.V. and when my dad came home he told us. But she was so upset because people in Germany, they really liked him.

TS: You were pretty young at that time?

DBT: Yes, I was like six or seven. I didn't know who he was. I just remember—I can remember her standing there and just breaking down.

TS: When you talk about Robert Kennedy being assassinated do you also remember Martin Luther King Jr. because he was assassinated before.

DBT: I think I was in the United States when that happened, but I don't remember where I was, I just remember knowing about it.

TS: Yes, so were you aware, that's what you are talking about 1968. Were you aware of the anti-war protests going on, things like that?

DBT: When we came back in like '70 and my dad was in Vietnam until 'til like '71, '72. We lived in Massachusetts and they are very—for the most part you are living around, very liberal people that didn't like the war and here your father is in Vietnam so it was very conflicted. They would say all the baby killer stuff and I would try to tell them that that's not the way my dad is.

TS: Who would say that to you?

DBT: The kids, they would—

TS: At school?

DBT: Yes. Not about my dad, but just about soldiers.

TS: But they knew that your—but did they know your father?

DBT: Yes, sure. Everybody knew 'cause when you are the only one you kind of stick out.

TS: So were you kind of picked on about that or—

DBT: No, no one ever said anything mean to me about my dad.

TS: No?

DBT: But they just didn't like the army and they didn't like soldiers. Which—that is what always bothered me because you can't be mad at the soldiers. You know, you have to direct that. If you are really interested in stopping the war to help the soldiers then you can't call them baby killers and treat them mean and spit on them. I always thought that was strange.

TS: And were you aware of the counterculture going on?

DBT: Yes. My older sister was just at the edge of, you know, being the rebellious teen and being in that part of the time but more early seventies. So I saw it; I didn't participate.

TS: But your sister, you said, was on the edge?

DBT: Yes, she was very much like that.

TS: Yes? In what way?

DBT: Just very—My sister started an organization in our high school to get rights for the students to wear jeans and smoke in the court yard and strange things like that. But she got the whole school behind her so she was very, I don't know what you would call it, involved with things?

TS: Active?

DBT: Activist, yes.

TS: So she was very activist at that point?

DBT: Yes.

TS: What did you think about that?

DBT: I was surprised to find out that my sister was the one causing all the commotion but in a good way. She wasn't trying to over throw the school, just trying to get a little leniency in how they were. 'Cause things were more relaxed.

TS: Like rights or whatever for students?

DBT: Yes. But I mean she took over because the president of the student body and all those people just followed the party line of the school, so she just took over and pushed them away. They didn't count. They weren't helping students. They were trying to keep everybody in line with what the teachers wanted and the principal.

TS: So she was a little rebellious on that side?

DBT: Yes.

TS: Were you that way at all?

DBT: No.

TS: No?

DBT: No. I was the middle kid. I wasn't.

TS: What does that mean? Being the middle kid?

DBT: I was the good kid [both laugh]. I got good grades and didn't cause trouble and was more relaxed. She was very hyper.

TS: Well, did you like school?

DBT: High school, no. The rest of the school, yes.

TS: What school?

DBT: You know elementary school and junior high and everything. When I got to Massachusetts—to Marlboro, Massachusetts and I went to the high school I didn't really care for it. I liked some of my classes. I liked being in classes but it was too confining. I wanted to do something. I didn't want to just sit there.

TS: In the classroom?

DBT: Yes.

TS: [clock chimes] What do you mean "do something"?

DBT: I took up photography, so I'd rather have been outside taking pictures than inside sitting in study hall. I was real big into history, I loved history. I went to the library in one study hall and every day for a few years, I read every Life magazine cover to cover from the beginning to when they ended back then in the seventies.

TS: What was interesting about those magazines to you?

DBT: The pictures, I love the pictures. I love the—my favorite part and still today in my job, I love the advertisements because when I went to Germany as a wife my mother would send me video tapes of T.V. programs. She cut out all the commercials thinking she was doing something nice for me. I told her "No leave the commercials in because that gives you an idea of what it is like in America. You know, those are things that people are doing and talking about." The same thing with the magazines, you look at the ads and it gives you the whole idea of what people lived like in America in the forties or the fifties. So I liked that.

TS: Well, while you are growing up are you thinking to yourself, "I want to be this or do this when I get older?"

DBT: Nope. Because I remember being in high school getting ready to go think about what I was going to do. And they make you take the little tests and try to figure out what you are

most interested in and I didn't have a clue. I liked writing but I didn't want to be a reporter. I liked taking pictures but I didn't want to be a—I always wanted to be a combat photographer. I've seen one on T.V. and I thought that would be cool. But I couldn't put it all together into what a job would be.

So, I had one counselor suggest that I see if I could apply to [United States Military Academy] West Point. I did all the paperwork and the person came down and talked to me and everything was great and they thought I was great. It was when women were first starting to go and I was starting to decide that was what I wanted to do. I wanted to be a solider and I didn't go to West Point because I kept thinking I don't want to be a female lieutenant coming into the army. I want to experience the army. And if I like it enough then I could go—maybe go to OCS [Officer Candidate School] or get out and go to ROTC [Reserve Officer Training Corps]; something. I didn't want to just be a female lieutenant. I wanted to be part of being with the soldiers and everything. So, I didn't really want to do that. And I think—

TS: So why did you think that being a female lieutenant would not be part of the army?

DBT: Because it was so new and they were set apart and I didn't think they were—be treated the same. And I'd grown up in the army and I didn't think being a lieutenant, at all, would be something I'd wanted to do. I thought I'd rather just be a soldier. So, that's what I did.

TS: How did you go about making that decision?

DBT: I went and talked to the recruiter and took the tests, and I did really good on the tests. He took me up to Boston and my father was telling me, you know, "Don't listen to them. All they want to get you to do is sign up for something."

I wanted to be an army photographer and they said, "You're not going to get promoted in that, we don't have anything available. We can't put you—But here we've got this and this and this." One of the things I wanted to do was I didn't want to stay in the same town. That's not how I lived the rest of my life. I wanted to move around like I used to and see new things and do new things. So, I thought I would like to have a job that's non-traditional female job. When he said the telephone lineman, I thought, "At least when I get out I could work for the phone company, that's kind of different." So, I signed up for that.

TS: Let me back up a little. What do you mean by you want—explain more about why you wanted to do a non-traditional job.

DBT: I didn't want to be somebody's secretary. I didn't want to work in a factory. I didn't want to work at a drug store I had worked at. You know, that would be my life just working at a drug store. I wanted to do something that women don't do all the time. I mean it was the seventies and women's lib and all that.

TS: Did that have an influence on you, you think?

DBT: I think so, it would have to. That's the culture at the time. But, definitely didn't want to stay in one place and be the people I saw in that town.

TS: And which town was this?

DBT: Marlboro, Massachusetts. But I had cousins and aunts and uncles that they were born there, they got married there and they're going to stay there until they die. They have the same job.

TS: That wasn't you?

DBT: That wouldn't appeal to me at all. I just wanted out. Not that I hated the town, just the lifestyle. That's not what I wanted.

TS: Now, do you think you got that from your experience with being in the military—an army brat?

DBT: Oh, being an army brat, one hundred percent, yes. We moved every—at least every three years, and it was fun.

TS: You enjoyed that?

DBT: Yes. Getting new friends and going to new schools wasn't the best part but all the other stuff was great. You didn't—You were special; you didn't live like everybody else. You did something different.

TS: Did you consider any other service?

DBT: No.

TS: Why not?

DBT: Because I'm an army brat. I was born in it so that's what I was used to.

TS: So you didn't even look at the [U.S.] Navy or [U.S.] Air Force or Marine Corps or anything like that?

DBT: No. When I walked to the recruiting office they would all say, "Hey, come in here, we'll talk to you".

"No, I'm going in here."

TS: Now, did your—what did your parents think about your decision. Both—both if your father is an officer and you wanted to go enlisted and also just going into the military.

DBT: I don't think he cared which way, enlisted or—because he went in enlisted. So, he did—He was one of those officers that went to OCS and they knew what it was like to be enlisted so it made them a better officer. So I always thought that was good. He wasn't prejudiced. He is more now, but he wasn't back then. My mother and my grandmother had the weirdest reaction. They'd known me all my life and they took me out onto the porch in the back of our house and sat me down and asked me if I was gay. Because the only reason you'd be joining the army is if you were gay. And I'm like—

TS: This is your mother and your grandmother?

DBT: Yes, my mother! So, I thought that was really funny that they would do that. I just wanted to go in the army. Because it wasn't normal. I mean a lot of people went in World War II and there were army nurses but this was—the all-volunteer army had just started.

TS: How did you explain? How did that conversation go?

DBT: I just remember just laughing in disbelief. I'm like, "Huh? You've known me. I've lived with you every day of my life. This is what you think? No. I just want to do the job; that's what I want to go in for."

TS: The job?

DBT: The job, yes.

TS: To do something different?

DBT: Yes, but I thought it was a really—I never would have expected it from my mom and my—and my father was a little disappointed that I let the recruiters, he thought I let the recruiters talk me into the MOS [military occupational specialty] I picked going signal. But he wasn't mad or anything, he just, "I should have gone with you and told you what to get." But he was alright. He had a cool reaction when I went to jump school. I thought when I went to jump school he'd freak out. But I'll tell you that later.

TS: Okay. Well, what about your siblings. Did they have any reaction to you joining the army?

DBT: I think my little brother was real proud of me. He always has been. He thinks it's amazing that my husband and I served in the army. He's a rich stock broker in Boston and he'll call me when he gets real nostalgic and he just talks about how great we are to have served our country and all that. My other two sisters, I think they were living their own lives. They were kind of oblivious, so I don't think they really—they don't think I was in danger or anything. It's not like today where you know you are going to get deployed. I'm seriously—nothing ever happened the whole three years I was in the army. Politically we didn't attack anybody.

TS: We had the Iran Contra—not Iran Contra. We had the Iran hostage crisis. [1979 incident involving American hostages held in Iran]

DBT: Yes, but that was the last few months and we didn't go anywhere. We didn't get alerted for anything and we're the first alert people.

TS: In your first particular job that you had at that time—well, tell me a little then about your first days in basic training.

DBT: Well, I will tell you that being an army brat makes you not so nervous when you go because you know people like these guys and you know it's a game. You know they put this face on when they go to work. They are not going to kill you or they get in big trouble. You're not in danger; they are not going to hurt you. So, some of it—I laughed at a lot of stuff in basic training. When people were crying, I didn't laugh at the crying people, but when things would happen I didn't get all upset and cry or anything. I never cried when I was in the army.

TS: What kind of things did people cry about?

DBT: That the drill sergeants really thought all these horrible things about you, because when I went in, back in when I was in the army—

TS: And this was in '79?

DBT: '79, yes. They could say anything they wanted to you and be mean to you and swear at you and everything, which they are not supposed to do now. I didn't feel it was personally towards me, you know, it was just part of the game. So, it didn't bother me that much, but a lot of the other people didn't see it that way and they would get all upset.

I remember going to the reception station in Fort Jackson. We flew down there and I remember the first time I was in the barracks with a whole bunch of women and I put some of my white clothes in the washer and one of the women had come and put her red clothes in with mine and turned all my clothes pink. So, like the first night or two that I was in the army this girl wanted to beat me up because I was mad that she had ruined my stuff and I said something. I'm like, "Great, get me out of this place." I remember telling my dad, "If I ever say I want to reenlist, you just come and get me and take me home." I was just so, oh, I can't believe it.

And then, I remember there were the women that were in our platoon had to sit on a bench outside the barbershop while all the guys got their heads shaved and that was really funny. We watched them and laughed because, you know, all these cool seventies guys with long hair and just "zip, zip, get out". I always remember that my very first assignment by anybody in the army was the drill sergeant had forgot the little plastic cups with the urine in them, for the urinalysis. And I was told to go back and get that, so I was in charge of the pee. [Chuckles] So, I always—

TS: Your first assignment.

DBT: —my very first thing someone told me to do in the army. Then they sent us to Fort Gordon and we went on a bus and we woke up and it was in the middle of the night and we pulled in. You could hear the bus [makes bus sound] and the doors open and of course the drill sergeant gets on, "You got ten seconds to get off my bus and nine of them are gone." So, we're all standing and shuffling and to get down off the bus; he's yelling at you.

But this is Georgia and there's pine trees and roots sticking up out of the dirt; there's no grass. I'm looking out the window and everybody kept tripping over the roots. And then the drill sergeant would scream and yell even more at them while they were on the ground trying to get up. And I'm like "Oh God, don't trip, don't trip" all the way until I got out of the bus. And the thing that freaked me out was all the drill sergeants were screaming at everybody and screaming at everybody and then they marched the guys away to get their sheets and put them in their beds.

There were six women and this one female that was left behind from a previous class, who said, "Hi. My name is so and so and I'm going to take you over to the barracks." And we just very quietly walked over to our barracks, while going down the street is all these guys getting screamed at. So, it was really weird. I expected to continue getting screamed at but I didn't. It was very weird.

TS: Were you a little disappointed?

DBT: No, but it was strange.

TS: Were you ever homesick?

DBT: Yes, I liked talking to my parents on the phone and I talked to my little brother a lot. All the time when I was in the army I talked to my little brother on the phone because he was the youngest. He was, you know, preteen and wanted to make sure he knew who I was. I helped raise him. I took care of him from the time he was a little boy; walked him to school every day; fed him.

TS: How old was he when you went in?

DBT: Like, a preteen. He was, like, ten, eleven; something like that. I would call him and talk to him, but not real homesick. We had—the girls we were with, we were friends. We ended up not having but two by the time we got out of AIT [advanced individual training]. The others got hurt or quit.

TS: Well, how was it in—is this in your training, then, you're talking about?

DBT: Yes, in basic training.

TS: Basic training. Well, did you—was there anything particularly difficult physically that you had to do?

DBT: I ran before I went in and I used to play softball and could run pretty good and I ran even more before I went in. The kind of running you do on the pavement in boots, I got shin splints; we didn't wear sneakers back then. I got shin splints so that was—in the beginning couple weeks was painful.

The thing that I thought was really cool is when I would be in the middle of the formation and I wasn't running, because we used to run to class on the other side of post, and I would start to move back in the formation; the guys would keep me in the formation. They wouldn't let me quit. And my feet could touch the group but they were holding me so I couldn't get away. They were like big brothers, they watched out for us.

TS: So it was a co-ed platoon?

DBT: Yes. We had one guy, Sergeant Bolton, he was a prior service and he came back in. He was automatically made our platoon leader and he knew everything so he told us everything. He was a really cool guy; a very mature and not a kid like most of the guys that were in our platoon. So, he kept us out of trouble because we already knew everything before they tried to teach it to us. We were pretty good.

TS: So, you had a good platoon leader to help guide you?

DBT: Yes. I remember when I went into the army I thought that if I got a curly perm I could just wash my hair and go like this and I wouldn't have to do anything.

TS: Not fuss with it?

DBT: This was a big mistake because I went into a profession where you wear a big heavy helmet every day. I started to look like a clown, you know where your hair's flat on the top and you have curls sticking out. When it started to grow out my drill sergeant—I told him I needed to go with them when they went to the barber shop to get my hair cut. And he said "No, my wife's the hairdresser." She came and cut all of our hair for free in the barracks. So, I got rid of the curls.

I remember in basic training, before I went in the army my dad taught me how to use an M-16; to fire it, to take it apart, to put it back together. Everything that I could learn I already knew. So, I go into the class and I was the first one finished all the time and they thought I was a genius. I was all proud of myself and everything. Well, everybody kept letting the bolt slide and make a loud clack and the drill sergeant or the instructor said, "The next person that does that I've got a surprise for them," and of course mine did it. I had to spend the rest of the first class with my toes on a desk leaning down like a push up to the ground. I had to stay that way the whole time, but I did get the best score.

TS: Did you?

DBT: I just got in trouble.

TS: So, the qualifying was okay for you?

DBT: Yes, I qualified expert. And then they didn't believe me so they watched me because I qualified expert and I was just a girl. But my dad—

TS: Who's they; they didn't believe you? What do you mean by they?

DBT: The drill sergeants came back over and watched me shoot, so that—your partner records what you got, so they wanted to make sure that he didn't cheat. So, they came over and stood and watched me shoot.

TS: You had to do it again?

DBT: Well, they watched the rest of me because I was doing so good. My mother was a crack shot and my dad taught her how to shoot. The very first day he taught her how to use a pistol, a .45. She shot it at the target and my dad's mouth dropped. She said "Oh look, all the bullets went through the same little hole in the middle." One of the guys that was next to my dad at the range packed up his weapon and left. He was so disgusted that my mother—

TS: Was such a good shot? [laughs]

DBT: "Oh, it was my first time." So, my dad always said that I inherited that from my mom. He really did teach me how to do all of that before. I did pretty good with that. One funny thing I told you, some of the things just made me laugh so hard. It was the task at the end of the week when they taught you how to use a grenade and throw a grenade. We're in this hole, me and the drill sergeant, and it's just about up to neck level for me but he's a lot taller and we were supposed to crouch down, stand up, throw the grenade, and get back down.

TS: Was it a live grenade or just a—

DBT: No, it was fake, thank goodness. I did everything perfect, all the moves. I practiced, I did it, and about six feet away from where I threw it, it hit a pine tree and bounced back and when we crouched down the grenade landed right between the two of us. It just made me laugh so hard. I'm just standing there trying not laugh and get in trouble. But he is like [makes a face]. But he lets me pass because I did it right. It's not my fault there was a tree. We were making jokes and stuff because I'm like, "You're supposed to jump on that one when it comes back to you, you know; you're senior. You're supposed to jump on it."

I had an instructor, when I was going the M-60 machine gun, and we had to lay down. My helmet was in the way and I couldn't get it up because where it was hitting the weapon was pushing it down over my eyes. The guy came over and just was pissed at me

for something. I kept doing this and not firing. So, he turned it around and dropped it on my head.

TS: Turned what around?

DBT: The helmet. So the brim wasn't so big on the front.

TS: I see.

DBT: He turned it to the back and dropped it. And when he did it broke my nose right across here.

TS: The bridge of your nose?

DBT: Yes, and it started bleeding and I had blood dripping on both sides. I was so pissed that he did that that I drilled the whole magazine about ten feet into the ground in front of me instead of firing at the tank we were supposed to be firing at. I got up and I looked at him and I was covered with blood. He was like "Oh my God" and I just walked away. So, I didn't get in trouble but he didn't get in trouble either. I was pissed because he didn't have to hurt me.

TS: Right.

DBT: You know, that was mean what he did because he was mad.

TS: You think some of those things, at that time, because the co-ed? Do you know when that started; to have the men with the women?

DBT: It hadn't been that long because when I came in it hadn't been that long that they were together. And I don't even know when it ended. I was just surprised to find out—start talking to women who said they went with all women, so I didn't even—

TS: After you were in?

DBT: Yes, much after.

TS: Is it not co-ed anymore? Still today?

DBT: Apparently not.

TS: So, it was just a brief window of time?

DBT: Yes. I don't know how long though.

TS: How many women were in your platoon to start?

DBT: I think it was six.

TS: And how many did you say ended?

DBT: Two.

TS: You and just another one?

DBT: Yes.

TS: What were the other women dropping out for?

DBT: They got hurt. We climbed telephone poles for AIT and they would get injured, and I had to take them all to the hospital.

TS: So, this was your training; not basic anymore?

DBT: Yes, that was. But—

TS: What about basic training? Was that a co-ed training?

DBT: Yes. We actually moved from this barracks to about two streets over and were actually in World War II barracks that were condemned before we got there and they took the tape down and put us in there.

TS: That's where you went? You're on the same—you're on Fort Gordon.

DBT: Just across the field on another street. Yes. It wasn't far. You could see it.

TS: With your basic training, how many women were in that?

DBT: About six.

TS: Oh, six and the same thing for your—

DBT: Same people, we just all moved together. We stayed with them.

TS: You went in your platoon, knowing you're going to be doing this. Oh really? Is that how the army—

DBT: That's how we were supposed to do it; basic and AIT together.

TS: Okay.

DBT: We all were together. It was pretty cool because we already knew everybody.

TS: Right.

DBT: We all did pretty good. I know one night—one night the drill sergeant came into the barracks, and we were in the big long bays in the World War II buildings, and he came in and he woke me up and said "Come with me," so I had to get dressed and follow him; just me. He takes me over to the male barracks which is across the street, and we're the only people on this section of the—just us. There weren't other companies of people. We go into the other barracks and he takes me upstairs where all the guys were and he makes them all take their metal bunk beds apart and take them down the back stairs and set them up out in the grass. And I had to give them a class on how to make my bed because when I was a kid my father taught us how to make army beds. That's how we had to have our beds. When we were little my father would give us money to go to the movies on post and it was a quarter to get into the movies and a dime for popcorn. If they didn't bounce on the blanket, you didn't get to go to the movies. I learned how to make a tight army bed when I was very little. He was sarcastic, it wasn't—he wasn't mean or anything.

TS: Your dad?

DBT: He just thought it was funny. Yes. He used to wake us up by—for school every day for most of my life, by going [imitates "Reveille" with mouth] into a toilet paper roll. The cardboard tube; every day forever and ever. He does it now, if we stay over at his house. He does it.

TS: Does he really?

DBT: I even bought him a little guy that—

TS: Makes the sound?

DBT: —plays "Reveille"; a little soldier and he's an alarm clock. He put a little roll of—he made a little miniature toilet paper roll for his little guy.

TS: For his little guy [chuckle]?

DBT: Yes, he thinks he's funny.

TS: So, did you teach those guys how to make a bed?

DBT: Yes, and then they made them break them all down and put them back up in their room and I had to help them put it all back together. And then, I got to go back to bed and in, like, an hour he woke us all up to go to train. This is my punishment for doing a good job.

TS: [chuckles] That's right.

DBT: I remember my mother used to send me goodie boxes. I'm the only one that got them. The drill sergeants of course would say, "Well, you need to make sure your mother sends enough for everyone to share." So, every time I got a goodie box we'd stand in formation and they'd all stick their hands in there and take something. My mother liked that though.

TS: She liked that you're sharing it with the rest of them?

DBT: I'm like "Mom, don't send me anymore stuff."
[imitating her mother's voice] "Oh no, it's okay."

TS: Well, Donna, what was it like for you as a—growing up an army brat, and then when you put your uniform on the first time?

DBT: I remember when I would take a shower, especially in basic and when I got here, and I would get clean after PT [physical training] and put my uniform on. Back then we had starched—they had surplus Vietnam uniforms, all green. Kind of that ripped stuff that we had to starch to make look like anything. You know, you break the starch and you blouse your boots and I just felt like John Wayne. I thought that was too cool.

First time I ever rode in a jeep when my first sergeant was taking me back to have a shower when we were on Fort Bragg in a field exercise. I got to put my foot up on the side and ride in the passenger side of the jeep; John Wayne; totally John Wayne. I was cool. I liked that.

But in basic I didn't really think—it was more like survival. I didn't reflect on most of it until after you leave, you know, but I liked it. I liked being in the army. One day around the World War II two story buildings we were told that the company commander was going to be standing in the middle of the building on the other side, outside. And we were supposed to run around to where he was and we had our weapons, so we had to change hands and salute him and then go back and then run around and come back and get the end of line. Three or four people went and then it was my turn. Well, what they didn't know was that the commander, for the three or four people, kept getting closer to the corner of the building. He was, like, walking and he would shake the— the person would salute him and he would salute back. So, he's closer each time so by the time I did it he was right at the corner of the building. I run just like they did and I run around the corner and bam, knock him on his butt. He's, like, in disbelief sitting on the ground looking up at me. He didn't say anything and I looked at him like this, I switched hands, I saluted and I said "Good Morning, Sir" and I walked away and he's going [exhales].

TS: The whole dazed look and everything?

DBT: Yes. Yes. It was so funny, and it's like of all things, God, you know, you could have just been over here and not made me feel so stupid. It was funny to me. I came out of the—I remember they took us over to finance or something. I came out of the old building with

the screen, wooden screen door, and when I opened the screen door I knocked a two star general off the stoop as he was coming in.

TS: Now, about the time that you were in the army, the *Private Benjamin* movie came out.

DBT: Yes, but what I liked about that was it didn't have to do with anything here.

TS: No, but I can see her doing these things that you're–

DBT: Yes, but things like that happened to me a lot. I think they're funny and you can say maybe I was klutzy or I just have this luck.

TS: Murphy's Law sort of thing?

DBT: Yes, but I did like that movie because she finished. Most of that stuff—some of it was, I mean, you do, you know, with the commander hitting on her, and she jumped out of planes and things. But a lot of that stuff happened. We used to have—

TS: What stuff?

DBT: Like when I was here at Fort Bragg. The people aren't used to the women being in the unit and they think, "Oh, well, we can just date." And they would come—not guys but, like, commanders. I had the brigade commander; he had gotten a DUI so he had to ride his bike. So, he gets drunk and rides his bike to our company, comes in and sits in the day room and tries to hit on all the girls that are sitting there watching T.V.

TS: What do you do?

DBT: Yes, what do you do? You can't yell at him, you can't throw him out. You just have to, kind of, get out of the room; go back to your room. Nobody's going say anything. But weird things like that. You can't believe guys are this stupid that they would do this. You could get in trouble.

TS: Did they get in trouble?

DBT: Hardly ever.

TS: Yes?

DBT: But in basic training it was more—they were all nice to us. We didn't get to go anywhere. We didn't get to—we got escorted to the PX, shoppette or something. We never got to have the night off or anything all through basic. AIT towards the end they let us, but my aunt and uncle lived in Augusta and they would—I went to their house and we had jeans stored there. We would go to the store and they bought me clothes and we'd go to the mall or go out to dinner; hang out. I got to be a real person for a little while.

TS: How often did you get to do that?

DBT: Just the last couple of weeks. That was it. I did want to because they did live down there and we hadn't seen them in a while. They had two little kids so it was nice to be in somebody's house. It was weird. I was very happy when I saw my clothes. When I got out of AIT, they gave us our suitcases back. "Oh! Real clothes!"

TS: Because the whole time you just had to wear your army uniforms?

DBT: Oh, yes.

TS: Did you have a big field exercise that you did at the end of basic training?

DBT: Yes. They had a bivouac—it happened to be— it was Georgia. One of the ice storms—one of the worst ice storms they had came in and knocked down all these pine trees on top of us. We were outside living in little pup tents next to rivers of ice.

TS: You were in the field during the ice storm?

DBT: Yes, and they came—We were all sitting around, because it happened at—I think it started at night and we were, in the morning, all hovered around fire barrels. Like, your clothes, you could just push them and they are just crunchy ice and we were freezing. And I had—one of the girls had lost their gloves, it had floated away. And so, I gave her half of my gloves. I gave her the warm part inside and I kept the other part. Big mistake; I was freezing. That was very interesting because by that time, the Sergeant Bolton I told you about, got in trouble and he couldn't be the platoon leader. So, they thought it would be really funny to make one of the only girls the platoon leader in charge of, like, sixty guys. We had all infantry drill sergeants who always told us that, you know, we're just signal pukes. You know, if we were in the real army, if you were in the infantry, you wouldn't be able to come home because of a little ice. But they sent us home and it was dark out. It was pouring rain—ice rain—and the drill sergeants went into the barracks and you could hear them drinking coffee and laughing and making fun of us. We were all standing out there like idiots in our ponchos and everything. Well, I stood there for a few minutes and this is getting ridiculous so I walked in and they were all mad at me for coming in. I said "Look, y'all put me in charge."

TS: Oh, they made you the platoon leader?

DBT: Yes. I said " You're the ones who put me in charge, so I'm going to dismiss the platoon so they can go back to their barracks and take a shower and that's all there is to it."

They just sort of looked at me like "Okay" and I took everybody back to the barracks.

TS: That was it?

DBT: They didn't fight me, just, they were shocked that I did it. But if—you're the ones that put me in charge so this is what I'm doing.

TS: What did you think about all of this? Like you said, you didn't really like that at the time, but looking back what did you think about your army experience? Were you thinking this is a good thing, I'm glad I joined up?

DBT: I thought there's a lot of dumb stuff in the army. I thought I shouldn't have to do dumb stuff, but the people that I knew, my friends when I got here, I missed all of that. I liked all that. I liked playing army, but it's all the other stuff you have to deal with that made it hard.

TS: What's that other stuff that made it hard?

DBT: Guys back then there, and not all guys; the older guys, not the young guys. Their opinion of women trying to do what we were doing and we shouldn't be there. We shouldn't be in their army. Things like that.

TS: How would you—when would you get that kind of comment?

DBT: When you were training, and they would say—you know, the drill sergeants especially. Infantry guys aren't used to women at all, still. They don't have very many women around them. But it was always—There's lots of occasions where you just are so surprised that they would say something like that. I had a sergeant major of our battalion standing on the tarmac at Pope Air Force Base. We're all sitting around waiting to get on planes to do a jump. My fiancé—my husband is sitting next to me. He's whittling and the sergeant major comes over, and he's new; we don't know him very well. He came over and told us through this conversation we were having with him that if he wanted to he could drag me across to the woods and have sex with me and no one would say anything; no one would report it. And here my husband, my best friend, her boyfriend, all our friends that we hang out with are all sitting around here with their mouths hanging open. "Did he really say that?" My husband, I just was watching him, and trying to defend my opinion to the sergeant major and my husband's whittling harder and harder. And it was so hard for him not to, which was important to me, that he doesn't defend me but I thought he was, and he had a knife. I'm thinking, "[unclear], you just don't know what you're doing." [chuckles]

TS: How did you defend yourself to the sergeant major?

DBT: I told him that, "These people are my friends and my fellow soldiers and they would never let you do that. They wouldn't be scared of you. You don't realize who you are standing next to," and I told him—I didn't tell him he was my fiancé or anything.

TS: Right.

DBT: But what a dumb thing to say. Why would you say that? He's a sergeant major. He should be saying things about what he shouldn't do, not that he could get away with that. But they thought like that.

TS: So, let's get into how you got—First, actually, tell me about the training for the telephone linesman.

DBT: Oh, that was interesting. When I was in AIT, like I told you, they had made me the platoon leader. I would run the guys all the way out to the training area and there was a big forest of telephone poles. We had to wear gaffs on our feet; pointy metal gaffs that you stabbed into the pole and you walked up—you climbed up and you went around and came back down. They would have you do different things. That's the first week; you have to learn how to climb the telephone pole. Well, people would slip. We had one guy, real tall guy I remember, had one gaff sticking in the pole half way up and the rest of him hanging down. So, his knee is gone and he is just stuck there and we had to go up and get him.

TS: He blew his knee out?

DBT: Yes, and I was the platoon leader so they kept making me take him over to the ambulance and send him to the hospital. One of the girls—she was a little tiny thing too—she was shorter than me. She fell, slid, and grabbed the pole, which is very bad because talk about splinters. This splinter was like three inches, it was very pointy, and it went up through her cleavage and came out like this right next to her chin. I had to take her over there and send her to the hospital. This doesn't make you want to get back up the pole. You're like, "Don't hold on like that. Don't do what she did." I did great and I was very proud of myself. I wasn't afraid. I did everything I was supposed to plus taking all the—I mean, I got to see everybody up close. So it was very daunting to try to get back up on the pole and not be scared.

TS: Right.

DBT: So, the next day—and they told us throughout this class if you don't come to class, no matter what the reason, you have to be recycled. I go to the unit and the drill sergeant says that I have KP [kitchen patrol]. "No, they told us we can't miss a day; I can't have KP today."

And he said "Oh, yes you do and you're going to do it." They left me behind and made me do KP all day. So, the next day I go back out to the pole training and they told me, "You missed yesterday, you're out. You have to be recycled. Go back and start over next week." I didn't think that was right.

I argued with them and they said, "It doesn't matter, you broke our rules, we can't let you stay."

I go back and I tell the people in the company and—"You need to tell them you made me go to KP. This was not my choice.

"I'm sorry; there's nothing we can do."

So, I called my dad and I said, "What do I do? Who do I tell? I mean I don't want to get in trouble but I don't want to do that again. I already did it all."

TS: Right.

DBT: So, he told me to call the IG [Inspector General] and he called the IG. We had an appointment the next day with the training battalion—no brigade, he was higher up; with the colonel. Went into his office, like, all the drill sergeants and me, and we went in there and he said that they didn't realize this problem existed and they want to assure me that this will never happen to anybody else again. "But you, unfortunately, have to be recycled. And hey, don't worry about it. It's just one week."

So, I had to climb the poles all over. Not only that, all the people I've known for eight, ten weeks, whatever, went ahead of me. They kept going so I had no friends. I'm with strangers and I was pissed. I get to the first day and the drill sergeant is over at some bleachers a little ways away with a whole bunch of boy scouts and they're going to show them how a soldier climbs a pole. He tells me to climb the pole. I go put everything on, I'm pissed. I did what he said because he was telling me what to do from across the—I went up there smacked everything, went around, came down, pissed off, took everything off and walked away. I was pissed because they made me do that. Why? Why? It didn't happen to three other people. They didn't have KP every other day; just happened to me because they knew that you could get recycled. They did it on purpose.

TS: You think you were setup in that way?

DBT: Yes, I'm one of the only two girls.

TS: Did the other girl get recycled?

DBT: No, but she never made it. She didn't finish the AIT part.

TS: No?

DBT: Oh, she's the one with the—the little short girl. She was the last one with me. But she didn't make it through the pole thing. She quit after she got hurt. I don't blame her. [Therese chuckles]

TS: You feel like they were doing this simply because you were a girl or a woman?

DBT: I think so. I do.

TS: What's your dad think about that then?

DBT: Well, he called IG and told them what he thought of it but—

TS: Had no power?

DBT: Yes, they couldn't fix anything. They weren't willing to and just the way the colonel said, you know, he made this big deal about me keeping everybody else from doing it and said, "But you have to go back to training. Sorry." Like he was trying to think of a good way to get out of it, but I didn't believe him. It didn't come across true. I think I was setup or something.

TS: So, did that make you more determined to just finish it?

DBT: Yes, but it kind of made me sad because everybody was gone before me.

TS: Right.

DBT: And then when I was in basic training the way they did it back then was everybody that came in had their MOS picked out and a lot of them had their destination after training. They were going to Germany or California or whatever. There were five of us that didn't have that selection where we were going to go.

TS: Why?

DBT: Because we didn't select anything. We just came in for the MOS.

TS: And it didn't matter where you went?

DBT: I didn't mind.

TS: Okay.

DBT: Didn't want to go back home.

TS: That's right.

DBT: So, they brought the five of us to the dayroom and they had an instructor—recruiter for the airborne come from Fort Bragg to talk to us. He told us all about how great it would be to jump out of airplanes and everything, but he kept ignoring me being in the room next to the four guys. He passed out the paperwork to the four guys and I said, "But what about me?"

And he said, "Well, you're not going to go, are you?"

I said, "Gimme the paper," and I think one of the things I really thought about after is, I think I got played because he either—it was reverse psychology, you know, he—I think he talked me into doing it. Because I had no plans to go airborne, never thought about it but best thing I ever did. I think I fell for it; definitely.

TS: You think so? You don't think he was intentionally avoiding you?

DBT: No, I don't think he was being intentionally mean to me. If he was trying to get his—

TS: Quota?

DBT: Score, yes; his quota.

TS: How many women were in the airborne training at that time? Was this still '79?

DBT: There were twelve of us in the class.

TS: Twelve women?

DBT: Yes, and there's like three hundred guys in the one class and there was, like, four classes at a time. There weren't that many of us but I tell you what, eleven of us graduated. And about one hundred guys—

TS: So, the attrition rate for women was better?

DBT: We did very well, yes; we did very well. I always remember from jump school, one day the commander came in and inspected us and he said my hair touched my collar in the back. I had kind of rounded in the back, okay, so it was getting close. I went up to the PX that night and the beauty shop wasn't open after hours. The area right next to it was a barber shop with these five old barber guys. I went in there and I said "Could you just trim my hair in the back because I have to pass?" And I didn't want—A lot of the women had long hair and they taped it all up. I listened to them pull the tape out every night and I'm not doing that, no. I don't want my hair ripped out. I don't want to rip tape from my hair every night.

TS: How would they use the tape?

DBT: They'd put their hair up with bobby pins in the back and then tape it all flat to their head in the back. It didn't seem like a good idea.

TS: So, you're in the barbershop—

DBT: I'm in the barbershop and these little guys are so cute. They're all standing behind me telling each other how it should be done. They never cut women's hair and the other guy is like "I did it one time and you gotta do this and this."

I said, "Guys, just cut it straight across. It doesn't have to be pretty." I was in there for, like—an hour it took them to cut my—They were so scared to cut my hair and it was so funny.

I hung out with them and they told me when I had to pay. The guy said, "You don't have to pay."

I said, "What?"

He said, "If you graduate from jump school you come tell us. That'll be payment enough. If you don't, you come here and you pay us." When I did graduate from jump school I went to tell them and it was closed, so I never got to tell them. But I always remember how nice they were. And they were all old retired army guys; airborne guys. They just were tickled, but not the rest of the people at jump school.

TS: No, how was that?

DBT: Same thing, we shouldn't be in their jump school. I mean, they're even more zealous than our drill sergeants.

TS: How would they specifically treat you?

DBT: One day, we were doing the—it's called a swing landing trainer, which you're on a platform, like, about six feet up or so and you walk up the stairs, you stand up there with your harness on, they attach it to—well, actually it's not attached then. You just have your harness and your fake parachute stuff on and what you're supposed to do is—oh, it is attached. It's attached to a rope because what he is supposed to do is you jump like you're jumping out the door but he gradually lowers you to the ground so you can practice a PLF.

TS: Can you tell me; what's a PLF?

DBT: It's a parachute landing fall, and you land on the side—the side of your leg and your hip and your shoulder so you don't hurt yourself just landing face first, flat on your butt; whatever. He didn't like women in his jump school. So, every time I did it, he'd say, "Go," and as soon as I've jumped, he'd let go and I'd hit the ground, just one big [makes noise] and he'd say "Unsatisfactory, do it again." He did that to me all day; the whole time I was there I never got to do one. He did that to me every time. Nobody said anything to him. He did that all the time, but kept making me do it over and over.

DBT: I know we were running PT in tower week and I was perfectly fine; no problem. It was hot, but I wasn't falling out or anything. The formation was really, really tight and I caught the back of this guy-in-front-of-me's foot. He put his foot right back and I tripped and fell on the ground. I went to get up and these people come over and drag me to the ambulance and make me start drinking salt water because I passed out. I said, "Look, I didn't pass out. I saw me fall all the way to the ground and I got right back up. I didn't pass out."

"No you passed out. You probably won't be able to finish your training; probably going to have to get recycled." And they're filling me full of this nasty salt water stuff, making me sick to my stomach and they didn't believe me. They treated me like I was a heat fatality and they wouldn't listen to me. I don't know why they did that.

TS: So, what happened after that, then?

DBT: I just went back to training. I told them, "No, isn't anything wrong with me." They couldn't say there was something wrong with me anymore.

TS: Right.

DBT: I didn't pass out. I remember me falling.

TS: Right.

DBT: I didn't pass out. Things like that. We had Navy SEALs [Sea, Air, and Land] in our class, there were Marines, and these guys would all—they come from a unit, they know each other. They're going through this training, so anytime one of them got in trouble the other ones would drop and do pushups. It pissed off the army guys and they told them don't do that. If you do that then everybody in the whole formation has to pushups. So, we did that for the whole four weeks we were there because they would go together. They never changed how they did it. So we had to do more pushups than anybody else because we had to do whatever they did.

TS: The SEALs wanted to keep their camaraderie?

DBT: Yes, and the commander was a Marine. So, it was very interesting. They were very intense guys but we hung with them. We did pretty good. One of my favorite things about jump school was in ground week you're at one end of the field and you're exhausted and it was very hot and they would say you're on a break. So, they'd put you in a formation and run you to the other side of the field to give you a drink of water so you could sit for two minutes and run all the way back. I'd be exhausted and I'd be like, "I don't like breaks around here. There not fun, I don't want to do breaks. I'll just stay here. I don't need any water." [both chuckle] I always thought that was strange, that the breaks were worse than the training.

TS: I guess a lot of people say that women can't do the physical aspects. You know, for example, the jumping out of a plane, being a paratrooper, those kind of things.

DBT: Well, when I went through jump school and I got here all the non-airborne guys, maybe some airborne guys, they would say—I used to work in operations and they would have to say they wanted the form to go to jump school and they would say, "Well, heck. If Donna could—

TS: If Donna could do it then they could do it?

DBT: —do it, they could do it, anybody could do it."

And I'm like "Uh-huh."

I'd be right there when they came back with their broken leg or their "Well, I didn't really want it as bad as all them other people, you know. I could go later. No big deal."

But they all—the big mouth ones always came back, and I was like "Oh, so you didn't make it."

And they would always say, "Well, they let you graduate."

I would tell them all the time, "Look, they don't have special little pink planes that fly three feet above the ground for girls, you know; we jump out of the same plane. We do all the same stuff y'all do. So, this is one thing where you can't say that."

One of my favorite things is they do this training where you have to hang in the harness and you're just in a shed, you know, an overhang, and you're just hanging in the harness for quite a while. All this training, basic, AIT, jump school, all this stuff is harder for us. I'm 5'3'', you know, a lot of this stuff—being short makes it harder but being female and you're not as much upper body strength as the guys, all that stuff. This was the one thing I thought was great because they call it suspended agony because of the straps. The guys, their private parts don't like the straps and hanging there forever, but the girls we didn't have a problem. So, we just made fun of them the whole time they were hanging there.

TS: That's one thing where you had more—

DBT: Yes, we won that one.

TS: What would you say to the people, and you've given me some examples, but even today there's still the idea that women, they can't do this or they can't do that because you're not physically capable.

DBT: Well, my idea is when people say it today, if a woman wants to and she can do it and I don't believe—I never believed in lowering the standards to let women get in and let women pass because then you're not really doing it. You have to do the same thing or they won't treat you the same. But if she wants to and she can do it, there are women that can do this stuff and want to bad enough. I wanted to bad enough it made me able to do everything without being as big as they were. If you want to do it, you should be allowed to do it. I don't think it matters what it is; if you are qualified and you can do it. I know there's guys in the army that—guys talk crap; like, tankers or artillery guys, you know. "Women aren't strong enough to do what we do because we handle big ammunition and they can't lift this," and all that. Well, it's all team oriented; they all do it together. I mean that's the way it should be for the women. And there's little guys in the army that can't do what some girl that grew up playing little league and played sports in college and high school. They can come in here and do that kind of stuff that some little guy, that's not really an athlete, he's just a guy. It doesn't matter. I think if you are capable, whatever sex, you should be able to do it. So, I don't believe all that stuff.

TS: Well, what did you like best about the jump school?

DBT: That it was like going to college rather than it was like being in training. You know, you had your nights off and we all hung out. I remember the night before I made my first jump, which was freaking me out because I told you I was born—I made my—my

twenty-first birthday I made my first jump. So, it was kind of bothering me because I could picture the headline, you know, "Woman returns to scene of her birth only to die in a fiery crash."

So, we were all sitting around outside in the field—or in the little lawn outside the company and talking. I found the only four leaf clover I ever found the night before. The next morning I got up; I broke my foot jumping on my first jump. So, I thought "Goodness, what would have happened if I didn't find the four leaf clover?" [Therese laughs] What had happened was it had rained so the ground was soggy. But there's a road down the middle of the drop zone—[unclear] drop zone, and one foot landed on the road the other foot landed in the mush and turned like this [demonstrates to interviewer] and I broke my baby toe.

TS: On the mush?

DBT: Yes, it turned like that and just cracked because it had all my weight. It's all the adrenaline you don't really—I didn't know my foot was broken. But as I'm running across this big field to the turn in your parachute area where the drill sergeant has a bull horn and he's yelling at everybody telling them what to do. I ran all the way over there and I realized that if I limp I'm in trouble. So, "Don't say anything, don't say anything. Whatever this is I can go back and soak it and I'll be fine, because I'm not getting recycled. I've been recycled; I don't like it."

I run over, I turn in my parachute, and he's over here. And I go maybe a hundred feet away and I'm going to get a drink of water from the water buffalo and I limped. He saw me from all the way over there and yelled at me to "Come here and go to the ambulance." I went to the ambulance, pissed off. I didn't want to go to the ambulance. They took my boot off of my foot like this [makes noise with mouth] so I had to go to the hospital and they x-rayed it and said that I broke my baby toe. "There's nothing we can do about it."

"Oh great, then why did I have to come here?" So, I went back and I did get recycled because they put me on a crutch for like a week, but it was so funny. When you get hurt you can't keep training but you—and I only had to do it for a week so I could—I knew I was going back to jump school for the last couple of jumps.

They put you in this big parking lot and sergeants from all over the post come and go "I'll take that one, that one, that little girl with the crutches," and they take you away. Whatever they want you to do you have to clean whatever, or do whatever they say, and I had to clean the floor of this huge room. It was, like, a huge classroom with all these desks we had to move out. Little student desks and we're doing it in the middle of the night. I remember all these rangers that had quit. They come in and they're broken and bleeding and muddy. They look like they were dead; just the look on their face. I felt so bad for them, so I remember seeing that and thinking, "I'm not quitting; I'm not quitting. It isn't that bad. They're not doing that to me. How bad could it really be?"

One day they took me to tower week where they have the two hundred and fifty foot towers and they connect the parachute and you slowly drop. It used to be a carnival ride so it's not scary. It's just to see the feeling, I guess, to do the right thing when you pull on your risers. Our job—we have like four guys, and our job is to—they take a

dummy, this big, heavy dummy and drop him with different parachute malfunctions so that the class that's learning way over on the bleachers can see. But what we have is a stretcher and we stay inside the little house underneath the tower and when the thing hits the ground we're supposed to come out with the stretcher. We're going [imitates carnival song with mouth] like a silent movie, and we're all—you know how you laugh so hard you can't lift anything? We're trying to put it, because it's such a dumb thing to be doing. It was so weird. So, we put him back on and we go back to [imitates carnival song again] and we went in. We had to go up to whoever was in charge of the tower week and we went up to their office. When we first got there were four of us. The guy comes over and he's talking to the first guy and then there were three more of us. He would stand in front of us and ask us what was wrong with us, so he knew for us to work for him that day. So, the first guy says "I broke my big toe."

I said "Aw shoot." They made fun of him; a toe; big deal. So what?

And then the next guy says, "I broke my two toes beside my big toe."

I'm like, "I'm not telling them I broke my baby toe. Nope, nope, nope, nope. I'm not, I'm not, because this is going to be embarrassing." So, he chewed that guy out about being stupid about toes.

And he said, "What happened to you?"

I went, "Uh, I injured my foot."

"How'd you injure your foot?"

"Um…" And I tried to get out of it but—

"Exactly what did you do?"

"I broke my baby toe." So, they picked on me too. That was embarrassing, I remember that very well.

TS: Yes.

DBT: Because you are trying to be cool and you're trying not to stand out for the wrong reasons.

TS: Right.

DBT: This stuff happens to me, but I went back—Oh, actually when I hurt my toe on the jump—my foot, when he caught me was the second jump of the day. I actually went to lunch.

TS: I'm sorry, what?

DBT: I jumped my first jump in the morning and hurt my foot. I walked around trying not to limp during lunch and a break. Then we got on the plane to do the next jump. When I got finished with the second jump that's when he caught me limping at the end of the day.

TS: I see.

DBT: So, I thought I was pretty brave; I jumped with a broken foot. They thought, "Oh, you should just go be recycled. You know, you hurt yourself." It was only a week and I went back. We actually ended up jumping with the four of us because we all four got recycled. We finished all our jumps and they told us to go down to fire drop zone. They had a little office down there and they were going to give us our certificates and our wings. Everybody else had a big ceremony and got them pinned on. So, we go to this building and we're standing outside the steps and the guy threw us the little packet full of the—you know, just threw us the little pad of certificates to one guy and threw each one of us a set of wings and shut the door.

TS: And that's it?

DBT: That was how I got my jump wings. I remember going—walking up the hill—there was a real steep hill; how you had to come down the fire drop zone from the school barracks and everything. We were walking up and a black—a huge black racer snake. We're all macho because we're airborne now and we are cool and this racer snake goes across like this; across my boots into the grass. And I stood there on that hill screaming. They're going "What are you doing, you're airborne? You're not supposed to be screaming."

I said, "I can jump out of planes, I don't like snakes." [both laugh] But that was how I got my jump wings. I was actually supposed to—my parents were going to come see me graduate and it turned out that on my very first day of jumping my mother was having breast cancer surgery and we didn't know, because she didn't want to say anything until they knew she had it and had the surgery. I didn't know that but my mother knew that my sister was having her baby the same day. I was jumping out airplanes and she was having cancer surgery. So, she was freaking out, but then they couldn't come to the ceremony. But then I didn't have a ceremony, so it worked out. I found out later—I told you about the paratrooper and Jerry Devlin is my father's best friend from OCS. We've known him forever and he was going to come to my—

TS: Ceremony?

DBT: —ceremony and bring one of the original members of the test platoon of the 1940s first paratroopers for the army. He was going to help pin on my wings, but because my mother had the surgery everything was cancelled. I thought that would be cool, but I didn't know until a lot later. What was really neat was Jerry Devlin sent me that book, *Paratrooper*, which he had just written towards the time I went through jump school. He signed it "For your graduation from jump school," and it's from him. Then I end up twenty-five years later being the historian for 18th Airborne Corps and that is the book I use every day to find airborne history. I talk to him on the phone. If I have a question I call him and ask him. He's my expert and he goes around telling everybody that he's known the 18th Airborne Corps historian since "she was in her mom's tummy." It worked out pretty good.

The reason I'm telling you about the book is I came to Fort Bragg with the book and that book I read. It's very good information considering you're going to a unit full of airborne guys that don't know much about airborne history and I did. I would tell them

that the army, when they first tested parachutes for pilots in the army, long before World War II when they still had bi-planes, the first female to test jump parachutes for the army, well, the first person was a female, Tiny Broadwick. She's one of the first females to do most everything for parachutes; first free-fall jump. But she's the one that tested all the parachutes for the army and then they decided to buy it. It was actually her uncle's parachute that he had developed, so they bought it from him. I would remind them when they would say, "Girls shouldn't be in the airborne."

"Well, actually, you know this—," and I would tell them.

TS: What kind of reception would you get to that information?

DBT: They would just look at me like I was nuts and I'd just walk away.

TS: Knowing that you gave them the information.

DBT: Yes. When I was in the unit here my roommate, Beth, and I—we used to—she had the coolest sense of humor. I would just be shocked when she would say stuff. It helped a lot because when you get here and it's the same people every day and guys say things to you. I mean, when we would run in formation down our dens[?] every morning. Guys would hang out the windows and yell things at you and talk to you. Not bad, but sexual things. And formations going the other way would call cadence about you as you go by. They used to put the women in the front because we were shorter and it would slow down the formation so all of us would stay together. But then all the guys with the big, long legs would be yelling in the back because it hurt them. I'd rather be in the back because I don't want to piss them off. Hanging around with her helped me. You had to be good at comebacks and I didn't know how to do that. I wasn't very good at that. I was just nice, so I didn't know how to do that. But she helped me with that. She would get me in, not trouble, but in situations where I'd just be like, "Oh my God, we're going to get in trouble."

TS: Like what? What would she do?

DBT: Like, she—When you're in the army, or the airborne, they tell you back then that when you salute you say, "All the way and then some sir." Well, Beth decided from now on we were going to—when we saw young lieutenants and captains walking past going to the mess hall or something, we'd go, [in a soft tone] "All the way and then some, sir" and then we'd turn to watch them walking by us going, [makes gesture to interviewer] "We're going to get in so much trouble." But she thought it was funny. She would throw it right back at them and it helped us stay out of trouble.

TS: Where was she from?

DBT: Pennsylvania. Her name was Beth Hiltebeitel[?] and I have no way of knowing how to spell that. It is very long.

TS: That's okay.

DBT: You look at her shirt and it's like halfway across her shirt.

TS: That's a very long name to put on a shirt. I'm going to pause it for a second.

DBT: Okay.

[recording paused]

TS: You don't even need a break?

DBT: No.

TS: Okay, so we were just talking about what your dad thought about you being at jump school.

DBT: Well, I told you I signed up with that guy, so it was kind of a last minute, out of the blue kind of thing. So, I called my dad on the phone that night and I told him. I'm like, "Dad? Dad? Dad?"

And my mother comes on the phone a couple minutes later and says, "What on earth did you say to your father? He's just standing here with his mouth hanging open in shock."

I said, "Well, I went to jump school."

She goes, "Oh, well of course you are." My dad can't get on a ladder without shaking; he is afraid of heights. He did parachute a couple times but not airborne; just being at a military base you can do it for fun on the weekends and stuff; they have clubs. He did it and ended up in a tree—stuck in a tree for a really long time, and they had to get him down and he didn't like it after that. When he found out I went to jump school he couldn't talk. It was very long time he wouldn't talk about it. He would get the creeps just thinking about me flying through the air I guess, maybe, because I'm his kid or maybe because he was scared. Seriously, if you hold a ladder for my father, it does this. It just vibrates like crazy because he can't stand it. I always remind him that he's a leg. That pisses him off.

TS: A leg? What's a leg?

DBT: A leg is a non-airborne person. It's a—not a nice thing but it's not terrible. It doesn't stand for anything evil. You're just a straight leg infantry guy or whatever. Yes, he's a leg.

TS: Now, when did you meet your husband?

DBT: When I was here, I was about a year here by myself.

TS: At Fort Bragg?

DBT: At Fort Bragg, and a couple of times I met him until I actually knew him. It's still pretty weird. Let's see, it was June of '80.

TS: Oh, okay. So, we're not there yet. We're still in '79 and you were going to tell me about when you got to Fort Bragg.

DBT: Oh, they suggested—they said they have a program you can go home and be a hometown recruiter, and so I went back to where my recruiter was. It's a publicity thing; they put you in the paper and you go to the high schools—your old high school and you talk to people interested in coming in. Mostly I just hung out with him and talked to recruits when they came in. He'd take me and do a display—put up a display, and I was just a thing that was in the display because I was an oddity, an airborne woman.

TS: Right, and you had your uniform bloused. Did you have a particular hat that you wore for airborne?

DBT: Well, back then the uniform for women had this little—dress uniform had a little black beanie kind of beret thing with a big gold badge of the front. I always thought it was strange looking. I didn't get dressed up in my uniform that often so I didn't have to wear it that much. But they had very strange uniforms when I came in. They had one that was pistachio colored and it was like wearing a plastic bag. It was all polyester or something.

TS: Was that, like, the lime green kind of colored one?

DBT: Yes, but it was more pistachio I thought.

TS: Pistachio, I think that is a better description.

DBT: But it wasn't the cotton one that the nurses wore before. The pin striped one.

TS: Is this the one when you wash it, it would change colors?

DBT: I don't know I never washed it. I saw it in the closet; that's it.

TS: You never had to wear it?

DBT: Never had to wear it, no.

TS: Oh, okay.

DBT: I wore my turtleneck. They had a little green turtleneck that was kind of cool. I thought that looked nice and it didn't choke me like the little white collar with the little bow. I thought that was dorky. Plus, I'm wearing slacks with my boots bloused and you didn't want to look too girly with the little blouse, so I wore the turtleneck. I thought it looked good. That's a picture of me in it.

TS: Oh, in the turtleneck. Yes, that does look nice. That's a nice—

DBT: So, they would drag me around and show me off.

TS: How long did you do that?

DBT: A month; you do it for a month. Then when I got back I did the same thing but it was something totally different. You didn't go to your town. You went on a team to assist recruiters in a particular state, and we traveled all around Ohio and talked to people. It was kind of a bad time because the economy was good and kids didn't want to come in. Their dad was going to get them into the factory and they didn't need a job in the army. But we did—our team did collect a lot of referral cards for the recruiters. So, we did really good.

TS: Do you remember any kind of questions you'd get asked?

DBT: "What's it like to be a girl in the army? What's it like to jump out of airplanes? Do you really like it or are you just saying that?" The girls weren't interested.

TS: No?

DBT: In Ohio it was very rural where we went and it was—you know, they were going to get married and have kids and stay right th ere. The guys didn't need a job; dad owns a car dealership. It was all the same story wherever we went. We did go, which I thought was really fun, across the bridge to Parkersburg, by God, West Virginia. Which is what it said over the bridge and it was going really really south. I'm a Yankee so this stuff is new to me when I came down here. But it had all the pickup trucks with the mud splashed on them and the dogs in the back and rifles in the window. It was all like that through the whole town. We went and talked to the recruiters, and he told me that yesterday when we were getting in the car, the car had bullet holes in it. And they told us that yesterday we went to talk to this kid who was interested in going in the army but his dad didn't want him to. He lived out in the country and the dad shot at them with his shot gun. Just at the car, not at them. I'm thinking, "Yes, I don't want to stay here and talk to kids about coming to the army." It was interesting; traveled all around. I realize I don't ever want to live in Ohio. I didn't like it. I liked Fayetteville better and Fayetteville is kind of a strange place.

TS: Yes.

DBT: But I like it here.

TS: When you got to Fort Bragg, then, to do your job, what kind of job was it that you ended up doing?

DBT: Well, when I got to Fort Bragg, and I don't know the whole story until I became the historian, but I will tell you the part I knew as a private.

TS: Okay.

DBT: When I got to Fort Bragg I was assigned to the 82nd signal. Eight-second is the 82nd Airborne Division; everybody is airborne. So, I thought if you weren't in the 82nd and you were in some other unit on Fort Bragg you were a leg. I did not just go through jump school and all this stuff to be a leg. When they came and told me that a group of us who had not—who had just gotten to Fort Bragg and were supposed to go to 82nd, we're not going to the 82nd, we're now going to 35th Signal Brigade, to 50th Signal Battalion. They put us in the vehicle and took us right down there and I was almost ready to bust into tears. I couldn't believe they were going to do this to me after all of this. I just was pissed. And it wasn't all girls. It was guys and me, so I didn't think it was a girl thing.

I got to the brigade headquarters and it said 35th Signal Brigade Airborne. I'm like, "Oh, good. Okay. Alright. I'm not going to cry. This is cool. This will be alright." They dropped me off, I go into the brigade headquarters and I sit on this bench forever while people walk past me. Towards the end of the day, the brigade commander walks by and he says—doesn't introduce himself, I just know he came out of the boss's office where they've all been running around, so I figured that was the big guy. He says—as he's walking he never stopped to talk to me, he says, "Oh, a new female airborne," or "new airborne female. Can you type?" and kept on walking out the door.

So, I thought, "Well, that was insulting". I understand now that a lot of the women that first came here they tried to keep them in clerical positions rather than doing their new MOSs that they didn't get to do before. I didn't realize that they were trying to keep me out of my MOS, but when I got to the unit I realized pretty quick. They sent me to the headquarters company and made me work in the personnel section for the battalion. I did leave forms and requests for, you know, all kinds of things and typed up stuff, but not my MOS. Okay, as I learned that the main job of a signal person while they're in garrison is to change oil and hang out in the motor pool with the vehicle. It's not interesting. So, I—"Okay, I won't say anything, I'll just stay here. This is okay for now. This is interesting. I'll do it." But I thought it was ironic I came into the army to do something non-traditional; I don't want to be a secretary. And what happened? First day I'm a secretary. So, okay, I can deal with it.

I ended up going from there to Charlie Company where I became the clerk in the operations for the company commander, which was like three people that worked in there. This was early on. There was a female sergeant that was in there and she was older; like, she was—had been in as a WAC [Women's Army Corps] and she was like thirty-five or something like that. She was a lot older but she was an E-5. One day it came out that we were going to be in a parade for the change of command for the corps on the

main post parade field. We'd have to all be out there dressed the same and stand there forever in the heat and everything. They told me that, "We have two females in our company so you both have to dress the same. You have to wear your skirt and your low quarters, your little black shoes."

I said, "No, I'm airborne. She's a leg. No, I'm not wearing a skirt." I did not go through jump school to get here and have them take that away from me. That's a symbol. They didn't care.

I kept bugging them and the company commander said, "If you want, it's the—sergeant major's put out the request and go talk to him and if he'll let you, then whatever." So, I didn't think they thought I was going to do anything about it, so I went over to the sergeant major's office. I stood out there for a long time and they finally opened the door. He's sitting at his desk; I'm standing at the door. I never actually got to get in but it wasn't that big an office. I start to tell him—and I'm a nice quiet person, I don't yell.

Well, I yelled. "I don't think it's fair; I shouldn't have to dress like her. She's a leg and I'm airborne. I didn't go through all of this, and if you want us to dress the same then you send her ass to jump school." And this sergeant major's just looking at me like—I'm like, "Oh, I'm going to get in so much trouble, this is going to be really bad." My heart's pounding and I'm saying it because I'm not giving up. All of a sudden from behind me an arm comes and they put their arm around me and it's the battalion commander.

He said, "Darling, you can wear anything you want to. You tell him I said so."

I'm like, "Alright." I went back and told him, and I didn't have to dress like her. I never do stuff like that but it just meant so much to me. I couldn't back down, so I did. So, that's where I learned I'm not so bad at standing up for myself, it just happens in little pockets all around.

TS: Yes.

DBT: That, and the army taught me, too, that I'm very good in a crisis. I'm not the one that screams, except for snakes. But I'm not the one that screams and does "What do you do, what do you do?" I'm always the one that stays calm until after and then gets upset.

TS: Yes.

DBT: So, that's something I learned about myself in the army, which came in handy being a mom. [both chuckle] I can do all the stuff with the broken bones and the blood and everything.

TS: Yes? Well, did you ever get to do your—did you do your telephone linesman?

DBT: Well, when we went to the field they let me do it a couple of times, but here it was like they didn't put big cables on telephone poles. They strung wire through pine trees in the woods, so it wasn't really climbing poles; it was like pine tree. When we'd go to the field I ended more working for the first sergeant and the company commander handling the

radio and collecting all the information. It was interesting in the field but I never really got to work my MOS. I mean, not that they wouldn't let me if I asked, but I realized that this was the cool place to be. It was more interesting, more stuff to do. I wasn't going to spend three years changing the oil in vehicles that didn't need their oil changed. Those guys looked bored.

TS: Yes?

DBT: And my husband was one so I know. He hated being in garrison because it wasn't anything to do.

TS: No? So, did you get to jump out of more planes?

DBT: Oh, yes.

TS: All the time?

DBT: Total I did—I got there in July '79 and got out in November of '81 and I made thirty-two jumps.

TS: Did you break your toe again, ever?

DBT: No, I got a concussion one night. That was interesting. It was coincidentally my twenty-second birthday. [Therese laughs]

TS: A year later huh?

DBT: Yes. We made it a policy in the company that I don't jump on my birthday anymore. It was my first night jump so I was real excited. We ran out the back end of a C-130 and it was disorienting because you could see stuff but then you couldn't see stuff. It was like dusk. I could make out the shiny sand of the drop zone but things were a little distorted. So, okay, when you see the tops of the trees you prepare to land. Wham! I hit the ground. They weren't the trees; I'd already passed the trees; they were dark. I saw the tops of the short little bushes and smacked into the ground.

TS: Oh no. Oh no.

DBT: My helmet came off when I hit. I hit really hard and I remember seeing the bushes and going wham. But I don't remember anything between that until I was in the ambulance, again, with the light in my eyes and the guy talking to me. They said I had a concussion. But what I did while I was concussed was pick up my parachute, put it in the bag, tie everything out, find my helmet, and get to where you turn it in. They said I was wandering, looking confused. They said, "I don't think she's doing good; let's take her to the ambulance;" my friends. I was fine after that but they made me go to the hospital. My company commander, who I worked for, he hit his head. So, the two of us sat in the

hospital talking all night. Okay, we got injured in a jump but, you know, you're in a room full of people who got injured on the same jumps, so we didn't get seen for a very long time. We just had to stay awake. They'd just come by and make sure we were awake.

TS: Make sure you're awake.

DBT: Yes. He said—he used to call me DB for Donna Barr. He never called me Specialist or my full name ever as long as I knew him. And he never saluted me because we'd see each other back and forth, back and forth going to the battalion and through the company area. He was this little S-4 [Supply-4] guy that had a company command now and he was just like a book worm kind of guy. He'd walk by me, wave and go, "Hey DB." That was it, and I had to salute of course. I always remember him, just, the look on his face, "Hey DB." He was real sweet to me.

TS: Talk for a minute about—you alluded to this earlier; there's guys in the military who did not treat women very well and there's guys who did treat women very well. Did you feel like you had any mentors that were men, that took you under their wing?

DBT: Mentors?

TS: Well, they showed you the ropes or helped you along?

DBT: My company commander; I worked for him in operations but I also worked for the first sergeant who was—you know, we were all in one group. The first sergeant was Fred Taylor and he was pretty cool; like a big teddy bear, like somebody's dad. He was just the nicest, sweetest guy and he watched out for me. When we would go to the field Beth and I were the only girls that went to the field. He slept in the trailer; the jeep trailer was parked next to the tent so he could see us and make sure nobody came around us. He was guarding us, not eyeballing us.

TS: Right.

DBT: My father had come down with my mom and visited when I finally was in the unit and my dad and him had this big long talk. He told me later that, "Your dad made me swear I would keep an eye out for you." So, he did.

TS: That's one of the reasons—

DBT: So, when I got in trouble it was like getting in trouble with your dad. I hardly ever get in trouble, but I did have some where he'd "tsk, tsk, tsk."

"Uh, I did something really bad."

TS: It's like he's disappointed in you.

DBT: Yes. He also—I thought it was really cool he gave my helmet to my father. He knew about his collection. And my helmet that I had when I first got there is the same helmet that's in my dad's collection now in his museum. He replaced it from somewhere else. I didn't ask but I had a new helmet. I thought that was really sweet. He was a great guy. He was leaving, and I loved working for him. I was over at the battalion headquarters and I was standing around waiting to do something and there's a whole bunch of people; people I didn't know. And I was talking to the guy that had staff duty and he's saying, "You know, you're getting a new first sergeant, why don't you come work for me at the B company?" Because I was really good at what I did and they wanted me to come work for them.

I said, "Well, if the new first sergeant is a real monster, I will give you a call." I'm standing there, "ha, ha, ha." There's this guy at the end of the line, we're all kind of leaning against the wall.

This guy leans back and goes, "Hi. I'm the monster." That was the new guy and that was my new first sergeant. He was odd; he wasn't as nice as First Sergeant Taylor but he was nice to us for the most part. Just strange, like a real old guy.

TS: What do you mean by strange? What qualifies you as being strange?

DBT: Creepy like. He was creepy, like, an old guy. I don't know. [chuckles] But, like, First Sergeant Taylor, I'd been in the unit for quite a while and you go over to the battalion and they have electric typewriters. They have a computer in the back of the brigade headquarters. It takes up a whole van but I know people have computers, I know they have at least electric. I'm typing legal documents, and all these things you can't make mistakes, on a manual typewriter that I have to use two fingers because my fingers don't stretch long enough to push hard enough.

TS: You really had to make them funk to get the ink down?

DBT: Yes. So, I had to learn to touch type—two finger type even though I could touch type pretty fast. I got so good at [makes typewriter noise] doing it with two fingers that I had to be trained again when I got out of the army because I couldn't type anymore.

TS: Because you were just used—[laughs]

DBT: My fingers were kind of out. But I was so pissed I messed up something on a legal document and you can't mess up and I'm tired of typing this stuff again. So, I picked up my manual typewriter and I walked into the first sergeant's office and I'm standing in front of his desk holding it and he's looking at me and he's talking on the phone. I lifted it up over my head and dropped it on his desk.

TS: While he's on the phone?

DBT: He says, "I have to go. There's a crazy woman in front of me."

I said, "This is no joke, you get me an electric typewriter today or this is the last time I'm typing on this." And I had an electric typewriter. I didn't know I had to threaten him to get one but I had one that day.

TS: Your mild mannered-ness that you've told me about seems—

DBT: Doesn't work forever. [both laugh] You had to stand up once in a while.

TS: Right. I guess not.

DBT: He was always real nice. When I did get married we went home to Massachusetts and then after to Florida where my husband is from, for our wedding and fu—wedding and funeral [chuckles]—wedding and honeymoon. He brought my husband and I in there and he said, "I'm filling out this leave form and I'm keeping it on my desk. You call me when you get there; you call me when you leave; you call me when you get back, because the minute I don't hear from you, I'm putting this thing in." So, he's covering his butt, but he gave us a whole month for free.

TS: Why did he do that?

DBT: Because we were getting married and he—I worked for him and he thought that would be a nice present. He would be in big trouble if he let us leave and something happened to us; we got hurt.

TS: Right.

DBT: So, he had that leave form ready to get turned in; "Oh, I forgot this." But he never turned it in; he ripped it up when I got back. And then, as soon as I got married they kicked me out of my own unit and they sent me back to headquarters again.

TS: Why?

DBT: Because you couldn't have two married people in the same unit.

TS: Why not?

DBT: They said so back then. We weren't allowed to be together.

TS: What was the reasoning?

DBT: Well, I don't know exactly, because we were the same rank so we couldn't have a—

TS: Supervise each other?

DBT: Yes, but we didn't. We didn't work together at all. We saw each other at formation or lunch. But they kicked me out because it was easier to put me in the headquarters than it was to put him somewhere else because of his MOS and the equipment was in that company. He was the guy, so you don't kick the guy out. That was not too much before I got out so I didn't mind. But it was my company; I wanted to stay with my friends and my company. Nope. They also tried to send me to Korea and we made that not happen, so I didn't have to go. I'd just got married.

TS: Why did they want to send you to Korea?

DBT: Because I'd never been anywhere. It was just a PCS [permanent change of station] move.

TS: How did you get out of that?

DBT: Turned up to be pregnant while we were trying to fight it and keep it from happening, so they didn't send me.

TS: Because you were pregnant?

DBT: Yes.

TS: Was that a restriction that wouldn't allow you to get to—

DBT: They won't send you while you're pregnant back then. They didn't even want you to stay in the army. I know people that—right before we had kids, you had to give your kid away before. If you were single, you had to sign them over.

TS: To be able to get into the army?

DBT: Yes. You couldn't be a single parent back then. You had to find alternative care for your kid. One of our roommates, we had four people that lived in our room, four girls, and one of them had to do that with her kid.

TS: Before she joined?

DBT: Yes, but that changed while I was in; I know that. Nobody tried to make me give my kid up or anything.

TS: Had you ever thought about staying in?

DBT: It was funny how it worked out. My husband's step-father was an insurance broker and he owned his own business. He wanted us to come live in Florida where they lived and work for him. And he said that he would—he was going to set up—he had a separate room next to where my office would be and I would work for him and the baby could stay in the little room with me. He'd set it all up with a crib and all that stuff. He was all

excited and my husband could come home and work for him. It was my husband's time to get out or reenlist and so that's what we were going to do. Right about the time I had the baby everybody started calling him grandpa and he realized he wasn't ready to be a grandpa. So, he kind of—the two of them got divorced and you can't go work for your ex-stepfather. I'm out already and my husband had to reenlist because he didn't have a job if he didn't. It kind of just worked out, I was out. Okay.

TS: So, you had gotten out, though, with the intention of going to—

DBT: Yes.

TS: Do you think you would have gotten out otherwise?

DBT: I don't know. I didn't have the option because we had made other plans. I hadn't thought of staying without my husband and he was ETS-ing [Expiration of Term of Service]; he would be out. So, he didn't want to stay. He wanted to go home. It worked out good because I didn't want to go to Florida as much as he did and he's not going to Massachusetts. So, we stayed in Fayetteville, North Carolina.

TS: This is where you been ever since?

DBT: We're half way to each place. This is where you keep your family; half way; several hundred miles away at least. You can visit them when you want but they weren't all in our business here. This was our place, and then my parents moved here.

TS: Oh, they did?

DBT: Yes, but my husband like them so it worked out alright.

TS: Did you think of yourself as a trailblazer at the time?

DBT: No, because I didn't know the history of what happened before me other than I knew there were nurses in Vietnam. I didn't know anything about WACs. I didn't really realize how early I had gone to jump school, and why it was so new, until I started working here in '97 as the historian and started reading about it. Number one, when I first became the historian I couldn't find anything about women airborne in the building. There wasn't anything. Nobody collected anything. So, I did and I have a pretty good collection of oral history interviews and things like that. I've talked to women and made sure that there's airborne stories here.

TS: What kind of—When did the women first start becoming airborne then?

DBT: It was like '73, '74. So, when I signed up in '79 there wasn't that much history before and it was "onesies" and "twosies," it wasn't—

TS: What does that mean?

DBT: Like each class had one or two people.

TS: Oh, I see.

DBT: It wasn't a whole lot. I have a list. A friend of mine was the one hundreth woman to graduate from jump school and I think that's '75. So, you figure two years and it was only one hundred women the whole time. Then she ended up being the first female pathfinder. Well, she was the first female pathfinder, but she was also the first woman instructor; black cat is what they call it in jump school.

TS: What's a pathfinder?

DBT: You go to a school, they give you a badge. Your job is to jump in first and setup the drop zone for the oncoming paratroopers. You do all of that before they get there, so you jump in early. She went to the school and it was the first woman that they sent her there; first women that ever did it, so it was a pretty big deal. We just had a women's history display and one of the women we took pictures of for the display just got her pathfinder badge, so it's still a really big deal. I'm sure there's not that many women. I didn't realize I was that early. I mean, '79, okay, four years later but still. I didn't realize it was that early. I just thought everybody did it. I didn't know. I didn't know much about WACs until I started working here and how the transition—my friend I just told you about, she was a WAC when she came in and then she was sent here as a volunteer soldier. It had switched over. When she got here, the 82nd Airborne Division was supposed to take women.

TS: Was or was not?

DBT: Was, and they were fighting it. Every woman they sent over there, from 18th Airborne Corps they sent back and said they couldn't take her. There was a big fight, and she got sent back and forth, back and forth. Then finally she went back down to jump school and they made her the first instructor. The 82nd fought hard to keep women out. I didn't know that until I was the historian. So, when they actually were ending up with me they didn't fight. We were actually over there in processing and that's when I got sent over to the other signal unit. And that—I didn't find out who was at fault for that until I was the historian.

My sergeant major became the corps sergeant major and he's a big deal in 82nd history; was in the army forever. He wrote a book about his time in the military and he comes to all the functions still, he's always around. He gave me—as a historian, he gave me a copy of his book and I read it. The story I told you about not wearing my—not being able to wear my jump boots and my pants, he was the sergeant major and he wrote the story. But I believe he took two stories—two different stories, and smushed them together because there's this other girl's story kind of overlapping mine. I don't know if he did it on purpose to tell one story or he forgot which one was which. But that was me and I'm reading about his—when he becomes sergeant major at 50th Signal and he was

asked by the corps commander to go down there and fix it because it was drugs; non-airborne people. They wanted to make it all airborne. It was 1979, and it was just—before urine tests and all that for drugs and it was just a mess. So, they sent him down there to square it away and he told the people at the in-processing that he wanted the first group of new paratroopers and that's how I ended up. He's the one that lassoed me and brought me down there. I was kind of mad at him because he took me out of the 82nd. I was already here as the historian 25 years later.

TS: Before you found that out?

DBT: I'm still mad.

TS: He was—You actually were the first group of airborne to go into that?

DBT: No.

TS: No?

DBT: It was half airborne, half leg, and they wanted it all airborne. So, they just wanted to fill in all the—

TS: Fill in all the slots?

DBT: Yes.

TS: I see. Well, did you feel like you were treated fairly during your time in the army?

DBT: Yes. I don't think—except for personal things, I don't think the army did anything bad. The army was always behind you trying to get you to be in these positions. It was individual people that didn't like you being there. They thought they could use their position to bully you or push you out.

TS: How do you distinguish between what the army wants and, when you're in a unit, what individuals want?

DBT: Because they don't say it out loud. They tell you in person by yourself and nobody else can hear them. They say things like, "I'm going to make sure you don't stay here. I don't want you in my unit." Things like that, that no one believes you if you told them.

TS: Did people say that to you?

DBT: Yes.

TS: What units didn't they want you to stay in?

DBT: When I was in the signal unit.

TS: Yes?

DBT: Yes. They didn't want me in their unit. "Well, sorry, I have to be here."

TS: How was it like with your peers? How were those relationships? Were those kind of guys the ones talking to you or was it leadership?

DBT: There were guys that knew you that you worked with that were your friends. We had a whole group of SPEC-4s [Specialist 4] that came in at the same time and we were all friends; with Beth and my husband and his section sergeant—or team sergeant, Phil Nelson; he was one of our best friends. He married the daughter of another friend that worked in B Company. He was a first sergeant over there, so we all were interrelated friends and friends of friends. We were all real close. We had parties at everybody's houses on the weekends. Other people that, you know, the guys that would accost you on the sidewalk or hang out the window and say nasty things to you. Those guys were always surprised because we had other guys that would stand up for us. I mean, you could trust them to take care of you and not let anybody else mess with you. You still had all the jerks. I mean, you have that in the civilian world, too, it's not just the army.

TS: Was it more, maybe, fear of the unknown? They didn't work with you, they didn't know you.

DBT: Yes. We weren't there before. They have preconceived ideas. Once you work there and they see how good you do or what you're capable of. I always did very well at my job. I always had—Whoever I worked with or worked for, they thought I did a great job. I never was a dud but you get treated like a dud until your prove you can do what you do.

TS: Do you think you had to prove yourself as a woman? Did you have to do extra?

DBT: Well, like I said, when I worked in the company I was airborne, I was established in the unit and some new guy would come and he's a leg and he said, "Well, if you can do it, I can do it."

"You know, okay, how much more do I have to prove? I'm here. I did it. I do it once a month. What's the deal?"

TS: It wasn't like through affirmative action type—

DBT: No.

TS: We need to have two women graduate this month, we'll select you?

DBT: Nope. No. No. No.

TS: You had to do the work.

DBT: No pink cloud.

TS: Pink plane.

DBT: No pink planes floating on the ground. We had to jump out of the same planes. We had to do the same training and they were not nice to us. They were worse to us than they were to them.

TS: They? Who do you mean?

DBT: The instructors in jump school. They weren't nice to us. They yelled at us all the time. Everything we did, they yelled at us. I'll give you an example. They decided on their own, I think, that in ground week they had this big PT pit full of rocks. So, all the girls—I was in basic and AIT and did pushups all the time and we had infantry drill sergeants that said we had to do straight leg pushups. We never did girl pushups. I mean, oh my goodness, they'd kill us if we were doing girl pushups. They wouldn't let us do that. So, we get to jump school and they tell us we have to do girl pushups, which includes putting your knees on all these rocks and doing a pushup. We would try to do them straight like we learned how and they would yell at us and tell us to "put your knees on the rocks." That was more painful. I don't think that was to be nice to us or treat us better than—just because we're all girls? We could all do it, we just graduated.

TS: You were with the [Navy] SEALs?

DBT: Yes. What's the problem? No. They were mean to us for things like that; weird little things. I had an instructor—When you are training they set you up in a mock airplane on the ground which is like the body of the plane but they take the sides off so that you can see inside. The struts are all around behind the chairs, the wood struts every couple of inches. I was sitting next to this other girl and out of the corner of my eye I could—back in those days I had really good peripheral vision. I could see him without looking away from the instructor that was talking, and he walked behind me and her and took our static lines and hooked them together so that when we stood up we'd fall on our faces because the pole is keeping us from moving. So, he just nonchalantly walked away and went back to the front where the guy was talking. I just very quietly without moving too much unhooked them. When we stood up and hooked up, we didn't do anything, we didn't fall. When I jumped—you go up to the front and you jump out of the plane like you would if it was in the air, and he was standing there looking at me. I turned to him, I smiled and I jumped out. Nobody said anything to anybody but he knows I figured out what he was doing because we didn't fall on our faces. But stuff like that, he thought that was real funny to make us fall.

TS: Did you feel as though—Well, did you work with a lot of women?

DBT: No.

TS: Did you have Beth? Did she work with you at all?

DBT: Beth was the mail clerk.

TS: Mail clerk?

DBT: I had another girl that was in our room. Her name was Wanda Monseese. She was, like, six feet tall, big farm girl, and she walked like she was going to kick somebody's ass but she was like baby Huey; big, sweet, wouldn't hurt a fly; never. She was just this big farm girl. My husband used to laugh all the time because she was so tall, and when she would get a drink from the water fountain she would take her feet and spread her legs like a giraffe on either side until she was low enough to drink from the fountain. So, he would call her a giraffe all the time, but the sweetest person.

The thing that freaked me out working in the company, I knew everybody's records and she scored higher on her test to come in the army than anybody in the unit. She was extraordinarily smart, very, very high, and she read. She was talking to me one day and wanted to know about Watergate [scandal] and [President Richard Milhaus] Nixon and said she keeps hearing this stuff but doesn't know the story and I was trying to explain it. She goes and buys every book by every guy that was involved in Watergate and read them all. She knows everything about Watergate. I thought it was fascinating she's that smart but she's goofy, shy. You don't get that she's that smart because I would tell everybody, "No. Heck no. Dude you are so lower than her on the test. You wouldn't believe it." She's very, very smart.

TS: Did you have any awareness of the political climate going on in the time that you were in? Because, you know, we had that—you would have come in when [President James Earl, Jr.] Jimmy Carter was president.

DBT: Yes.

TS: Then it would have been [President Ronald Wilson] Reagan that got elected.

DBT: The only time I remember of being aware of politics and presidents, is when Reagan got elected we got a raise. We made more money and we got higher jump pay. We went higher for jump pay because it's a Republican and they like to give money to the military. We had a more tighter economy in the unit. We didn't have as much money, so, with Carter. I just remember Reagan and everybody promised us all kinds of more money and everything. But I remember Iran Contra because we would watch it on the news but not like "Oh my God, this is it. We're going to go." Not Iran Contra, I'm sorry.

TS: The Iran hostage—I did that earlier, so yes, The Iran hostage crisis.

DBT: Iran hostage, yes. We knew about that but just because we heard about the attempt to go in and save them. That was military so we were interested in what happened and everything. That's about it. I don't remember really thinking much about it one way or another before that.

TS: Did you have a favorite hero or heroine?

DBT: Like in the army or before?

TS: Doesn't have to be in the army.

DBT: Well, I thought—when I came in the army, every time I did something when I was—when I jumped and you hit the drop zone and you had that adrenaline rush and you could do anything, you were—You weren't Super Woman; I was John Wayne. I figure it must be John Wayne because it just—it's a John Wayne thing to do to put your foot up on the jeeps and sit in the helicopter and be jumping out of helicopters. It was John Wayne all the way. Not that he was my hero, I just kept referencing him when I would do really cool, tough guy stuff.

TS: Yes, maybe the John Wayne thing to do, yes. Well, if you're—I don't know, your daughter—How old—Your daughter is—

DBT: Twenty-nine.

TS: Twenty-nine?

TS: Did she ever have any interest in going into the military?

DBT: No. Sometimes it has an opposite effect. Amanda's[?] funny. I made my last jump when I was pregnant and didn't know it; like, a week or so. And it's actually this jump right here [shows interviewer a photo]. We jumped into Eglin Air Force Base in Florida. It was the largest jump since World War II. We've been beat out since that.

TS: That's a lot of parachutes in the air there.

DBT: But I was pregnant and didn't know it. My daughter has worked in restaurants and things around here with soldiers and she will always tell them, because they get all cocky and airborne guys want to tell you, "Yeah, I'm airborne."

"Yeah, I did that before I was born. It's no big deal."

TS: [Laughs] That's a good one.

DBT: She was really cute when she was little because my husband, with my permission, made her tough like that. She was a little wiry thing, and she could—she was very strong, and she could do anything. He taught her two things: how to jump off the refrigerator,

because he was training her to be airborne, and how to untie his boots. So, he would always be flinging her around on the couch and she was fearless. At Fort Bragg we have a spring fair and an Oktoberfest where they setup little kiddie jump towers. They're the little small tower you hook to the wire and you jump out of the little mock door and you slide down the wire, which is a training that we do during tower week, and they do it for the little kids because they love it. Mandy is like two and a half, three years old and she had done it a couple of times and she goes and gets in line. She's got the harness on and she's a little tiny thing dragging this stuff up the stairs. She gets up there and there's this sweet, young soldier that—this poor little child, and he wants to be sweet to her. He puts his legs kind of in the door and lets her slide down his legs so she doesn't get the big jolt. I'm waiting at the bottom, she gets unhooked and stomps down the stairs. I say, "What's the matter?"

She says, "He did it wrong." She was pissed and stomped all the way passed me, up the stairs again and she told the guy, "That's not how you do it. This is how you do it." She went "uh" and went out the door. [both laughing]

I'm like, "Oh no, we've corrupted her." About a year later she was almost four, like three and a half or something. We had—my husband's unit had a fun day and they had set up the tower over there. My husband had told his commander, his colonel, that Manda[?] had jumped like four times already.

And he said, "Well, five times she gets her certificate." He had this little impromptu ceremony and had brought a certificate when she jumped. She has a certificate for five jumps and wings. She has them, still, at 29 years old on her bedroom wall. That's very important to her, but she loves to tell people she jumped before she was born.

I'm like, "Keep it down. I don't want people to think I'm, like, a crazy person, jumping with a baby," but I didn't know when I did it.

TS: But she never wanted to go into the army or military?

DBT: No. No.

TS: If she had wanted to what would you have said to her?

DBT: I would have let her do it. That's weird because I would have let her before I let the boys.

TS: Why?

DBT: Because the boys became eligible when all this stuff was going on.

TS: You mean with Afghanistan and Iraq?

DBT: It bothered me that they could get hurt and I encouraged it. Not that they wanted to go or didn't want to go, but I would feel bad if I said, "Sure, I think you should go in. Yes, no problem." Now, my youngest almost went in. He talked about it and then never did. But I

thought he was going to actually go and I was scared for him because he's just like his dad.

One of my bosses in the army, when I met my husband, he told me to be very careful if I marry this man because he thinks he has a total disrespect for authority. Well, my husband is like an authority, just the way he is without rank. He is just that. When he walks into a room, everybody knows he is there. It's not loud, he's just—it comes off of him. He projects this thing and he didn't learn it in the army. When I met him he already had it. As a private, you know, you don't have that. And he still has it. People talk about it all the time. He's just like that.

TS: You son is the same way?

DBT: Oh, identical. He's a clone of my husband. They think the same. They look the same. They are now working for my husband's company together and they wear the same blue shirt and black pants. When they walk in the door I have to go [makes motion], because they have the same haircut and everything. I'm like, "God, I can't tell them apart." They look the same.

TS: Did your husband retire from the military?

DBT: No, he got out with twelve years and I was really pissed at him. Because being an army brat and having a dad retire with twenty, that's what you do. He just said he didn't want to go twenty because he was an NCO [non-commissioned officer]. The only thing he could become is a first sergeant or sergeant major and he didn't want to be a staff guy or first sergeant or sergeant major. It didn't appeal to him at all. He liked working with the equipment. He did computers and electronics. He liked working with the soldiers and he didn't want to do all that other stuff that he saw. He said, "Besides, at this age I can get a job and I'm not old and their going to hire me because I'm young and I've got a few years left." I fought it but he got out. I believed him, you know. I didn't want to have him stay in and be miserable. He also said he did this one project, this huge project, for the brigade and he turned it over to these majors that were assigned to do it. He did it and gave it to them and they took credit for it and never gave him—And he said he didn't want to be in a job where what he did helped other people get ahead and didn't help him. He wanted to work for himself, so that's what he did, even though I didn't get to go to the commissary or the PX or the hospital anymore. What can you do? It worked out good.

TS: Do you think there's anything—any misconceptions that civilians might have about the military?

DBT: Yes, I think they have a total misconception.

TS: Like what?

DBT: Unless you know somebody, I don't think you know anything about the military. And even the people that their dad or their brother, I don't think they know that much either.

TS: What do you think their misconceptions are?

DBT: Some many things. Being the historian, people call me and ask me for the strangest things like "Could you tell me about when my husband or when my grandfather was in World War II? I think he was in Charlie Company." Well, you're in fifth army, you're in a corps, a division, you come all the way down brigade, battalion, company. Everybody has a Charlie Company, so things like that that they don't really get.

Being the historian, I get calls from people saying they want me to provide a list of all the people that knew my husband when he was training at Fort Bragg; pictures of him outside the barracks, and names and addresses so she can send them invitations to his eighty-fifth birthday. She doesn't have a clue what goes on in the army. I mean these things aren't possible. Nobody does that. You watch local news programs. These people I've seen since I've been here, they are the expert on Fort Bragg for each of their stations and they get it all wrong. They say things like how can they not know that? They've been around us forever. They say the strangest things. They mix things up and change—

TS: Like what?

DBT: Like, my commander, Lieutenant General Helmick is the 18th Airborne Corps and Fort Bragg commander. That means he runs the post, he also runs the highest ranking unit on post. Eighty-second Airborne division works for 18th Airborne Corp, so my three-star general is the boss of the two-star general in charge of the division. They said on the news one of the guys that's been here forever said Lieutenant General Helmick is the Fort Bragg commander; he's also the 82nd division commander. Things like that.

TS: So, they have a lot of trouble with hierarchy?

DBT: Yes, and how things are laid out. I mean you could watch M.A.S.H. [1970s television show about a Korean War field hospital] and know more than a lot of people. I'm used to it because I grew up with it. I get it.

TS: Right.

DBT: But it just amazes me that people—or you watch movies and the things they say. I have a friend that was telling me—I told them one of the movies I can't stand the most is with John Travolta because of what they wear. They had Samuel L. Jackson in a helicopter at night on a training mission with a black sweater and dress pants and a beret or something. I said, "None of that stuff makes any sense for him to be on there."

He said—because he worked out there with the military people hiring out to movies, and he's like, "No, they're, like, black pants would look so nice with this black sweater, don't you think?"

Okay, but it shouldn't be there. You watch movies where they have military advisors and their stuff is on upside down or backwards. Or they say stuff that you're

like, "Huh?" They love to talk about [Fort] Bragg and they say things about [Fort] Bragg like it's true and I'm like [scoffs].

TS: Bragg the fort or Bragg the person.

DBT: The fort.

TS: The fort.

DBT: Or what's the one I saw the other day? Never could stand *Rambo* movies because they do dumb stuff in those. But he always talked about [Fort] Bragg. You know, things that never happened.

TS: You mean, like, historically inaccurate and factually inaccurate?

DBT: What soldiers would and wouldn't do and how they are.

TS: Yes.

DBT: Like that—What's that movie, that got that Academy Award and that guy got it. They were in Afghanistan. It's a new movie.

TS: *Rendition*?

DBT: No, where he was a demolitions expert. He acted like an insane person. If you acted like that they take you away. So, I mean, here they are projecting this image of this crazed bomb explosive guy. And it's like okay, if a guy that dealt with this stuff was like that they wouldn't let him do it.

TS: Well, I have a question for you. It's kind of interesting to see how you answer this knowing about the time when you first went in the military. But one of the controversies right now is about the repeal of "Don't Ask, Don't Tell". What do you think about what's going on with that?

DBT: Well, I like it. I don't want it to be repealed. I just think—I'll give you an example. When I first got to my unit here I was in headquarters company with all the women that lived in that floor with us; were in the day room every night watching T.V. There was a guy from upstairs in the headquarters that was a young guy, maybe like twenty five or so, who would come down and hang out with us and watch T.V. with us because if he stayed upstairs or hung out with the guys, they'd beat the shit out of him because he was gay. So, he would hang out with us and we all took care of him. We were nice to him. We taught him how to knit; probably made things worse for him but—

TS: Maybe.

DBT: That made me realize that you can't do that because when you're in a military unit and you do that mob mentality stuff where if it's okay or if it's not—if nobody—if you just ignore it, the command ignores it, ignores you doing something to the guy, then it will always happen. I think they need more information, not just pretend it's not there. Just tell people don't do it; that it exists. I think they should be more like that. I think it's just like women in the army, it just takes time. It's better now than it was when I was in. I mean, you didn't know, you couldn't know, and that was before "Don't Ask, Don't Tell". That was just, you know, you could beat the guy up in the bathroom and you didn't get in trouble because half the floor beat him up. And we had gay women. Right before I was there, there was a lady that was gay but I never met her. They told me about her.

TS: What were they saying?

DBT: Well, she was real tough and she got drunk all the time and they said that they realized—two of the ladies told me they realized that she was upset about her situation and nobody was being nice to her so they hung out with her. She was a really nice person and nothing wrong, nothing scary, nothing bad, but she got picked on all the time; harassed; made fun of all the time by the guys. I don't think you need that.

It's like, in the army when I was in it wasn't the women that had to change it was the guys that had to cha nge. Because until the Vietnam era guys moved on; the army wasn't going to change. And it did because when I came in all the volunteer guys, most everybody had two years of college already. They weren't just dumb asses that couldn't get a job or guys that were told you go in the army or you go to jail. But before that, they had a lot of that and we used to always say when all of that goes away and it's just us and the next group and the next group. I said the same thing about women. Until you get rid of the guys that never had women around and you get used to them, it'll be better. You know, there's still, for gays and for women, there's still guys that'll just say they shouldn't be here.

TS: So, you think some of it was generational?

DBT: Not generational; army generational, military. You know, this is the era these soldiers were raised in. That's the way they think. They think that even though their generation is still in the army, nobody else thinks that anymore. But they still have it. You'd see them all muttering and talking under their breath after a while because they couldn't say it right out loud anymore. So, I know a lot of it exists, people still think it, and they might mutter about it but a lot of it is going away, which is good.

TS: What would patriotism mean to you?

DBT: I don't like the fake patriotism that I see. I think, to me, patriotism is when I was a little kid in Germany and you were just so proud to be an American, because you knew that where you lived it was so much better. The people were so much better off than the places you were going and seeing people. I'm talking about Germany, too, because Germany in the sixties hadn't been that long since everything was bombed out. You

could still see bombed out blocks in different areas. You still saw things still broken and so it hadn't been that long. And you see Germans had to go grocery shopping every day because they don't have the appliances or the things at the store that we have that we just don't even think about anymore. I was always very happy to go home, to be in the United States, but you learn that from leaving and seeing what else there is. There's no place like home. That's patriotism, I think.

I don't like this fake stuff. I'm really bad about—what did I watch last night? *American Idol* with my daughter. They said that the *Idol* stars are hometown heroes. I don't like the way the word hero gets thrown around because I know heroes and I know what a hero is. I don't mean just military. A hero is above and beyond; somebody that would sacrifice themselves to save their friend. I don't think everybody's a hero but we seem to want to say that everybody's a hero now and everybody's patriotic. I really don't like the division in the country now where one party is more patriotic than another. I think that's totally the opposite of what patriotism is. You have to love America; it's not just loving Republicans or Democrats. I don't think there's a lot of that going on.

TS: When you look back on your time that you spent in the army, if you could go back in time and change something what would you change; if anything?

DBT: I don't know because I know everything worked out, but I was always confident from the beginning that it would. I didn't think "Oh my God, I'm going to die." Even jumping, because in jump school even when you get here, you are so trained and so convinced that you can do it because of how they've taught you, you believe it. I noticed a lot of—When I drive to work and you're driving at the same time the soldiers are trying to get to work or get home. Oh my goodness, they are convinced they can't get hurt because they have been trained to believe they will survive. Who wants to go to war if they tell you "You, you, you, you, and you; you are all dead. You're not going to make it back." That doesn't work as well.

TS: It's not good for morale.

DBT: Nope. But I had that when I first was in the army that, you know, we'd walk out into the street, traffic stops for us. You're not scared. You're not going to die. You're twenty-one years old, you're invincible. A lot of them have that now, which is scary on the roads but it's something they need to have. That's what the army gives you. But it's backed up by all the training.

TS: Well, do you think that you were an independent type person before you went in the army, at all?

DBT: I don't know. I don't say independent. I say more—like, I notice when I look back even before I came in, I'm not a fad person. If something's popular and everybody does it, like tattoos or ear piercings. If that's something that shows your individualism and you're making a statement, it's not really when every little high school kid does it because every other little high school kid does it in the whole country. I was never like that. I don't like

that because I believe I have a brain for a reason and I make my own decisions. And I always did that. I choose what I like and what I don't like; not follow the crowd. I think I was more like that. I don't think that's independent, where I think I can do everything and don't need anybody. But I just—I don't mind being different. I'd rather be different and be comfortable with the decision I make.

TS: How do you think your life has been different because you went in the army?

DBT: Well, I never left. I actually work for the same people. I just learned I don't have to stand out in the rain or stay up all night making beds out in the woods or something. I can work for the same people, be around the same stuff and the same people and still get paid well. I like it better, but I've never left; I never left the army. So, I don't know. I've had civilian jobs and I've hated them. I don't get it.

TS: What was hard about them? What was difficult?

DBT: Not being part of something like that. I worked for a moving company and the people were just [heavy sigh]. The lady that ran the place, her son worked there, her boyfriend worked there, her son's girlfriend worked there, so pretty much if I come in and I'm working there I can't move up unless I marry somebody. I don't like that. I like that in the army everything changes. Every three years, every two years, everything's new. So, it doesn't get old; you're not with the same boss for thirty years. You do have friends that stay around. Same civilians are around that I knew when I first started. Things like that I like. I don't know. I don't want to work for civilians. I don't want to work anywhere else; I love my job. I get to enjoy all the patriotism and helping people. I help veterans and Wounded Warriors [The Wounded Warrior Project is a nonprofit organization whose mission is to "honor and empower wounded warriors" of the U.S. Armed Forces]. I work by myself, so I arranged a couple of years ago to get Wounded Warriors to come because they love military history and they like coming here. I teach them what I know how to do; computers and scanning, all that stuff. I can help them because they have a job. They have someone that cares about them instead of just sitting in the barracks waiting for your next appointment. I love that. I've met so many cool guys working for me, and girls. I get volunteers. I get people that come from all over the country to see Fort Bragg. I will get in the car and take them to where they were when they were in World War II because they're never going to find it but I can show them where it is. I sit in the car and watch an eighty-five year old guy crying because he's standing on the place where he trained and all his friends—it's never the building or I miss that tree. It just triggers all the friendships and that's what I had in the army that I miss.

TS: Like camaraderie.

DBT: Yes, all the people that I knew. You know them so well. It's not like you work with them. I mean, you lived with them too. You knew them all the time.

TS: I know that you do a lot of oral histories, too. Do you have a favorite question you like to ask?

DBT: Yes. A real good one that I like doing—when I do oral history interviews I'm not like the guy historians that want to know about the equipment and all this stuff. I want to know how you felt; what you thought. You go to all these commanders, generals and sergeant majors and they just got back from Iraq or Afghanistan. You ask them "What was the one thing that you did that meant the most to you? What's your most memorable event?" and they start crying. I had a guy run to the bathroom three times and understandably so. Here you are thinking, "Well gosh, this colonel cries a lot; he lost, a lot of his people died." You're sitting there talking to this guy in his office and he's back and it's all the guilt and the sorrow and everything. It just comes flooding on their faces. I stop doing audio oral histories and started doing video because I need that face. I need to see that person. It's very cool because you have these guys that are supposed to be tough and they're just mush inside when they talk about their guys. It is so cool, it gives you chills. That's another thing that gives you chills. You go up to Ardennes[?],a road through the 82nd, and my unit used to be on it. That's where everybody runs PT in the morning and there's thousands of guys, all kinds of formations, all calling cadence running down. If you go stand there at six o'clock in the morning you will get chills on your arms because it's awesome. It's not just because they look pretty in their shorts. It's because they're doing this at six o'clock in the morning because they care that much about their country, and you feel it. It just floods down the street and you just get chill bumps just thinking about it. That's patriotism. That's America. Not that they want to go kill people or they're crazy, they want to shoot everybody. It's that they want to be a part of something like that. That's what I like.

TS: That's what you like? So, what was most memorable to you?

DBT: Most memorable? I would have to say—I would have to be personal and say that meeting my husband because I'm from Massachusetts, he's from Florida. We have nothing in common and that we met on a drop zone on Fort Bragg, on that particular day and he turned around and offered me iced tea; just turned around in the formation. What it took to get us—to get to that very point I thought was pretty cool. That's what I remember most.

TS: That's one of the interesting things about the military, is that you meet people from all over.

DBT: That you would never know. You know them very well and then they're gone. But you always know them. I was—The second year I was the historian I was in another building with other offices and I was walking from my office down one hallway and then there was another hallway that went this way and I was going around the corner down the other hallway and I turned. This is thirty years later, and I turned and I saw a soldier walking about thirty feet down the hall way away from me. I didn't see his face, I didn't hear him talk and I knew who it was. I hollered to him. I said, "Sergeant Huff." He turned around

and it was Sergeant Huff that was in my basic training; AIT. He went to jump school; I was off the track with those guys. He went to jump school the week before me. He got here the week before me; he was in my unit in formation in front of me for like, two years. I know the back of his head. That was funny to me. I know this man so well that if I see the back of his head I know who he is thirty years later. That's the kind of people you meet. He also remembers me because when I was in basic I told him I had a dream about him. He said "Really, yeah, tell me all about it."

I said," I dreamed you were stabbed to death."

He goes, "That's not good." He said all the years—because I had seen him before that, all the years he was in the army he would think about that and think about me saying it. He'd always be more cautious like in a situation where he was—

TS: Where he might get stabbed?

DBT: —in a dark alley or something. He said, "You made me paranoid about people stabbing me so I'm always looking."

TS: He probably never asked what dreams are [unclear]. [chuckles]

DBT: But he always brings that up. I've seen him, like, two or three times since.

TS: I could see why he would have that feeling. Well, we talked about a lot today, is there anything that we haven't talked about that you wanted to mention?

DBT: Sure. I've got lots of stories, but like I said, their not military stories about combat. They're just funny stories. That's the part I liked about the army, the things I remember. I don't remember all the names of all the equipment, and official this and that. Not like my husband can. He can say all that. He fills in the blanks when I start talking. I don't have to remember all that.

TS: Do you have a favorite funny story you like to tell people?

DBT: A favorite funny story? Now you put me on the spot I can't think of one.

TS: Of course not.

DBT: Well, I do have one from jump school that makes me laugh. I told you it was my 21st birthday. So, I'm in the plane, first jump, I'm going over—they said it was the Chattahoochee River. That's so cool because my whole life on my birth certificate it says I was born in Chattahoochee County and this is the Chattahoochee River. This is too cool. Then I'm standing. I was the first person out the door on our first jump. So, I'm standing near the door and near the black cat, the instructor that's going to put us out the door; the jump master. He signaled me to come closer and stand in the door; when I did I stepped on his shiny jump boot. We're both standing really close. I look down at his boot and he looked down at his boot. I looked up in fear and he looked up smiling. I'm like,

"Oh, this is going to hurt. This is going to be bad." He said, "Go" when I was in the door and I went out holding my butt because he hit me so hard that my butt hurt. I'm like "Ahh."

TS: He got you back.

DBT: But it was something like out of a movie. It was so funny. Of course it happened to me. Why wouldn't that happen to me?

TS: Right, that's right.

DBT: I stepped on a jumpmaster's boot, this is not good. They're very big into shiny boots, or they were. They don't have shiny boots anymore. They have fuzzy boots. They wear fuzzy brown boots like they used to have in World War II.

TS: Oh, okay. Don't need them shiny.

DBT: No.

TS: Well, if you have anything more to add I think we can go ahead and stop it.

DBT: No, I don't think so. Oh, I will tell you something funny. This jump I'm showing you, we jumped into Eglin Air Force Base.

TS: Right.

DBT: We're flying twenty one C-141s down to Eglin Air Force Base. That's a lot of people; biggest jump since World War II.

TS: How many people jumped that day?

DBT: I don't remember the number. I got it somewhere.

TS: It's okay.

DBT: So, we'd never been to Eglin Air Force Base. We didn't know what to expect. But on the way down there it was so hot in the plane. We begged and whined and we got the air force guys to turn the air on really high to where by the time we got there flakes of frost were floating all around in the air. I mean, it's freezing in there. We loved it because we're all wrapped up in all our stuff. You can only sit like this and you're hot and miserable. Oh, and of course Beth, I told you she has a sick sense of humor, she opens up the C-ration can of beef tips or beef chunks or beef stew and the whole plane smelled like dog food. You watched the guys, like the domino effect, they're all pulling their barf bags out of their hats and throwing up because she made everybody sick. I'm like, "You did

that on purpose, didn't you?" She's like [laughs] eating her beef stew. But they all got sick.

So, we get to the drop zone and everybody's jumping and it's freezing in the plane. It's one hundred and five degrees on the ground. Everybody hits the ground, they're convulsing in heat stroke or whatever. They're just laying there [makes noise] and this is me walking down the road that's in the middle of the drop zone. They told us not to stop to help anybody, because these are people we know. Not to stop, the medics would get them and go. We had to go all the way to the other end of the drop zone to go to where our company was rallying. So, I was doing that and then it was really surreal because—it was a big publicity thing because it was such a big jump, that an entire bus full of reporters and photographers are coming at me screaming, "It's a girl! It's a girl!" They jumped out and said I had to walk the other way so they could all take pictures of me coming. So, this is my "I hate this shit" face right there because I'm pissed, it's too hot. I don't want to go back over the same ground I already did. I don't care how much space it is. I just want to go back over there.

TS: Did you turn around for them?

DBT: Yes, because we have to be nice to the photographers. It's cool, too, because the photographer, Cindy Burnham, that worked here in Fayetteville, she had the pictures and she gave me these pictures. That's why I have them. When I got back I found out who she was and got the pictures. She actually used that picture over there where it says "you've come a long way soldier." That was used in an article about—in the soldier magazine about women in the army. Of course, when the magazine came out that was a file photo. I was in Germany and had been out a few years and had my second child and was breastfeeding in the recliner when my husband threw the magazine in my lap and said, "Check this out."

TS: And there you are. Do still have copies of some of those you can maybe—

DBT: I have a copy of the thing somewhere.

TS: That would be nice to get those and especially since you talked about this one with your mouth agape.

DBT: Yes. I have another picture that I always keep. It probably won't be here when I look for it. No, I must have moved it. But I had a friend of mine, one of my roommates take pictures of me, with my camera, jumping. I was the third person out the plane so I have a picture of three dots coming out the plane and I was the third one. I will get that for you. I mean, but there's no picture.

TS: Okay.

DBT: It's just a plane with three dots. You can't see it.

TS: You can't tell who you are.

DBT: No. That jump was a really big deal.

TS: Yes.

DBT: I walked past my husband, too. He wasn't laying on the ground.

TS: No?

DBT: He got to carry, he carried the commander's radios and was all real heavy and he was sweating like crazy and not happy. But I just kept going, I didn't want to talk to him and get him in trouble or anything. [Therese chuckles]

TS: Well, thank you so much.

DBT: You're welcome.

TS: It's been a pleasure to talk to with you today.

DBT: You're welcome. Glad to do it.

[End of Interview]