Interviewee: **Stewart, Virginia Z.**
Interviewer: **Robin Sellers**
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Sellers: Ginger, give me a little bit of background if you will, please ... where you grew up, where you went to high school, things like that.

Stewart: Well, I was born in Asheville, North Carolina. My father was just finishing his graduate work at Duke University and working as a forest ranger, and then he went with the Forest Service to Washington D.C. where he worked with the Census Bureau. Every year he went back to the Reserves and one summer he came home and told Mom he enjoyed flying so much that he really wished he was back on active duty. And Mother said, "If you like it so much, John, go." Two weeks later we were on our way to New York, and I lived in northwestern New York in a little town called Youngstown. My dad was the only pilot at Fort Niagara. Then we went to Germany and were there for five years.

Sellers: What are the years on this?

Stewart: Let's see, we went to Germany in 1958, and lived there until '62. Early in one and late in the other, that's why I call it five years. And then we got transferred to Arkansas, where I went to high school in Jacksonville, Arkansas, and graduated in 1965 ... and went off to college at Colorado State University at Fort Collins, Colorado, where I majored in German. I didn't start out majoring in German, but it seemed to be a good idea to major in something I was getting A's in and enjoyed, so I did that.

Sellers: Why Colorado State?

Stewart: Both my parents went to Colorado State University when it was Colorado A & M, and so it just seemed a good idea and it was also in-state tuition, so that was a good idea. I had in-state tuition in three states, so I figured I'd picked the one that I liked the best. Colorado seemed much more attractive than Arkansas or Indiana, so that's why I went out there. In the summer of my junior year of college, I applied to and was accepted to what the Army calls the College Junior Program. It was a one-time program to see if young women would be interested in careers in the Army as officers.

Sellers: ROTC was not available?

Stewart: ROTC was not available to women. Women could not command men, women could not fire weapons. Most of the women in the military at that time who were officers were

nurses, and they were beginning to expand the role of women in the military. So I went off to this College Junior Program the summer of my junior year, and we all marched around Ft. McClellan, Alabama, for the summer. At the end of the summer I applied and was accepted as one of the ninety women nationwide accepted for the College Junior Program. The only requirement we really had was to make sure you go to class, get your degree, and accept a commission when you got your diploma.

Sellers: Did they make special requests as to what your degree should be in?

Stewart: Absolutely not. They just wanted to know that you had the wherewithal to stick with something and get a degree. So I got my degree in German education at the secondary level, and I accepted my commission in July of '69. In August of '69 I found myself at Women's Officer Basic Training at Ft. McClellan, Alabama. And that basic training course lasted from August through December and I'm pleased to say I was the Distinguished Military Graduate from that course. I went off to Ft. Knox, Kentucky; that was my first assignment. I was the executive officer of the WAC Company, because women weren't allowed to be in any other branches. We were all in the Woman's Army Corps, which had been founded in 1942. So our women worked everywhere throughout the post, but they all came home at night to the WAC Company, when all the men they worked with were in their own individual units that worked in particular places. But the girls all had to come back to this one unit. That is no longer the case in the military. I've seen a lot of changes over the years. But I really enjoyed that job. I got introduced to my 1st sergeant. She gave me all kinds of instructions. The 2nd lieutenant gets a lot of instructions from sergeants. One of the things I had to learn was to not say, "Yes, ma'am" and "No ma'am" to my sergeants even though they were all older than I was. But I had been raised in the South and taught to say, "Yes ma'am" and "No ma'am." So that was an interesting thing.

I became the supply officer ... I became every officer the company commander didn't have to do. I was the training officer and the mess officer, and, you know, all those sorts of things. She (the commander) had to be the re-enlistment officer and the commander, and I think I got just about everything else. I got down to the supply room, and this lovely black lady came up to me and says, "I'm Sergeant ... " I believe it was Campbell. "I'm your supply sergeant. You may not touch anything in my supply room until I tell you you can." "Yes, Sergeant." I went up to the mess hall, which is the dining facility. A little-bitty lady from West Virginia - "I'm Sergeant Peggy Henry. You may not touch anything in my kitchen until I've trained you." "Yes, Sergeant." But I was allowed to sign all the papers and take all of the responsibility. Our building was a fall-out shelter, and we still had to check all the water supplies and all that in case A-bombs went off.

Ft. Knox was an interesting experience. I was one of five women in the Bachelor Officer Quarters, which was a 500-unit apartment building. I walked in my sleep one night, and I found out that ... from the man who ran the front desk, who was a sergeant, the next morning he says, "I"m awfully glad you wear nice pajamas." And I said, "What do you mean?" He says, "Well, you were walking around the lobby last night." He said, "I took you back up." You know, I don't think I've walked in my sleep since then, it scared me so bad. But I was awfully glad I'd worn my good looking pj's when I'd gone to bed that night.

Let's see, from there I got a call from Washington, and they said, "We'd like you to go to

Germany. How would you like to be a company commander?" Well, I had asked to be stationed in Japan, and I said, "Well, okay." And they sent me to Germany and I landed in a little city called Zweibrucken. That was the head of the Army Material Management Agency in Europe. And again I was the WAC commander. I had a unit ... let's see, when I first got there, it was about twenty women, and they worked all over the post. Then they (the Army) decided to do a large increase as I was getting half-way through my tour of duty. The Volunteer Army was the big thing then, and they had to make sure everybody had lovely barracks. They weren't in big open bays anymore, the girls all had rooms where they had two people in a room. The girls got to pick the paint color on their walls - it wasn't Army green anymore. They built us a kitchen, and my unit was built to house about thirty women. In about two weeks time, I had 160 women. So it was very interesting - they decided to increase my unit without telling me. So that was interesting and that was kind of fun.

I was also the brigade adjutant, which is the next level up in Headquarters, and adjutant is kind of the secretary. I got to do that while I was also the company commander. I was the only company commander in all of Europe that had no girls go AWOL and no girls get pregnant while I was there. I thought that was pretty cool. So that was pretty neat. We had a really good unit. There I learned that you never bring your bad attitude to work; if you get out of bed and you don't feel good, leave that at home. If you get to work and the boss is mad, pretty soon the 1st sergeant is mad, then the supply clerk is mad, and then the mail clerk is mad. And if the mail clerk is mad, nobody gets mail. So you really don't do that. So I learned how ... that was where I got a good education ... one of the very important things in a work ethic is leave bad attitudes at home.

Well, let's see, what else ... I really enjoyed my time in Germany. I like to think that I got to do some cutting edge stuff in Germany because they had a big meeting of all the women who were company commanders, and they were saying, "Well, here's what we'll do with the women in case the Russians come through the Fulda Gap." Fulda is a town in Germany, and they planned all of their scenarios on the Russians invading Europe coming through this particular part of the mountains. The plan was that all the women in the military would go home with the dependents. We would all be evacuated with all the wives and children. And I said at this meeting one day, "Excuse me," (and I've never been one to be really quiet if I thought I had something to say), and they said, "Well, yes, Captain, what do you want?" And I said, "Well, one of my sergeants is your senior security NCO. One of my sergeants is chief of your Automatic Data Processing unit, and one of my sergeants is the chief sergeant over at the Inspector General's office." I said, "Is it really fair to any of the guys to throw them in that job just as the Russians are coming across? Or is it better to leave one of the women there who has been doing the planning and that sort of stuff?" So they rewrote the war plan so that women would stay. I like to think that that one little thing kind of helped change the role for women in the military, because we do get in harm's way. I really think it's not fair for us to collect equal pay (which we got), if we didn't have the equal risk. We still can't go in and carry a weapon as an infantryman, but you've seen in Iraq how young women do end up in combat just like guys do. So I kind of felt that was a neat thing to be able to do.

While I was company commander and brigade adjutant in Germany, a lady from Washington came to visit me and she said, "Well, we want to try something new." Her name was Evelyn Foote. Evelyn P. Foote. I'll never forget her. A very quiet, soft-spoken, tall, willowy

lady ... sat in my office, and she says, "How would you like to try something new?" And I thought, okay, I'm game. So I was the first female staff officer assigned to the infantry school at Ft. Benning, Georgia. My friends would say, "What on earth are you going to do at Ft. Benning, Georgia?" Well, the motto of the infantry is "Follow Me." So I said, "Well I'll just go stand in front of Infantry Hall and say 'Follow Me' and see what happens." Well, that's not exactly what I did. When I got to Ft. Benning, I was still a member of the Women's Army Corps, and they didn't know what to do with me. It was funny. I went to work in the Department of Army-Wide Training Support ... and I was put in the ROTC office where we wrote the curriculum for all of the ROTC programs world-wide – junior high and high school, and college. So I got to know where all the colleges were. They gave me the job of writing a magazine that convinced young college men that they wanted to be infantry officers. Funny, we're still in Vietnam - this is not an easy job – because that's kind of a cannon fodder job. But I made the magazine and they only got one picture sideways, so I thought that was pretty cool. And it was interesting collecting the pictures and stuff. I found ... a lot of the pictures came in that had people I had known in high school and college who were now infantry officers in the pictures that came back. So it was kind of a neat project.

I worked with ... my boss was a big fellow from south Alabama, and he was a combat arms officer. The two men who were the same rank I was were two black men, one from South Carolina and one from Alabama. I thought, I'm not a man, I'm not combat arms. I said to myself, "I'm out before I ever get up to bat." I said, "This is a very hard job." Well, what was really funny was these guys were just as afraid of me. They had no idea - they thought they were going to have to bring me tea and cookies and treat me like the queen bee. It was really a very interesting experience. I learned an awful lot, they learned an awful lot about women.

Of course, every job I had in the military you had to convince somebody that it was a good idea that they had the Women's Army Corps and that women are in the military. And I told the women who worked for me that some people just will not change; you have to wait for them to retire or die. If you aren't a bra-burner and a really, kind of, blatant person, and you do your job well, people will see that Ah-ha! You can have another woman working for you and be okay. And some people would say, "Well, that WAC messed up, I don't ever want another WAC to work for me." I said, "Wait a minute - you don't ever say 'never give me another GI.'" But it was an education process.

And then they dissolved the Woman's Army Corps and said women had to choose branches. So, they had ... you know, infantry was a branch, armor, and artillery, field artillery, and all that sort of stuff were all the ones that the guys would be in. And then there were the ones that the women could choose - communications, ordinance ... just all sorts. I chose quartermaster, which is supply. I figured I was pretty good at being organized, so I would try to be in supply. So, to give me some experience in supply, before I got sent off to school for supply, the infantry school made me the assistant division chief for the Supply Division of the Infantry School. That was an interesting job, because in that job I became the Army's expert on the procurement and use of Soviet military hardware. If you needed a tank from the Russian army, I knew where to get one. If you needed Russian bullets, I knew where to get it. If you needed a Kalishinikov rifle, I knew where to get them. So that was kind of an interesting job.

At that time was when I met my husband; he was assigned as the school ammunition officer. He'd been in ordinance school and told he would need no information on ammunition

because he was going to be in mechanical maintenance, and so he would never need any information on ammo, so he was the ammo officer for the rest of the time on active duty. I supervised him, and he says I've been supervising him ever since. He got out of the service in April of '76, and I went off to the Quartermaster Officer Advanced Course at Ft. Lee, Virginia. I was one of the class leaders there, I was one of the class vice-presidents, and I was a Distinguished Military Graduate from that course. Then I went into a supply specialty, and after the supply specialty, Steve and I got married. And then ... let's see, where did we go? Ft. Jackson, South Carolina, where I was the executive officer for a basic training battalion, training women. We trained 1500 women every eight weeks to become soldiers. And at that point, the Army was starting a program they called MAXWACS (Maximum WACs), which was seeing how many women they could put in a unit before the unit efficiency was degraded to where it couldn't carry out their mission. They were very pleasantly surprised that MAXWACS works and girls can change tires and change the oil and pull maintenance on vehicles just as well as guys can. And you know if you've got a big guy or a big girl, she can change a big tire. Little guys need help just like little girls do, so they kind of figured that one out. I was the XO of the battalion.

They told me I'd be there for four years so we bought a house, and I never saw the daffodils come up in the backyard. I was on my way to school again. They sent me off to Ft. Lee, Virginia, where they dropped me in two weeks late to a class on becoming a subsistence officer. They told me the class I was there for was cancelled, but never told me another one was running. So I sat around for two weeks. They dropped me in the class two weeks late and because of my date of rank I became the class president. I was in a class of seven people, and happily I was also the Distinguished Graduate from that class.

After that they sent me to Korea for two years, where I became the subsistence officer for the Eighth Army in the 19th Support Command. That was the coolest job I ever had in the Army. I was a captain working for a general, and I was responsible for 300 dining facilities, a supply center, six supply points, a depot, four commissaries, a luxury hotel, all the officer's clubs and NCO clubs. We had a milk plant where we manufactured our own milk out of chlorinated water, non-fat dry milk, and coconut oil. I got to pick the flavors for the ice cream and all that ... that was really cool ... that was fun ... that was a good job. I had many, many Korean gentlemen working for me which was interesting because at that point in time in Korea women were still considered property. So you had to very careful. We also had to introduce computers at that time, and these people were all used to doing all their ordering with pencil and paper. They were afraid of computers because it would make them unnecessary. I said, "You guys look at your electric supply; you know you're going to need to remember how to do your pencils because the power goes out all of the time." But we finally got that stuff in, and one week a month we did everything by pencil and paper, so they wouldn't forget. It was very interesting.

I had a gentlemen who worked for me; he is now still the Eighth Army menu planner. His name is Kim Tong Sop. When he was eight, his parents sent him out the door and said, "Go south and don't stop until you find the American Army." And he never touched the ground, he walked on dead bodies all his way south until he found GIs.

Sellers: So he was a North Korean?

Stewart: He was a North Korean little boy, and his parents sent him south to find the Americans. He has worked for the American Army every since. Just a wonderful man. Let's see ... from Korea ... we found out in Korea that I was pregnant. And so we decided it was time to leave the Army as an active member. My husband always understood that the Army came first. I always understood that when I had children the Army would not come first. Many people have tried and done very well at combining being a mom and being in the military. I wasn't even interesting in trying. So we came home. When I was pregnant I was the ... a captain doing a colonel's job at Ft. Jackson, South Carolina. They gave me the job of the Director of Industrial Operations for the entire post. I did that from May until I got off active duty in September. That's when I came down here and I transferred to what they call the irregular Reserves, the Ready Reserves. I did correspondence course work with the Reserves until I had my thirty years in and I retired in December of 1998 as a major. During the time I was in the Reserves I took the Command in General Staff College by correspondence. And the oddest thing about that was I had one lesson that was on plotting to kill with nuclear weapons. I'm nursing one baby, I'm giving another baby apple juice, and I'm figuring out how high above the ground I have to detonate my bomb to kill the most people. I was conflicted [laughs]. It was very hard to nurture and kill at the same time, but I got an 88[%] in the class after three years, so that wasn't too bad. I did decide that I'm still the one to get you your supplies - what you do with them once you get them is not my work. I'll get you the bomb, but you do with it what you want. But I retired, and have been retired ever since.

Sellers: So you're no longer connected with the Reserves or anything?

Stewart: No, I'm retired.

Sellers: Just get your check?

Stewart: Yeah.

Sellers: Let me go back and ask you some questions. You said it was a college junior program, that ROTC was not available to women at that time. But ROTC was prevalent everywhere because of the Vietnam War. What did they do to keep the women separate from the men but not waste the availability of the facilities that the men were using when you were in the training program? Did they simply not allow you to do any training at all? All you had to do was go to school and graduate?

Stewart: Right. No action was required. There were only ninety woman nationwide in my program -- all at different universities. We simply went to school just like civilians. The training I did that summer was at the WAC training center. Men were not trained there unless they were in the Chemical School, because the Chemical School was co-located at Ft. Anniston.

Sellers: You said you were in Women's Officer Basic Training. What was a day like in that?

Stewart: A day in the woman's officer basic started with reveille at six, and you'd all have to already have your shoes shined, your skirts ironed, your brass polished and your uniform put together, and you go dashing outside to formation where you would all stand reveille and salute the flag. Then they'd march us to breakfast at the dining facility. Then we'd march from there to class and we'd spend all day in classes learning things like tactics and supplies, and military language. Then we'd go to parade practice and learn how to march people around and part of our class we would each ... after the first week, we had to take the leadership roles in marching people places because we had to know how to give the command. One of the rules was you have to follow exactly what the person tells you, not what you know she wants you to do, so that she will learn... We had to march through more ditches, and in front of big trucks, and of course, the young truck drivers all over the place know that these poor stupid people are trying to learn how to march troops, so they would drive very slow. And when you're marching they'd send troops out to be road guards to stop the intersection traffic when you're marching through an intersection, because you march right in the street. You're three abreast and you're marching along with your books in your arm and your purse over your arm, and you have to keep your right arm empty so you can return salutes because you are officers. You run out, and you stop in front of a truck so that he won't go through the intersection, and you can see these guys just laughing. You have to snap to a snappy salute, and return their salute and run back ... and this is in northern Alabama in the summertime! You don't run anywhere without melting. Of course at noon you go back ... you have a little bit of a break, and you put on a clean uniform because you have to be snappy and crisp. So you march around and do classes again in the afternoon, and sometimes we would ... they would issue us fatigues. Now women never wore those things. Fatigues are the work uniform, and we always had to look nice. You had dresses and stuff, you didn't have that Army "junk." So they would issue us these old fatigues and we would go out and practice using gas masks, because you did have to be able to wear a protective mask. It was interesting because when they finally said you're ready to go and try your mask in real gas, they took us out to the chlorine tent. All the girls who swore they were natural blonds who came out with green hair ... we all just laughed because they weren't natural blonds [laughs]. Let's see ... what else did we do?

Sellers: That's an age related observation, for all you young folks [laughs]. Did you have any time off?

Stewart: Oh yeah. The evenings were ours pretty much. The day ended at six, usually. They didn't make you march to dinner, but we did have to stand retreat when they ... the formal retiring of the colors in the evening. The bugle always blows on a military installation, and if you're driving in your car and it's time for the bugle, you stop your car, get out and salute. That's just the way it is on a military installation. So after retreat we would be free to go to dinner wherever we wanted. We could drive off post, we just had to be smart enough to ... they still had curfews, so even though we were out of college, we had to be back by a certain time. But our evenings quite often were spent helping each other learn things for the next day in class, learning how to shine shoes so they looked really good, learning how to polish brass so it looked really good, and getting everything aligned.

We had some poor girls that just couldn't remember stuff. We had one girl ... we always made her carry a rock in her left hand so she could remember which foot had to go down with the heavy beat of the drum. We had another girl who sat down every time because she was scared to death she'd get varicose veins [laughs]. I was constantly getting yelled at because I had my hands in my pockets, so I sewed my raincoat pockets closed so I'd keep my hands out of my pockets. I figured if they put pockets, then I should have a place to put my hands, but that was not .... You could hear them hollering, "Lieutenant!" clear across the parade field at me, and I would know it was me. We had one young girl who was so worried that she would not be ready. We had inspections every Saturday; we had to stand next to our beds, you know, and have everything ... you know, they'd bounce the quarters off the bed and the whole nine yards. This one poor girl was afraid that she would not remember all the members of the Secretary of Defense. The Secretary of Army at the time, I believe, was Stanley Reizor. We were drilling this kid ... this poor kid was a very intelligent, highly educated girl, but she couldn't remember stuff (like who the Secretary of Defense was). So we worked real hard with her. And she's standing there at attention, you know, and the colonel comes in the room and she's shaking like this [shakes]. The lady looked at ... she also was a mess, she couldn't iron her clothes. So we ironed her clothes and got her all straight and ready for inspection, and the colonel asked her who her laundress was. And, you know, that girl said, "Stanley Reizor." It was so funny. That was the end of the inspection; the colonel could not continue. We all got a day off after that, that was good.

Sellers: Who did do your laundry?

Stewart: We did our own. And we had huge fans at the end ... we didn't have air conditioning in these barracks back in the sixties. We had these huge fans that looked like plane blades ... and with a screen over them, and you'd wash your uniform and throw it up there because it would be dried quicker than if you put it in the dryer. It was also easier to iron because it was already flat. Yeah, we did our own laundry and did our own shoe shining. We stayed up and told stories late into the night. Many of us just didn't have an idea of what we were getting into. A lot of the girls were really unhappy that we weren't crawling through the mud under barbed wire with live bullets flying over us, and I kind of thought they were nuts. I'm hoping those girls finally found what they wanted.

Sellers: What about going into town ... you had to wear your uniforms?

Stewart: No, we did not.

Sellers: Okay. So you didn't have to face, perhaps, any of the Vietnam objections or ....

Stewart: No, we didn't. They knew who we were, though, because ....

Sellers: But the town people who were opposed to the war weren't obnoxious to you or ....

Stewart: I don't think there was a soul in Anniston, Alabama who thought we were, you know, bad. The folks in Anniston got their bread and butter from the military.

Sellers: That's true. They had a different opinion.

Stewart: We went down to Ft. Rucker, three of my friends and I, to visit my folks. My dad was stationed in south Alabama when I was in north Alabama. You know, everybody in the South, it seemed, was very supportive of the military. It has been traditionally a Southern thing. They support the military. Your vocal folks are usually in the far West, the Midwest, and I don't think New York cares.

Sellers: The Northeast.

Stewart: [Laughs] I never ran into to anybody who didn't think the military was an okay place to be, an okay thing to do. I met a lot of people who thought the military was kind of goofy.

Sellers: Now you mentioned to me when we were talking the other day that you didn't go to Vietnam because there was a waiting list ... a female had to volunteer to go to Vietnam.

Stewart: We did have to volunteer, yes. If you wanted to go to Vietnam as a woman, and it didn't matter if you were an officer or an enlisted woman, the waiting list was at least eighteen months long. There were many more women who wanted to go than they had places they felt it was safe to send women. One of the young women that was in my company in Germany had been to Vietnam, and her only war story that she really shared at all was she had been in country maybe six hours and they had said, "If you hear the words 'Incoming,'grab your helmet and head for the bunker." Well, the first time she heard "Incoming," she was in the shower. So she grabbed her helmet, and headed to the bunker ... soapsuds and a helmet, and that was it. And that's all she could remember about Vietnam [laughs]. The women were primarily in clerical positions, if you weren't medical. The medical women weren't field medics, they were the nurses. But field medics who were women did not go to Vietnam.

Sellers: You said that you were ... you had something to do with the bomb shelters during the Cold War. The base that you were at had a bomb shelter. Did you have to practice getting everybody into the bomb shelter?

Stewart: You know, absolutely not.

Sellers: You just happened to know ... you had to know where it was in case.

Stewart: Our barracks was the bomb shelter and that made me the bomb shelter officer. And the one thing I did have to do was make sure we kept the water barrels fresh. I'm not real sure how they did that, but we had to empty the water barrels once a year and refill them.

Sellers: Once a year? That kept them fresh?

Stewart: Well, the requirements were once every ten years, so I was just kind of pushing it back, you know. I was wasting a lot of water, I guess, but I just kind of wanted fresh water.

Sellers: Did you ever consider how much shelter that bomb shelter would actually have been had there been an attack? Or did everybody just kind of ignore that like the rest of the population?

Stewart: I think we all kind of felt that if the bomb went up, all you did was bend over, put your head between your knees, and kiss your butt goodbye, that was about it [laughs]. And that was really the way we talked about it. Nobody really felt that it was realistic. The only people who had bomb shelters that might survive were the ones who built their own.

Sellers: How quickly did you get promoted?

Stewart: You know, it's funny that you ask, because I got promoted from 2nd lieutenant to 1st lieutenant in a year. And then Vietnam was starting to slow down after a while, and I complained to my father, "Dad, I'm going to have to be a 1st lieutenant for one extra month. I'm going to have to be a 1st lieutenant for thirteen months instead of just twelve before I become a captain." And he told me he didn't want to hear it, because my dad was a World War II vet, and he said, "I was a 2nd lieutenant for seven years. I don't want to hear it." Apparently it was a little quicker. I was a captain until I got off active duty and I got promoted to major after I was in the Reserves.

Sellers: When you were in Germany and they decided to set you up with thirty women in your barracks, and then all of a sudden you had 160, what did you do? Add lots of bunks?

Stewart: We added lots of bunks and we asked the men who had the first floor of the building that we had, if they wouldn't mind bunking in with the headquarters company and letting us have their rooms until we could expand our facility. They were very gracious.

Sellers: How many washroom facilities did you have in the barracks for 160 women?

Stewart: Two.

Sellers: How did that work? Did you have sign up sheets?

Stewart: Well, two bathrooms, but we had ... I guess there were eight stalls in each bathroom.

Sellers: Open showers?

Stewart: No. The volunteer army, you don't have open showers. You have stalls with curtains and separate bathtubs. Women were required to have bathtubs; men didn't have to have bathtubs. Women had to have bathtubs. And we had a kitchen. Men didn't have to have a kitchen but women had to have a kitchen.

Sellers: Did you actually go out and shop and bring food in and cook your own food?

Stewart: Oh, you bet. We had Christmas dinner. As the company commander, I was kind of like the mom because most ... at that time the young women were not allowed to be stationed overseas until they had honorably served one year in the military in the United States. Then they could be sent overseas. That was different than the men. The men could be sent immediately overseas. But the girls had to behave themselves first for a year. When they came over, they're all away from home and everybody gets blue. Well, we just kind of treated them like my family and we put up ... I didn't ask my supply sergeant where she got the Christmas tree, but we had a Christmas tree, and she put that up and we bought ornaments. I had my mail clerk keep track of who got presents and who didn't, and those people who didn't get presents, the 1st Sergeant and I went out and bought presents for them so that there were presents under the Christmas tree for everybody. On Christmas morning I was at the company and we had Christmas just like I'd always done at my home. I was very fortunate that the commander of the headquarters at Headquarters Company ... his name was William Johnston, and he was stationed there with his wife and family with him. Bill Johnston always invited me home to his house for Christmas dinner. So I got to be with a family on Christmas day after I was the mom for my troops, and half of them were older than I was, but I was mom to the troops. Then I got to go home for a family dinner, and spent the afternoon with Bill and his family ... and do you know, I still hear from them to this day. They are stationed ... they are retired up in Peachtree City, up right outside of Atlanta.

Sellers: You said that you ended up very lucky because nobody in your barracks or your unit was AWOL or pregnant. I'm assuming those two went together, most often?

Stewart: No, you get judged as a company commander on many, many things. One of the things that appears in your efficiency report is how many serious incident reports occurred under your watch.

Sellers: What is a serious incident report?

Stewart: Any serious incident ... your troops involved with the police, your troops disappearing - like going absent without leave. Or, in a woman's unit, people getting pregnant, because ....When I first went on active duty, it didn't matter if you were married or not, or how the pregnancy ended. If you were pregnant, you were out. Then it changed to, you could request to stay on active duty if you became pregnant. But the women in Washington were the ones who had the last say, and chances were, that if you were not married, you were out.

Sellers: Bad examples.

Stewart: Then it changed that you had to request to leave active duty if you became pregnant, and it didn't matter whether you were married or not. Because many of the young women were finding they were getting this fabulous training - air traffic controllers, data processing, medical training, clerical training, legal training. Any pregnancy discharge was an honorable discharge because being pregnant is not dishonorable. How you got pregnant may not have been the most honorable behavior in the world, but actually having been pregnant was not dishonorable. So you've got an honorable discharge and all of the benefits that go with an honorable discharge. So many young women dishonorably used that particular avenue to come in and get all this expensive training and then leave before you've paid your debt to the military. And now, if you're in the military, you better figure out a way to have your kids taken care of because if you've gotten the training, you're staying to pay your time back. That's how you've got some families who are having mom and dad or someone else raise their kids if they get deployed. I think it's really a wiser use of your tax dollar, but that's one of the reasons I left when I had kids. I knew I wasn't going to want to leave my children if I had to go somewhere.

Sellers: Your husband left before you did. Did he just then become the male war-bride, so to speak, and follow you?

Stewart: Exactly. He was the Army wife, that's right. He went with me to Korea. The kind of job I had in Korea ... I was the first woman to have that particular job, and I was the first military person ever in that particular job since the armistice had been signed to stay there for two years. They thought the job was important enough to have somebody stay for two years that I was allowed to bring my dependent. But it wasn't important enough that I could have Army quarters. So we lived off-post. We lived with a provincial judge in the city of Taegu and his family. His indentured servant is the one who approved me to live in the house. Mr. Kim, my friend that I mentioned, was the one who helped me find my house. Then my husband shipped our car and he came over, and he had to pack our household goods for shipment. He'd never done that; he'd been born and raised in one house his whole life. Our stuff got to Korea - the only thing that had been stolen off the car was our windshield wipers [laughs]. We had our Plymouth Duster - '73 Plymouth Duster - that we drove all around Korea - really enjoyed it. That was an experience. But we lived in this provincial judge's home and ... granite floors, wood parquet floors, granite porches ... it was a fabulous place. And they had built the upper level of this house so they could rent to Americans. It had a bathtub and Korean families don't normally have bathtubs. It had in-floor heating called ondol heating, steam-heating through the floors. Now I recommend that - steam heat in the floors in the wintertime is wonderful. They had converted the balcony to my kitchen. They had glassed it in, and it was so cold in the winter I didn't need to leave any food in the freezer because it was just all ice out there. The first time I used the sink in our bathroom I heard this funny noise, and I looked and they don't have elbow joints in sinks in Korea; the water goes straight down to the cistern. So that was interesting [laughs]. And when the power would go out, the little house servant ... her name was Boyun, and Boyun would be carrying buckets and buckets of water. I mean she was tinier than you are

[points to a member of the listening audience]. And she would carry, on a yoke, buckets of water up the stairs and fill our bathtub so the Americans would have water. It was unbelievable, but it was a really great experience. Beautiful fenced in yard, with a granite wall around ... gorgeous view out over the city of millions. As soon as you stepped out of the protected yard, you are in the filthiest alleyways ... horrible places. But it was interesting. The little kids would slap themselves against the wall like this, and their eyes would get really big, and they'd say, "me-guk saram," which means "American person." And I'm taller than most Korean men and my husband is six foot four, so it was really kind of cool. You know they'd go [widens eyes] and just stand back. We'd go to the market ... the first thing I learned in Korean when I got there was, "How much is that? That's too much, give me a little discount." And so going to the market, if you don't haggle you're just dumb, and they'll charge you everything in the world. They like ... that's part of their entertainment is arguing over prices. And I would go and I would haggle with people and, you know, buy really neat stuff ... fabric especially. There are wonderful fabric mills in Korea. So I would buy fabric to send home to my mom. And the people would look at me and say, "Can you really see out of blue eyes?" Because they don't have blue eyes. One of the Koreans that worked for me said, "You know, can you tell the South Koreans from the Filipinos and Chinese and the Japanese?" And I said, "No, I haven't been here long enough." They said, "That's good because all you Americans look alike to me." And you know, when you look at Americans, we don't all look alike, but all the Americans looked alike to them. I thought that was very interesting, because we all seem to think that all Orientals look alike. After I'd been there about six months, you could tell a difference between the Filipinos and the Japanese and the Chinese and the Koreans. It was very interesting; there is a difference.

Sellers: Did you ever feel threatened by the North Koreans?

Stewart: Only when I went to Panmunjeom. I went up to the demilitarized zone on vacation with my husband. We were touring ... most people, when they vacation in the Orient, go to Hong Kong and stuff. We took our vacation in Korea, because we just thought that was a really neat opportunity. And we went driving in ... one of the places we went was Panmunjeom. You go into the building where the armistice was signed, where they argued over the height of the chairs, and the height of the flagpoles, and whose chair was taller than whose, and you can look into North Korea, and there are weapons looking at you. It's very, very, very sobering. This was after the folks who had been out to trim the trees had gotten ax-murdered up there. Some American soldiers had been ax-murdered ... I guess it was about two or three years before I got stationed over there. They had just gone out from their unit to clear the shrubs so you could see the no-man's land, and they had been attacked by North Korean soldiers and butchered. So it was really kind of scary. I had one of the world's stupidest conversations with a gentlemen, I will call him (loosely). He called me and he said, "I don't want any female turkeys up on the DMZ." And I'm going, "Excuse me, General, but we order our turkeys by weight, not sex." And this was getting close to Thanksgiving. He said, "But I don't want any girls up on the DMZ." Obviously this fellow had not been to the DMZ. At Ouijongbu, which is where they supposedly had the MASH ... have you ever seen the TV show MASH? That is supposedly where the MASH was located. Well, WACs were at Ouijongbu. After I explained to him that we didn't order the turkeys by sex, that I would certainly tell the Second Division food service

officer - her name was Mary Jane. And that was the end of that conversation. But this is the kind of stuff that I told my girls - you would either have to wait for these guys to retire or die. They just didn't get it. Yeah, it was kind of interesting up there. We went up and ... the atmosphere in Tong Du Chon and Ouijongbu, which are the northern-most posts for the U.S. military in Korea, is just exactly like on the TV show. My dad hated that show, because he thought it put officers in a bad light. I, on the other hand, can laugh because I've seen officers exactly like the people there. It was a good experience to go and see ... I got to see every installation in Korea because as a food service officer I got to visit every dining facility. Every little place that ordered food from me I got to go visit. That had me visiting the major hotel in Seoul, which was a luxury hotel. The Cheju-do Island, down where the lady pearl divers are famous off the south coast of Korea. They have huge cherry trees and a place called Chinhae. The Japanese raped that country of lumber, but they did plant the cherry trees in Chinhae, so that they are this big around now [motions with arms] and absolutely gorgeous in the spring. The Koreans have replanted their forests, and they all go up the mountains in stripes and in between them are purple azaleas. So the mountains are purple and green striped in the spring. It's really kind of cool to see. It was an interesting experience. That was the place where I felt I was doing the most good, because if I didn't do my job, somebody went hungry.

Sellers: Can you think of anything else? Go ahead guys [motions to listening audience], I didn't get a chance to tell you, but you're welcome to ask questions when it's over. How many years were you stationed in Korea?

Stewart: Two. I was there from May of '78 to May of '80.

Sellers: What was the most unusual experience for you as a woman stationed there?

Stewart: I went to lunch one day, and I heard the friends of the two Korean gentlemen who worked directly for me teasing them about working for a woman. Because again, women are viewed as property. Their explanation was, "You know, we work for an Army captain, and you know those crazy Americans - this one's a girl." That was early in my tour, and it colored the way I dealt with my people. I never referred to any of them by their first name. It was always Mr. Son, Mr. Kim. It was always very, very respectful. I found that respect was returned.

Sellers: And how did they refer to you?

Stewart: Before my husband got there, I was 'Mrs. Ginger', and after Steve got there I was 'Mrs. Steve.' I arranged for our living quarters with the indentured servant. When my husband got there, the fact that I was the breadwinner didn't matter. The man of the house dealt with my husband to renew our contract for the second year, because men did that; women didn't.

Sellers: I'm guessing, from the way you've talked, that if you had to do it all over again, you would?

Stewart: I would, in a heartbeat. I knew from the time I was five that I would be in the military. I didn't know which one. I kind of was leaning towards the Navy because I thought their outfits were kind of cool. But the Army offered me a better program when I went to look for .... I interviewed the Navy and I interviewed the Army, they did not interview me. I felt that that was putting me in the catbird seat. I kind of chose what I wanted. I graduated from college with a pretty decent GPA, so that I felt that I could ask for what I wanted and I got it. I would heartily recommend military for people who don't have a clue what they want to do with life and want to get some really good experience. It's a dangerous business when you get sucked in to places that the President decides to throw you, but other than that ... if you survive that, it's a really good experience. It is one of the few places where the glass ceiling is disappearing, and from the very first day I was commissioned, or first day I even raised my hand and was a corporal on active duty going to college, it was equal pay for equal work. If you were an E-4, you got an E-4 salary. If you were a captain with three years in-grade, you got a captain with three years in-grade salary. You earned the same leave, you got the same medical benefits. So, I think it's a wonderful idea. I endorse ... my personal belief is that every young person needs to spend at least two years giving something back, and I don't think it necessarily needs to be in the military. You can do something in the public health service, work for a national park .... But every young person needs to do two things: they need to spend two years giving something back to this great country, and they need to leave this country for at least eight weeks and go someplace other than Canada so that you will understand what you have when you get back. Because it's very, very important to know that this is a wonderful country; with all its flaws, and all its blemishes, and all the stupidity, and all the government waste, it's still the best place on earth to live.

Sellers: You were still in the States in '70 and '71 when all of the Vietnam unrest was occurring. What was the reaction within the service to that?

Stewart: I was in Germany between 1970 and 1973. I think a lot of people handled that overwhelming sadness that came from people that ... we felt that, "You just don't understand." A lot of that overwhelming sadness was expressed in anger, a lot of anger. Your Vietnam vets still feel it today in the fact that .... I belong to the American Legion, very active in the American Legion. In the building right next to ours is the American Vets of Vietnam. They're qualified, and welcome, to participate fully in the American Legion, but they stay in their own little group because nobody knows what they went through but them. Their wives don't understand, their employers .... Nobody that wasn't there understands. My dad served two tours in Vietnam. He would not talk about it.

Sellers: What do you think it would take to make them open up? Is it an outside force that they still sense that animosity coming from the civilian world or have they just become so insular that they're almost afraid to break the barrier?

Stewart: I think they're afraid to trust. I think they're very afraid to trust. I think the fact that there have been people in political power since Vietnam who have been apologists felt like a betrayal. Every one of those young men who went, went because he was told to go, and he answered his country's call. Those that didn't do that left, and for what ever reason, you know ...

the kids went to Canada, the kids did all kinds of things. But those that answered the country's call went and they didn't deserve to be spit on.

Sellers: Is there a difference in the feelings, and I would think there must be, between the ones who enlisted and the ones who were drafted?

Stewart: I don't really think so, because once you get through basic training you're a team. Basic training will do that, it will break down the barriers.

Sellers: So the ones that were drafted sort of became more enthusiastic about what they were going to do and the ones that enlisted ...

Stewart: If the drill sergeant did his job right, yeah.

Sellers: It was tempered a little bit ... their enthusiasm?

Stewart: I think so. I never had the opportunity to do it. I didn't volunteer to go to Vietnam for a very special reason. My dad was in Vietnam and I'm accident-prone. My mother didn't deserve that [laughs]. So, I went and did other things.

Sellers: What did your dad think about you being in the military?

Stewart: Well, you know it was really funny, he did not tell me until I had been on active duty for several years that he really would have preferred that I'd gone in as a nurse. And it was because he also had preconceived notions that the Woman's Army Corps was full of lesbians. I'm here to tell you that the Woman's Army Corps is a cross-section of society, just like any place else you'll find. After he met my friends, he changed his mind and was very, very proud. I could not go home without a dress uniform because I was going to get paraded around somewhere. I have pictures of me in my dress whites going to Easter service with my dad, you know, in a little town west of here ... DeFuniak Springs is where my folks retired. I couldn't go to town without my dress uniform, because I had to be dragged around somewhere to be shown off.

Sellers: Did you have siblings that were in the service?

Stewart: My older brother was in the Air Force. He was an air traffic controller in the Air Force.

Sellers: Was he in Vietnam?

Stewart: Nope.

Sellers: So that helped a little bit.

Stewart: That helped a lot. His eyes were too bad for him to do that.

Sellers: Just good enough to direct planes [laughs].

Stewart: Good enough to direct planes. He got stationed in Hawaii, that was his Vietnam experience. He was stationed at Hickam. I have an uncle who was in the Marines and transferred to the Army; he also spent time in Vietnam. In World War II, he was one of the guys who had a supply train, and his orders were to blow it up and walk out of China. So, my family comes from a long line. I'm third-generation military.

Sellers: There was a military basis for you to think you were going in. What would have happened if the College Junior Program had not come about when it did at the optimum time for you? Would you have gone into nursing, perhaps?

Stewart: I'm not sure. I probably would have just stormed the Pentagon and told them that we needed in, because I knew I was going in. When I set my mind on something I usually get it.

Sellers: So you would have gone one way or the other, but this was just a golden opportunity.

Stewart: One way or the other. This was the opportune way, and it was an excellent opportunity for me, and I think it was just my time.

Sellers: Being in the right place at the right time.

Stewart: I was very, very fortunate. Not everybody heard about that College Junior Program, and so I was very fortunate. I also had my mom looking out for stuff. She's the one that first told me about this College Junior Program. She had known that I had wanted to be in the service so she kind of kept her ear to the ground.

Sellers: So you applied to it and then they came back to you? So they didn't come looking for you originally.

Stewart: No.

Sellers: You didn't get a 'Greetings' letter. 'We have an opportunity for you.'

Stewart: No, no 'Greetings' letter.

Sellers: Okay. Ginger, I think that pretty much wraps it up for now. You'll get a transcript and have to edit it.

Stewart: Oh, my pleasure.

End

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