

This interview is being conducted on Wednesday, September 20, 2023 at my home in Plainfield, Illinois. My name is Fran Prokop and I am speaking with Deborah Lynn Leinweber, who served in the U.S. Army and is a veteran of the post Viet Nam conflict era. Debbie learned of the Veterans History Project through me, and she has kindly consented to participate in the National Archives Veterans' History Project. Here is her story:

**Debbie, when and where were you born?**

I was born in Harvey, Illinois, September 19, 1959.

**We note that today is September 20, one day after her birthday – Happy Birthday!**

**Debbie lives here in Carillon; I have interviewed several men and some women who live here in Carillon and Debbie is one of them,**

**What were your parents' occupations?**

My Mom was a stay-at-home Mom while I was growing up and she worked for K-Mart in Dolton, IL. My Dad was a Metropolitan Life Insurance salesman and he worked for Jewel at the time – and Radio Shack.

**So he was in Sales.**

Yes.

**What did you do before entering the service?**

Went to high school; went to college.

**How old were you when you went into the service?**

I went in delayed entry – January 10, I think it was '79. I went into Active Duty January 10, 1979.

**You weren't drafted; you just enlisted right?**

Correct.

**And where did you enlist?**

I enlisted as Military Police; I went to Fort McClellan in Alabama.

**Were any other family members serving in the military?**

I had a great uncle that did, but he passed away.

**What branch was he in?**

He was in the Army infantry in World War I.

**World War I – wow! Why did you choose that specific branch of service?**

No reason. I checked it all out and I could get into the Army – I don't like green, but -  
**Okay.**

It had what I wanted.

**Where did you enlist?**

Harvey, Illinois.

**And how did you report for duty – what happened that day?**

I – I got sworn in in Chicago, Illinois and then we were put on a plane to go to Fort McClellan, Alabama.

**How were your early days of training – could you describe a typical day in boot camp – what time you got up, what you did?**

We got up about 4:30 in the morning almost every day, had to make your bed so you can bounce a quarter on it; spit shine shoes; everything had to be pressed; it was a pain in the butt. I didn't usually iron anything but I learned – how to roll socks and make sure everything I want to take and put in one duffle bag.

**How many women were with you in the barracks?**

We had 45.

**From all different walks of life and all different areas.**

Yes.

**How long did boot camp last?**

Boot camp was approximately – I want to say ten weeks – and we went to AIT there also, which was another 8 or 9 weeks.

**Besides the 10 weeks?**

Yes. Yes.

**Tell me what AIT stands for.**

Advanced Individual Training – because we had to learn how to march and hold a weapon, went through hand-to-hand combat, shooting – rifle range. And then after AIT we went to Law Enforcement classes; learning how to camp out with barely nothing –

**Survival skills**

Yes.

**How did you do? How did you feel about that?**

It was just – when I first started it, it was strange; didn't really like going a week without showering or anything – but hey, you gotta do what you gotta do.

**Right. How did you adapt eventually –**

Oh, I adapted really well.

**So you had no real problem with it or anything.**

No.

**Did you have any specialized training either then or later on?**

I had military police training while I was there. Just before I got in I was a Police Cadet in Harvey for two years; that's what drew me to law enforcement. And I had a two-year degree in Law Enforcement – Associate's Degree.

**While you were in basic training you had classroom teaching as well.**

Yes.

**And did you have aptitude tests and things like that – or did you get that before**

We got that before we got sworn in. So they try to put you where you were best.

**So how did you adapt to the food and the social life and the physical regimen – and the barracks life – none of that bothered you?**

The food wasn't too bad, you know; they didn't feed us good but everything was rush, rush, rush. By the time you sit down, you gotta get up and go.

**So you had to eat fast.**

Basically, yes. Physical exercise wasn't too bad; I ended up getting fallen arches from the combat boots.

**As a result of all that – later in life you got it?**

No, I got it in basic training; my arches were bad. I had to get arch supports to run in combat boots.

**Okay, your training is over now and you're finished; what happened next? Where did you go – did you get your orders?**

My first duty station was at Fort Meyers, Virginia; I was in the Presidential Honor Guard.

**What President was that?**

Wait a second – Ronald Reagan's shooting – Carter, Reagan –

**Bush came after Reagan –**

Uh, I was there when Reagan got shot. I know I was definitely there for Reagan.

**Okay. What was the highest rank that you achieved?**

Sergeant.

**You're in Fort Meyers, Virginia; what were your duties there?**

Basically spit shining shoes, make sure my uniforms – we did Color Guard and helped provide – we did – when people got buried – we did that.

**Burial detail.**

Yeah, put the flags down. I also worked in the Vehicle Registration at Fort Meyers – registered vehicles and getting people set with their IDs.

**So was that like office work?**

Yeah. I also was the Company Mail Clerk,

**What Company were you in? What was the name, if you remember?**

I know it was the Garrison Unit, but I can't tell you; I don't remember.

**Debbie was going to finish some of her paper work and answer more questions after she goes home and checks her DD-214 – I'll have that information later.**

**Did you ever go overseas or did you spend all your time here?**

No, I went overseas. I was in West Berlin, Germany.

**Let's go step by step – how long were you in Fort Meyers?**

Fort Meyers I was there for three years. Then I went to Fort Hood, Texas.

**Okay, and what were your duties there?**

Military police; we patrolled, bivouaced; I did the McGruff Program – with the kids in the school.

**And how long were you in Texas?**

Three years.

**And that's what you did most of the time – the three years you were in Texas?**

Yes.

**And was that like a 9 to 5 job – Monday through Friday – or was it just on call?**

Uh, when I did McGruff – basically we worked shift work – and crime prevention.

**So you worked on weekends sometimes.**

Yes.

**And is that what you wanted to do? Were you happy doing that?**

Yes, I was doing a lot of law enforcement. I enjoyed that. There's different aspects of law enforcement.

**So you were an M. P., right?**

Yes.

**Basically the whole time you were in the service.**

I was an MP and I was a 71 L. Clerk – which is like an Administrative Clerk too. I did both of those.

**When you say LIMO – what is that?**

That's the MOS; the MP was 95 BRAVO, but I know it's changed now.

**Is it l-i-m-o or l-e-m-o –**

Lincoln – it's just 71 L – was the MOS.

**Okay, so your three years are over – anything unusual –**

I think it was two years and four months –

**Okay, we'll change it. Did any incident occur – when did Reagan get shot – let's talk about that.**

I was in Washington, D.C. when Reagan got shot.

**And did you do anything as a consequence of that? Were you called on to do anything?**

Uh, we were called to do – riot gear – we did a lot of parades for the people that got injured and for Dignitaries. I also did – we did – we had like Dignitaries – for example, one of them was Mr. Coors – we'd provide security for him.

**Okay, provide security for dignitaries –**

Yes, and I was in the Pentagon for a little bit – thank God not too long.

**Did you work at the Pentagon?**

I had to make trips to the Pentagon. I didn't really work there. When we were stationed in D.C. you were stationed everywhere.

**Wherever you were needed –**

Right, because a lot of times I worked at – I lived at Fort Meyers; I worked at Fort McNair and the Pentagon – go back and forth between those.

**So you were called on as needed to come in and do these things.**

Right.

**You were in the states so communications were no problem – you were able to call, make phone contact, not just write letters.**

Yes.

**How about medals, honors or awards that you received.**

I got Good Conduct Awards. I kept a low profile.

**When you go home and look at your DD-214, all that stuff is listed on there – so maybe that will refresh your memory. ( Debbie did that and added )-- Good Conduct 2<sup>nd</sup> Award, Professional Development Medal with Number 1, Army-Air Force Server Ribbon, Driver and Marksman Medal.**

Yeah.

**Did you have any recreation or off-duty pursuits? In Washington or at Fort Meyers – either – because you were there for a length of time.**

No, not really; not really; see the sights; tourist attractions.

**Were there no organized sports like baseball teams or anything like that for Women – maybe the men might have it.**

There wasn't really – they really didn't do that kind of stuff.

**Ok. Did you make friends and are you still in contact with any friends you made during your service time?**

Yes. I met my husband there. He was in the Infantry Company that was on

Presidential inaudible -- also. Yes. One of my roommates is now. She was in a different – she worked someplace else, I can't remember, I think the Pentagon – and she's – we've been talking back and forth – she lives in Alaska now.

**So you're in contact with her.**

Yeah.

**Do you want to mention her name?**

God, I can't remember; I'd have to look it up.

**So what about your husband – how did you meet your husband in the military?**

In the mess hall. He asked if he could sit down next to me.

**Okay.**

I don't remember, but that's what he said.

**Okay. Did you get married in the service? Or did you wait till –**

Yeah, we got married in D.C. and we had an apartment off base. But then we got – stationed in Fort Hood, Texas.

**So both of you were stationed in the same place?**

Yes.

**And it was okay – the military didn't care?**

Well, they knew – 'cuz see when he came up on orders and I came up on orders shortly thereafter to go to Texas – to the 287<sup>th</sup> MP Company Corps there.

**Was he also an MP?**

No. He was infantry; he was in 1<sup>st</sup> Cavalry. He's the grunt.

**Did you have a military wedding?**

No. No.

**You had a civil ceremony.**

Yeah.

**That was your recreation and off-duty pursuit – ha, ha. I would say.**

You know, we did stuff – you know – lot of times we'd go out state – but it was just – we went to a lot of places in D.C. because there was a lot of places to see, you know, but it varied on what –

**Right, but you did a lot of visiting – historic places and things like that?**

Yeah. I was disappointed in the Hope Diamond; thought it would be bigger.

**What Was his job at Fort Hood, Texas doing the same thing?**

Yeah, he was – he was – in an Infantry Company; he was basically out in the field nine months out of the year.

**And what's his first name?**

Greg Leinweber.

**I don't think they ask your maiden name. Wait a minute – you were in the military as a single girl; what was your maiden name?**

F-r-i-t-z-s-c-h-e -.

**So you were Debbie Lynn Fritzsche when you entered the Army. But you took your husband's name.**

When we went to Fort Hood, it was changed to Leinweber.

**Good thing you mentioned that; I forgot about that. Now your time is up at Fort Hood; you've been there for three years –**

Three years; I had my daughter there.

**You had your baby in the service? When was she born?**

January 15, 1982.

**Is that your only child?**

No. I have another one that was born in West Berlin, Germany.

**We'll get into that when you're there. So, your daughter was born when you were in Fort Hood. How did that affect your service – or did it?**

It really didn't because at the time I – I was E-3, Private First Class and my husband was a Spec 4 – so he had her listed under him and when he got orders for Germany, he got housing and everything with her before I could get over there.

**Oh, so he got his orders first for Germany.**

Yeah; six months later I went over.

**Oh, my goodness, so six months later you went, with the baby.**

No.

**He took the baby?**

He took the baby.

**Wow! He took the baby and got housing for him and the baby. He had to have someone come in and watch the baby.**

He spent more money on baby sitters than. Somebody was in the military so they understood too, so, you know.

**So they sent him over without you. You were alone back here. So how was it – did you apply for there or did they do it automatically or what?**

No. There was – I had a First Sergeant that was a – I can't say – but I had to push through to get orders for Germany.

**But you did; you did get the orders.**

Yes. West Berlin, yeah.

**Did you fly over there?**

Yes.

**When did you get there – do you remember?**



About six months later.

**You don't know the date.**

No.

**Okay. You're in Berlin now; what were your duties there?**

Military Police. I did a lot of patrolling as security – working Checkpoints Bravo and Charlie.

**What base were you in?**

Berlin was – the base was Berlin – because there was -- all the services were there.

**Was the wall still up?**

Yes, it was.

**Yeah, because that went down in '89.**

Right.

**Where did you do your MP duties at?**

In Berlin we had – there was the three nationalities there. I was in the American Sector; we did a lot of street patrolling of the German citizens – German areas. We'd escort convoys – if we had movements going through the corridor – through Checkpoint Bravo Charlie. That was East Germany; had to deal with the Russians, and –

**Did you ever have face to face dealings with the Russians or the Germans?**

Sometimes. Germans, yes. Russians, we were told not to – when they'd try to stop us, we never – we didn't acknowledge them.

**Oh, okay. You didn't want to escalate things.**

Well, not only that – if you wanted to get an Article 15 you could talk to them. But no, it wasn't worth it. 'Cuz all they tried to do – to talk – I had to work with the British and the French. The French were kind of quiet. They kept to themselves. The British were really nice; like to work at Checkpoint Bravo.

**So you had a lot of experience. Now you both were working; your husband was there – did you again have to get babysitters for your daughter.**

Yes.

**And when was your second child born?**

My son was born July 12, 1984; so he had dual citizenship.

**So how long were you there, in Berlin?**

About three years, I think it was.

**So the total years you were in the service?**

It was about eight years – eight years.

**Did your husband stay in the service?**

Yes. He stayed in the service – let me see, what happened – yes, he got stationed at Fort Dix – he got stationed and I left, 'cuz I wasn't reenlisting, so I had to go through the process at Fort Dix with the kids.

**You processed out at Fort Dix?**

Yes.

**Did he remain in Germany or did he come back when you came back?**

He left before I did. My son was like three months old – 3 or 6 months old when we left – when I left – 'cuz the kids were with me.

**So how long did he stay in , all together?**

He ended up retiring.

**Oh, he retired from the military.**

Yes. I think it was in 2020 he retired.

**So you processed out at Fort Dix.**

Yes, then I went to Fort McClellan in Alabama 'cuz that's where my husband was stationed.

**You had to go back there – you mean you lived there?**

Yes, I lived as a civilian there.

**While he was still in the service.**

Yeah.

**When did you leave Fort McClellan then?**

Uh, probably a few years later; we got divorced and me and the kids came up here -  
Up to Illinois.

**So you were in the military or connected to the military for quite a long time – eight years that you were actually in the service and then you stayed there for how many more years?**

Yeah, about two or three years. 'Cuz when I was in West Berlin I was there for the bombing.

**Which bombing was that?**

When they bombed the nightclub.

**I'm drawing a blank on that – in Berlin?**

Yeah. I missed the turn and I ended up being like two blocks down from where it blew.

**Wow! Really – a nightclub.**

Then after that is when I found out – couple days later I was pregnant with my son.

**Oh. Did you have to do anything with this bombing?**

**Were you involved in it at all – I mean after the fact?**

We had – we were always doing security details and the – I did a lot of prisoner escorts with high profile prisoners, but, it's all part of the job.

**It's all part of your duties.**

Yeah.

**You were basically in touch with your other family members. The question is how was your reception by family and friends when you finally came back?**

Oh, they were happy that I was back. I'm still quite with my – what I call my inlaws still – but ex-inlaws; we keep track of each other.

**Oh, that's good. How was your readjustment to civilian life?**

It was hard for me – coming back – because you're leaving a structured environment – coming back – and you're used to doing things one way and -- it's more relaxed in the civilian world.

**Right. You don't have marching orders, more or less.**

Yeah. You get it pounded into you it's gotta be this way, you know, everything is hurry up and wait.

**Yeah, yeah. Right, I have heard that many times.**

**Have you had contact with fellow veterans over the years?**

Uh-huh. Later, around in 2017.

**Anyone in particular? Your friend that you can't think of her name?**

I know her first name is Kathy. We lost track, then we got – I'm still friendly with my ex-husband – we've got a lot of friends but – we made so many friends – met so many people – you know – a lot of times – we really don't get together with a lot of different people, but every time, if you meet a new veteran – you know

**The next question is are you a member of any veterans' organizations today?**

**Ha, ha. I know for a fact that Debbie runs our local Carillon Family Veterans Organization –**

I'm a member of the American Legion – 40/8 and VFW.

**What is the organization here in Carillon called?**

It's Carillon Family Veterans Organization – we get all the family members – and anybody who wants to help support veterans – gets involved. I've always felt that women – were left out. I've been a member of the VFW – Forty and Eight –

**I've heard of that – Forty plus Eight. Is there a Berlin contingent –**

No – I was so busy with raising my kids – 'cuz I was a Police Officer for awhile.

**When you came back to Illinois, did you have to find work – or what happened – did you get a job?**

I did. When I was in Fort McClellan Alabama I was an assistant Arby's manager –

**Oh, Arby – the restaurant.**

And I worked at a company that made equipment for the military –

**That was in Alabama?**

Yes, that was in Alabama. Then when I came up here, I was – I worked At Eagle Foods, stock person and worked my way up to cashier. Then I – after the cashier – I started up the drive – delivery service at the Pizza Hut in our town. I did that for a few years before I was able to take the Police Department test.

**In what town did you take the PD test.**

I took a lot but I took it in Dolton.

**Dolton, that's your home town.**

Yeah.

**And you passed?**

Yes.

**And became a police officer there?**

Yes, I was a police officer for 23 ½ years.

**Did you retire from there?**

Medically retired out – 'cuz I got hit by a car.

**Car accident.**

**Thinking back and reflecting now on your service , how do you think your military experience affected your life?**

I think it made me what I am now, because, the way I look at it, you ask me a question – if you don't want the answer, don't ask me the question.

**Okay.**

I see too many people trying to b.s their way through life and it's not worth it.

And basically some people say I was too strict – and yet my kids appreciated it – they stayed out of trouble, so to speak.

**So what life lessons would you say you learned from the military?**

Life lessons? I should have done better.

**Do you still go for range practice?**

Yes. I have my concealed carry from being a police officer. I don't know how much longer I'll have it.

**Keep it.**

My old injuries are starting to affect me –

**Did you get those in the military?**

No, I got those when I was on the police force. (added later – but the knee problems and the hearing loss I got in the military.)

**Anything else you can think of – any anecdotes or things that might have happened in Berlin that you didn't mention, other than this bombing – that was the main thing.**

The good thing about Berlin – airports had excellent goat ?– whenever we got that zone, we always went up there. But no, honestly, I've learned a lot – I've seen a lot of different people coming through that – the ones who were forced to be in – and the guys who were from the Viet Nam -- one thing I like about it now is -- now they baby the soldiers too much, which is – I'm glad I'm not in it now. But it was, you know, it was a learning experience. I think everything I learned, good or bad, made me a better person.

**I think so too. I think everybody would be better off if they –**

I don't know what I would have done, honestly, if I didn't go in.

**I think like other countries – they have compulsory military service for men and women. I think we should have it here in this country too.**

Yeah. But not everybody is made for military service.

**But, just go in there and see – you know – at least get basic training; if you're not meant for it, then you're not meant for it.**

Yeah, but once they give you that training, a lot of times – they wash out quite a few people from basic training, and quite a few people from AIT for not passing.

**Um-hmm.**

But they give you a chance, you know, but the drill sergeants – there's a lot of stuff that they can't do anymore –

**Yeah.**

That they did when I was in, but.

**How did you feel when you were in basic training with all the other women. Out of the 45 women that started, how many went on or how many fell out?**

Actually I think we only lost – let's see – three got married in basic training – their husbands were in one of the other barracks. The women in our company – we – they had to split us up because we were outdoing the men.

**Ha, ha – what do you mean, outdoing?**

Outshooting them –

**Really!**

You know, class wise –

**Outperforming, huh?**

Yeah. Basically, yeah. I think we may have lost maybe one or two maybe – but we broke a lot of drill sergeants too.

**But these women went on to different categories. You stayed in the military. You were the military police. These weren't –**

No, these were all military police –

**Was that like a special group you were in – all military police?**

At Fort McClellan basically that's what they do – is the military police school.

**When you went in you were going – women who go there know that it's military police.**

Yes. I don't know how long they lasted, you know, I know some of them did.

**So the women you were in with basically had the same duties – they maybe didn't stay in for the eight years that you did, but while they were in the service they were doing the same type job that you were doing.**

Yeah.

**Security and things like that.**

Yeah.

**Okay, I think that's about it, unless there's anything else you want to add. Debbie will check her DD-214 and add more information in her papers, but other than that, thank you, Debbie, for this interview and thank you for your service to our country.**

Thank you.

**Debbie Lynn Leinweber (Fritzsche)**

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