

BARBARA BELT: Thursday, April 17, 2003. We're interviewing the veteran Shirley J. Curtis. She served in the U.S. Army, enlisted service was from August 19, 1949 to 1972. War served - Korean and Vietnam. She currently resides at Castle Rock Care Center, 4001 North Home Street, Castle Rock, Colorado. Being interviewed today by myself, Barbara Belt, 8662 Kim Court, Parker. I'm a volunteer with the Veterans History Project. Good afternoon, Shirley. Let's start up the interview with a date and place you were born.

SHIRLEY CURTIS: May 21, 1931 at Fort Morgan, Colorado.

BELT: Oh, Colorado.

CURTIS: Yeah, fourth generation.

BELT: Fourth generation. That's cool. Okay. So what made you decide to go into the service, Shirley?

CURTIS: Everyone, all the women in my home town up in Walden where we lived joined during the Second World War, and it was just something that I wanted to do.

BELT: All the women joined?

CURTIS: A lot of them did. We had about fifteen or twenty of them that joined.

BELT: From your town?

CURTIS: And so I wanted to go, so at that point in time, my folks had moved to Loveland, Colorado and when I graduated from high school, I talked a friend of mine to go with me and we went to Fort Collins and enlisted. We tried the Navy and the Marines, but they wouldn't take us. We were too young, so we ended up with the Army.

BELT: So you were about eighteen, I guess.

CURTIS: We were eighteen.

BELT: Did your parents have to sign for you, Shirley?

CURTIS: Yeah, they had to sign for us to go.

BELT: What did your parents think about you doing this?

CURTIS: They signed and had no problem getting this.

BELT: No problem.

CURTIS: Doing what I wanted.

BELT: How many was in your family?

CURTIS: I'm the only one. There is no brothers or sisters.

BELT: The only child. Ah, and you're signing up and leaving home?

CURTIS: Yeah.

BELT: Okay. So where, when they signed for you and you're going into the -- the Army is the only one who took you?

CURTIS: At that point in time, the Army and Air Force, they recruited for the same place, so we didn't know until August. We enlisted in May and we didn't know until August which one we were going into. But we lucked out and got the Army.

BELT: So there was no regrets on that?

CURTIS: No regrets. No, because no one else had got overseas duty like the Army did. So --

BELT: So you wanted overseas?

CURTIS: Yeah. So the 18th of August, we left Denver after -- well we --

BELT: Who is we?

CURTIS: Edna Guist [*sp?*] and myself, and we left Denver from the train station on the train going to Fort Lee, Virginia, for our basic training.

BELT: To Virginia?

CURTIS: Yeah, quite a change for a girl from Colorado. It was interesting on the train and we had never seen segregation before, and we ran into that full steam because there was a number of black girls on the train, but they wouldn't let them associate with us nor let them eat in the train car with us, and so we had some times about that, but it was our first time --

BELT: You mean it upset you?

CURTIS: Yeah, we had never seen any of that. We had never seen segregation and here we were full force into it. Of course, going to Virginia, we really got, really got it. We arrived in the evening. I don't remember -- at Fort Lee and they met us with a truck and a sergeant telling us what to do and we went. And they took us to the barracks and of course, they made us, give us bedding and stuff and we had to pack that down there in the one suitcase that we were allowed to have and down and then we had to make our beds. And then the next morning, that's when Basic Training. We were the first group to go into fourteen weeks Basic Training. They had always done eight weeks before, and they decided to do it fourteen weeks, so it was D Company, 2nd Battalion and we had wonderful company commander. I'll never forget her. Captain Wilberg, and the First Sergeant was Dusty and that's all I can remember. Dusty. I know she's gone now. She's dead, but Captain Wilberg had a sense of humor that was just wonderful. She needed it with that group that she had. [*chuckless*]. Cause we had some people in there, that --

BELT: How many in the group?

CURTIS: I don't know how many was in the company. Now wait a moment. We had to have over two hundred, because we had four platoons at over two hundred and I think before we graduated, though, they had washed out quite a number, so maybe there was a hundred and fifty that graduated.

BELT: What does it mean when they would be washed out?

CURTIS: Well, maybe they just couldn't handle the taking orders or they couldn't pass the tests or there's numerous things that -- every company had that. You know. And at that time, too, the black girls were taking basic training were in B Company. We had numerous people that were always playing jokes or doing something. There was one woman Cozio [*sp?*], she was from Rhode Island and she would always doing things. They issued us the old issue from World War II. We had the, the -- everything was khaki. The khaki nylon slippers, the long underdrawers for winter and the long nylon drawers and then we had to wear, of all things, cotton socks. No socks, hose. You only wore nylon hose on Sundays when you went to church and go to the Service Club. The rest of the time you wore the cotton socks. Really they saved us because when you were marching, you know, it saved your legs from chaffing and everything. You used a lot of baby powder in those days from the heat and all in Virginia.

BELT: You put that baby powder into the socks?

CURTIS: Yeah, and on your legs and everything. So, there was a lot of things. Cuzio. The uniforms and stuff was old and all of it. One morning early, when we were out for reveille, why Cuzio was out there, and the elastic broke in these underdrawers and they fell down around her knees, and I thought the company commander was going to burst a gut. But she managed to keep a straight face and tell the company, "Dismissed." And then she broke up. Then, another day, Cuzio, she stood out there and kept saying "harrumph, harrumph" and somebody sort of looked at her, and then she went "Ha. Ha Question." They couldn't do anything to her, but it was hilarious, and the whole company broke up. They broke up and they had to tell us, "Dismissed." They couldn't hold us any longer. chuckles. So it was things like that. Another time same girl in the barracks was taking a shower and she forgot to put the top on her powder can, and she had that Cashmere Bouquet which smells to heaven and she was throwing it around and the top wasn't on it and she put baby powder all over and we had GI'ed that place all that evening to get ready for an inspection the next morning, so guess who stayed up all night, all of us upstairs, and GI'ed that whole place in the dark so we could stand inspection the next day. So those are some of the fun things.

BELT: What do you mean GI?

CURTIS: Clean, scrub, scrub the floors. Those were old wooden barracks, and those floors, you had to scrub them with soap and water and all and you cleaned everything, cause the officers would come through and take a white glove and see if they found any dust or anything. You had to make your bed so they stayed out and you could bounce a quarter off of them.

BELT: You could really bounce a quarter?

CURTIS: Yeah. And most everybody took and you made your bed that night and then you slept under your bed on a blanket. [chuckles]. So you didn't have to make it again. [chuckles]. So it would take two or three to stretch those blankets real tight.

BELT: How was the segregation now? When you're going through Boot Camp?

CURTIS: Then you were segregated. B Company was the black company. And they had their own company, and they probably had one hundred girls, maybe they would come out with seventy or something like that. But those girls, when they graduated from Basic Training, they were the best that could be and all because they washed their women out like mad for most anything. And I know some of them still and they've retired and they made wonderful soldiers and some of them are very good friends. But then, I went from Basic Training. Oh, during Basic Training, we had the pleasure of bivouac for two weeks. And it

was in October, no --

BELT: What do you mean?

CURTIS: We went out in the field, out to train. And it was in October, Halloween night, we went out and it was pouring rain. And you had to use your pup tents and all. You lived out there for two weeks, and we didn't have big tents for us. You had two-shelter houses, two people. You made a tent out of it. You cooked the food and everything. We had C-rations, all of that cooking out. It was a lot of fun. You had to learn to read maps, use compass, firing range to qualify for -- We had to go out and they would leave you some place and find your way back. Good training. There was first aid, all this stuff, so it was very good training. We came back and of course, there was a lot more classes and all. We had a lot of military history, military justice, the laws. Health care, what you would do if you -- where the enemy or whoever we were fighting the war against would capture you. We had all of that. Not as intensive as they have the training now for them, but we had them. Because then they didn't think we'd ever be anywhere up in the front. Because you had a front and a rear and we'd be in the rear. But now days, there's no front lines. You don't know where it is. So this was very good training and from there, then I went to leadership school. I came out of leadership school and I did one term as a --

BELT: Leadership school in Virginia?

CURTIS: Yeah, in Virginia. Still at Fort Lee and then I had to do my tour of one company. I did Company C that year in training the troops. It was like a training school. We did that, and then I went up there and I went to Fort Mason, California, which was riding the troop train all the way across to California. [chuckles] That was fun. And --

BELT: How many troops, do you think?

CURTIS: I don't know. It was all one big train of men and women both. And all the men were going to go on the way to Japan and the Far East, somewhere. And the women were in other cars. We had two or three cars and they dropped them off at different places as we went across. Women. And then the last bunch of us was the ones that went to San Francisco. We got off in San Francisco and we went up to Fort Mason, which is a very small place, post, but it was very beautiful. Old-style Spanish buildings, with the roof tiles and all. Very small. You could walk across from one end to the other on the post in fifteen minutes and not hurry.

BELT: What was your job there?

CURTIS: Then the first thing that I did, was I worked in an office where they were writing,

and redoing, editing the books for Transportation Corps on all the things they had for ships and everything. And we had to go through and pick out what they said was useless and re-enter new theories or ideas that they had for it. Lot of picture work. We had to cut and paste. That stuff. And in those days, you did it on the typewriter and you had to do this big white sheet paper. It was not white-out, but it was paint. And you couldn't have any titles or anything like that. Then I went down to the port for a job with Ships Maintenance and what else did we call it? Ships Maintenance, that's all. We had all in charge of all the supplies for all ships. And at that time, the early --

BELT: Didn't the Navy do that?

CURTIS: No, no. The Army at that time took care of all the troop ships.

BELT: Oh, I see.

CURTIS: They were all under the Army. And so you had all that. Merchant Marine ran the ships. But the Army was taking the troops over. Troop ships. And they had a bunch of them coming in there at the port. And we had all the marine equipment. All that to check off. And to inventory. And it was very interesting job.

BELT: Was this all women? Or were you working with men also?

CURTIS: No, I was working with all the men. I was the only Larch down there.

BELT: Oh, I see --

CURTIS: Only the two Army personnel, yeah, in the office was a Captain and myself. The rest were all civilians.

BELT: Did you like your job?

CURTIS: Yeah. I liked it. Captain McCore [*sp?*] and I learned a lot. And then we had -- it was when Korea first broke loose, and the National Guard from Louisiana and Arkansas, they had put them on a ship at New Orleans and brought them around through the Panama Canal and up into Fort Mason. Instead of anchoring out on the piers, they brought it into the pier, which was a bad mistake. And some of the senior officers from the Guard got off the ship and went into San Francisco to sightsee and here's all the rest of these hundreds of men on that ship that hadn't seen anything but that ship for days. So they mutinied and jumped off the ship and did all kinds of things. They rounded up people, men from all over San Francisco, for the next three days. Some of them jumped off and hit the piers and broke shoulders and legs. Some of them got off and they thought they could get away, so they got

garbage cans and they were going to paddle their way off across the bay. Of course, they hit -- there's a real bad current out there by Alcatraz, and they hit that current and they were going round and round in circles when they picked them up with the tugboats and all. They didn't go very far. [chuckles]

BELT: So you observed all this?

CURTIS: Yeah, it was fun watching them. [chuckles] And we always had to watch troop ships when they loaded and unloaded the troops when they came in from the Far East or when they went. And that was the very first part of Korea. We were really moving ships in and out of there with troops. They didn't fly them in them days. We just took them by ship.

BELT: How was it working with men?

CURTIS: I never, never ever had any problems. Ever working with men, and most of my time, I worked with men and very seldom did I ever have any other women with me.

BELT: So they respected you?

CURTIS: Yeah, I had no problems. None whatsoever. And some good friends from all the years and I'll still hear from them -- From Fort Mason, and then I went to Camp Stoneman, California and at that point in time, President Truman extended all of us, so in essence, all of that were ready to get out were drafted until the duration. It was about a year and a half we had to serve more. So, Stoneman, they put me into the personnel for reception station for those who were going overseas. And we had --

BELT: Stoneman is where?

CURTIS: In California. It's up by Sacramento.

BELT: Stoneman.

CURTIS: Stoneman. It's not even existing anymore. They tore it down. And that was an interesting assignment, cause you seen all the men going overseas. There was the men that was going to Basic Training in Hawaii, there were men going to Korea, some to Japan, and then you had the men that they called them homesteaders, that had been serving in an Army post for ten or fifteen or twenty years and they transferred them homesteaders, had to go overseas. You processed them through all the military records. Wills, all the stuff, they got their shots, medical physical and then they changed clothes and gave them combat uniforms and everything. And they went onto the ships and out they went. Or they went on the ferry.

And the ferry went to up Fort Mason and put them on the ship.

BELT: So you were in charge of processing these people?

CURTIS: Yeah, and there was probably twenty-five or thirty of us in that office and all. Again, I worked for a Captain and a Warrant Officer.

BELT: Males?

CURTIS: Yeah. We had women officers around but they were in other offices. They weren't out with us. And we had a WAC [*Women's Army Corps*] detachment who lived in four barracks and all. We had to guard it all the time by men, 'cause we had wires around it at night the guys would like to try to come here. [*chuckles*] We had a lot of incidences when they did. They got in. But they got them.

BELT: Were they arrested?

CURTIS: Yeah, they'd take them out. They just wanted to do something before they left, you know. [*chuckles*] There was some funny things that happened. They had one guy and he came in and he got in and they never saw him. And he got under the barracks and he swiped all the clothes off the clotheslines and all and everything. He had bras and panties and everything and all, but they got him. He was dressed in all women's clothes and he was trying to get out from going overseas, that's all. You know, like MASH, oh, what's his name?

BELT: Klinger?

CURTIS: Yeah, Klinger! You know, that type. [*chuckles*] And we had a good cook there, good bunch of cooks in our mess hall. We had a lot of things. It was a lot of fun there.

BELT: So you were all right living in a barracks?

CURTIS: Yeah, then. Then, I got out of the service and went home and I thought I was going to stay out. I came home and worked three jobs and wasn't happy with any of them and it was on December 17th, I got discharged. 1952. And about a month later, I gave up and drove from Loveland to Fitzsimons [*Fitzsimons Army Hospital*] and re-enlisted again.

BELT: Did your parents know that you were going to do that?

CURTIS: Yeah.

BELT: Did they --

CURTIS: They didn't know that I did it until after I got back home but I couldn't take civilian life, so I went back in and I was at Fitzsimons, and I went to a medical holding company for just about a year as a typist. Was a Ward Clerk.

BELT: Were you happy again?

CURTIS: Yes, I liked it. It was nice. That was my first tour to work at Fitzsimons and I left Fitzsimons in March, I think it was of [19]53. And went to Livorno, Italy, Camp Darby.

BELT: I know. What -- How did you go to Italy? Is that something that you got to chose?

CURTIS: No, they just sign you up when they needed your MOS [*Military Occupation Specialties*] or your job specialty. And they assign you to it.

BELT: What did you think about going aboard?

CURTIS: Oh, I loved it. I thought that was wonderful. So --

BELT: And your parents? Did they?

CURTIS: Well, they -- my mother didn't want me to go, really, but she really didn't have anything to say about it and I had a ball. Yeah, she thought it was okay. Afterwards. She got over it, but I --

BELT: How did you get to Italy?

CURTIS: Yeah, I went to Camp Kilmore and we processed from Kilmore and we went by bus to, oh boy, what's the name of the Air Force base in Massachusetts? Anyway, can't think of the name of it. We went there. From there, we flew to the Azores and there were six of us who were going to Italy.

BELT: Women?

CURTIS: Yeah. We landed in the Azores, and from the Azores, we flew to Frankfurt, Germany, and Frankfurt, we stayed overnight. And then we had to go by train down to Italy. And they put us on a train and we made it --

BELT: Were you traveling with women now or were you traveling men and women?

CURTIS: Men and women.

BELT: Okay.

CURTIS: We had German trains, and we went from Frankfurt to Munich. They were supposed to meet us in Munich and bring us some food and stuff, 'cause there was no mess car or anything on the train. But they didn't. They met us with trucks. They thought we were going to be replacements and we weren't. And we had been warned not to let them pull us off and keep you. 'Cause they would do that to get replacements, and so they tried to get us to stay in Munich and we said, "no" we were going to Italy. And so that's what we did. And so from Italy, no Munich, we went to Salisbury [*Salzburg*], Austria, and then stayed overnight in Salisbury and from Salisbury by train down to Leghorn -- And the Company Commander met us at the train and we went in --

BELT: How many people, again?

CURTIS: There was five of us.

BELT: Just five?

CURTIS: And it was replacements. And we had a wonderful breakfast that morning. I will never forget it. In Italy, it took about two months before you felt like you could do anything 'cause getting used to the climate and all and everything. I never thought I would walk around like I had sea legs, but I did there until I got used to it. But it was a beautiful country and had a wonderful, wonderful tour in Italy. I worked several jobs there. The first one I worked was down at the port, down in Transportation again. I worked in the Commanding Officers of the Port office with a WAC Captain.

BELT: And now you're working for a female now?

CURTIS: Female. Yeah, right. Probably the toughest assignment I ever had because she had a red pencil that was wicked. Boy, you do something and it was wrong, she corrected it and you did it over. Now, I think back many a time and thank her for all the things she taught me. She was a very wonderful boss. We had a great time there. I made my hard Sergeant E-5 there. Sergeant stripes. I had got thrown overboard when I made my stripes.

BELT: Tell me about that.

CURTIS: Off the pier. That was the time when you made your stripes. We went down and I

didn't know that I had been promoted and got in there and somebody handed me a cup of coffee and all of a sudden, I saw Baconeack [sp?] and I thought, uh-oh, and I turned around and yes, I had the promotion cup. And the guys grabbed me and I tried to run, but I couldn't get my high heels off fast enough and I couldn't run fast enough and they got me and they threw me off the pier in the water.

BELT: Oh, my gosh --

CURTIS: So I got initiated. [*chuckles*] Same as all of them did.

BELT: Men or women?

CURTIS: Didn't make any difference.

BELT: Didn't make any difference?

CURTIS: Didn't make any difference.

BELT: So did you have slacks on or a dress?

CURTIS: Nah, I had the uniform on. Skirt and --

BELT: A skirt.

CURTIS: It got ruined. I had to get a new uniform. [*chuckles*]

BELT: What if you can't swim?

CURTIS: Well, they had somebody down there. They had two or three guys down there to get you out.

BELT: [*chuckles*] So they didn't care if you didn't swim, you'd still be thrown in.

CURTIS: Still be put in. I tried to outrun them, but I couldn't do it. The old chew [sp?] again was the sergeant in charge of the port down there. He and I are very good friends and he later became a Command Sergeant Major. Well, he's back in Brooklyn, I guess. Now I left Italy --

BELT: How long were you in Italy?

CURTIS: Italy. We were almost four years.

BELT: Four years. So you were learning a little bit of Italian?

CURTIS: I learned some Italian. We lived with an Italian family for a while 'cause we didn't have any barracks. We lived in the hotel at first until they built the barracks. Hotel Cuhello [sp?] down by the railroad station and that was fun. We did a lot of things there. And of course, you always had to be careful because the Communists were everywhere, and one night they said that they had made crosses or swastikas and put on the light posts. Gunny sacks and all of this stuff and then they set them afire. Looked like the city was on fire. But they were always doing something like that and the police would go in and take them down and all. But they had a Communist headquarters there and so you always had that factor and you had to be real careful, you didn't hit one with a car or something.

BELT: Where's the camp close to? What city?

CURTIS: Livorno, Leghorn. Yeah, it was just outside they built it. It is in these nice big, great big old pine trees. They had huge big pine cones. Big, big, big pine cones that come down there. Always coming down on us, would conk you on the head. But we had a lot of fun there. It was a good duty. From the port, then I went up to the headquarters and I worked in an office that handled all the ration cards and things for the dependents and other people they would get. We gave out rations for them.

BELT: You gave out rations?

CURTIS: Yeah, you had to ration cigarettes and coffee, tea and gas, all of that was rationed. They had to pick it up. Let's see -- the I guess, best thing that happened there was -- we really worked -- was when -- we had two things, didn't we? Yeah -- When Austria became neutral, then we pulled all the Americans troops out of Austria and they sent them home or they brought them into Camp Darby in Italy. So, when we went up there, they had so many women that were pregnant that they had to form a train to -- with all the surgical stuff and everything on it -- so if these women had babies--

BELT: Were these women soldiers? Wives?

CURTIS: Yeah, wives.

BELT: Okay. Wives.

CURTIS: And had babies, why they could take care of them. They had babies all the way

down. And they had about ten or fifteen of them on one day where they had to stop at the border that had France, Switzerland, Austria and Italy all together, and when they went to get their citizenship papers and all that thing later, the families had to go to each one of those counsels to get the papers to get the paperwork so that they were an American citizen. But we brought them down and we had, we called it the "stork" train. [laughter] And we brought all these people down, but we had two days --

BELT: The Stork train.

CURTIS: We ran the Stork train. And the next one we moved was the Trieste troops moved out of Trieste and we brought them in to go back to the States. They were a special infantry unit, division, that they were all the same height, same weight, and all. They were real classy uniforms, chrome helmets, and chrome bayonets, and rifles and chrome places for their laces, white laces in their boot and all. And they were really a show outfit, 'cause that was all that they did. They were also protecting that area to Yugoslavia and all in there, so we brought them in. And we had to ship them out. That was quite interesting. Then Italy became part of NATO [*North Atlantic Treaty Organisation*] and we had big parades and they had the naval -- all the ships came into the port from all over the world. And they had the ships come in and that is a sight to be seen. With all of them coming in showing their flags, playing their anthems, shooting their cannons off. You know -- to salute.

BELT: Do you remember when that was?

CURTIS: 1955, 1954 -- Yeah, it has to be. I came back in [19]56. And it was beautiful, and they had the Italian Alpine troops that ran. And everywhere that they go, they must run at full tilt. Even their band runs. And they have fezs with long streamers on the top of them and they would just go out on the firing range and they would just stand out and flow in behind them. It was beautiful. And all the troops on the field and all the different nationalities and their anthems and all the bands playing -- it was really something to see. You are standing there trying not to move in formation and just trying to see everything but you can't. But we got to see most of it. We were back where we could --

BELT: Was this for one day or for several?

CURTIS: That was one day.

BELT: One day. Yeah, something that you never forgot.

CURTIS: Yeah, you'll never ever see another one like that. If you ever, ever anywhere get to see all the ships come in, the sailing ships, and the big ships and all come in, that is

something. They have this at Naples every once in a while and San Francisco, also. But that is beautiful. Okay, I left Italy. I came back on the USS Randall, troop ship and came into Brooklyn Army Terminal. And then I went home on leave --

BELT: Did you see your parents at all in Italy during that time?

CURTIS: No.

BELT: You didn't.

CURTIS: No, I didn't see them until I came back and then I went home on leave. And then I went to Aberdeen Proving Grounds in Maryland, and there I went to work. No, I didn't go to Aberdeen. I went to Valley Forge Army Hospital, and I was --

BELT: From the Brooklyn Army Terminal?

CURTIS: Yeah, after I got off the ship there and went home on leave and then I went to Valley Forge Army Hospital, Valley Forge, Pennsylvania.

BELT: Now were you, did you request that or were you assigned?

CURTIS: No, that was where I was assigned.

BELT: Were you happy about that?

CURTIS: Yeah, didn't make no difference to me. I went where they told me.

BELT: Ah-ha.

CURTIS: And I worked, I supposed to work in personnel, but we didn't. I ended up in Medical Records. I was only there a few months up to maybe ten months, a year, I don't know -- And then I went to William Beaumont Army Hospital in Texas, at El Paso.

BELT: Why did they send you so fast?

CURTIS: They needed somebody to do it and they needed somebody with American record experience and I had enough where I was, so they sent me there to set up the clinics for the hospital. They were changing things around. All I did was set them up so that they could utilize their clinics.

BELT: Did you like your job?

CURTIS: Yeah, I learned a lot. And I went from there, I left there --

BELT: They were sending you off again?

CURTIS: Yeah, they took me off again and I been back in the States eighteen months and I left for Frankfurt, Germany.

BELT: Did you request that?

CURTIS: No!

BELT: Another assignment?

CURTIS: Another assignment.

BELT: Could you turn these assignments down?

CURTIS: No. Truly no. Only way you could would be a medical -- Frankfurt, I was assigned to IG Farben Building, which was Northern Area Command, and I worked in the personnel there and I was given the job of Officers' Records and taking care of all the officers and personnel needs and command. There was a Warrant Officer Page who was there, and he was going to return to the States in another sixty days. He had over thirty years of service, and he said that I'm going to roll my sleeves and I am going to teach you personnel, so sit down. And he did. He had a wonderful memory. He had a photographic memory, he could remember anything and by the time he finished with me, I knew what I was doing. It was great. I would like to work with that man for a couple or three years. Really. But I only had sixty days to do it.

BELT: So you were only supposed to stay sixty days in Normandy?

CURTIS: No, that was sixty days while he was there.

BELT: Oh, while he was there.

CURTIS: And he left, because he was going to retire. He had over thirty years.

BELT: Oh, I see. Okay. Well, what is your experience in Germany? What are you --were you happy to be there?

CURTIS: Yeah. I liked Germany. And then after he left, then I went on the inspection team for the Northern Area Command with a General and all of them. I was the only female on that. And we went to all the different posts underneath. We went to Giessen, Siegen, Frankfurt and Hannover, and Bremerhaven, I can't think of all the rest of them. Kaiserslautern. All the rest of them, every place we had, but Heidelberg, we didn't have that address. And we made inspections of their personnel labs, and all, and then we'd come back and then go to another one. Mostly, I came back to Frankfurt at night, but sometimes we were so far away that we'd have to stay and I would stay in a guest house or an officer's BOQ [*Bachelor Officers' Quarters*] was one of them. And they would have a guard outside the door so nobody could come 'cause there was no women around. I was the only one. So it was alright. It was a lot of nights. I drove usually, I was driving the staff car so I was usually driving. I liked it 'cause I got to see all of Germany from one end to the other and I got -- we had --

BELT: Were there other women NCOs [*Non-Commissioned Officer*] that you could associate with?

CURTIS: Oh, yeah. But I was gone out so much, you know, that I didn't do much. Oh, yeah, I could associate with anybody if I was there. But, you know -- on my inspection teams, it was all the men and the officers and also --

BELT: So a lot of male contact?

CURTIS: Yeah -- That's what I'm saying. Most of my time was out like that. I didn't, wasn't around all too many --

BELT: What were you wearing now? Are you still wearing --

CURTIS: Still wearing skirts and jacket and blouse. Yeah.

BELT: And --

CURTIS: We never wore the combat uniform that these women are wearing now. We didn't have that. We had some that we used for roadbound and all, but they weren't like these. They were just plain old green -- pants and a jacket and all, a field jacket and all. They weren't anything like it is now. It was something like the men's World War II uniform, but for combat, but they weren't like they are now.

BELT: Do you have to wear the government-issue undergarments?

CURTIS: You didn't by this time, you didn't have to.

BELT: Okay.

CURTIS: We quit doing them. You would get your own, but it was hard to get overseas, because the men would go buy them for their girl friends or their dependents would get them. And now I usually had my mother send me stuff. It was the only way I could get them, so -- but anyway, we really -- I enjoyed Germany. I got to see a lot of Germany. I had my own car over there and had a good friend there, and her and I would take off on a Saturday or a Sunday. We would both be free and we'd pick a road on the map and we'd go on that road and just take it and stop at a guesthouse and have something to eat. One day we ended up watching a dog show train for hunting. They were training the dogs. We spent all day, up on a hillside, watching them. It was a lot of fun. So, we did a lot of things. We went to the zoo. The Frankfurt Zoo was wonderful. I never did get through all of it. We went to the museums. We went to the opera. We did all the things that we could. So it was a good assignment. When I came back to the States from Germany, I went to Aberdeen Proving Grounds, Maryland. And there again, I was in personnel. And they used me to teach other people personnel and that hadn't worked in an officers' personnel so that was what I spent my time there doing was that. Then my very last assignment at Aberdeen, now, was the morning reports and all. They didn't have anybody there to do it. And I spent about a year in that. I had eighteen men under me, eighteen or nineteen men.

BELT: Under you?

CURTIS: And all they did was type these morning reports all the time. By ten or eleven a.m. they usually were through and they hadn't got all the stuff and everything caught up, then they could play golf.

BELT: So you outranked them?

CURTIS: Yeah, I outranked them. Most all of them that I had working for me, all were draftees, kids and all, but they were good.

BELT: And respectful to you?

CURTIS: Oh, yeah, I never had any problems. Never! Ever, had any problems. I left Aberdeen, and I went to Fort Monmouth, New Jersey.

BELT: That was another assignment?

CURTIS: Yeah, another assignment. And again, I worked in personnel and I worked for a warrant officer who had never worked with women and had always been in the infantry and was not too sure about this, working with a WAC. And he did the assignment of all of the officers from ROTC [*Reserve Officers' Training Corps*] that came in for their training, Basic Training. And then where they would be assigned for Signal Corps and he had to take the degrees that they had from college and try to figure out where you could match them up with training for the Signal Corps. A lot of them wanted into computers and programming and all. At that time, it was just starting out, you know. Most of them you put them in classes and they would flunk out. No matter what they had in college. They would flunk out. That's how tough the Army courses were. Even if they had some of them, they couldn't pass it. So, that was interesting because sometimes, you had a whole bunch of them -- all they had was an English degree. What do you do with a man in Signal Corps with an English degree?

BELT: What do you mean in the Signal Corps?

CURTIS: Yeah, you know. Signal Corps. There's many, many jobs in telephones, and all that, but what do you do with a man that all he has is a degree in English?

BELT: So what would you do with him?

CURTIS: You'd have to talk to him and interview him and then try to fit him into somewhere. [*laughter*] And maybe he'd be in the telephone, or you know. If he could pass the courses then.. Some of them passed the courses in programming you know. Where the other ones that had it, couldn't. So that was the difficult thing. I used to say I threw a dart and the dart would guess where I was going to assign them, but I didn't really.

BELT: So you still living in the barracks now? Or --

CURTIS: Yeah, still living in the barracks. We weren't allowed not to live in the barracks.

BELT: So you couldn't get an apartment?

CURTIS: No, you couldn't -- you had to get special permission and you couldn't do that. You had to be married

BELT: Oh, I see --

CURTIS: But by the time I got to Aberdeen and all, I had my own room in the barracks. At least I had that. I didn't have to be out in the open, so I had my own room.

BELT: Because you were --

CURTIS: I was usually a barracks sergeant, in charge of the barracks and what they did. And make them clean up the barracks.

BELT: Did you like that?

CURTIS: Yeah, it was all right. It was just no time of your own. You always had to have a problem to take care of or something. You never know what the young ladies would do -- so it was okay.

BELT: Did you find the girls was respectful to you?

CURTIS: Yeah, I -- well, once in a while, you would have somebody that would smart off, but you don't really. If you treat them right, they will treat you right. So I never, I never had any problems. And at Aberdeen, I went from personnel and I went to work for a special task force they formed. It was a general and two colonels and eleven or twelve civilians.

BELT: This is at Aberdeen?

CURTIS: Yeah, eleven or twelve civilians with high grades, 12s, 13s, 15s. Were all special in their own way. Some were engineers, some were aeronautics, some were writers.

BELT: What do you mean? They were --

CURTIS: They would write stuff for the military.

BELT: Okay.

CURTIS: Ah, just all kinds of things that they did. Uh, the Colonel that was in charge where I was, Cutpaper [*sp?*] had been with MacArthur, when MacArthur left the Philippines and went to Australia. He went with Mrs. MacArthur and their son and all had taken them. And he had been with them; he was a very fine man. He had three or four degrees in engineering and all and I'd loved to have worked with them for a long time. He was always so interesting. You learned so much from him. And we did contracts of land, buying land, or selling land that the Army -- Defense Department had. So I learned a lot there. From there, I went to Brooklyn Army Terminal.

BELT: Back there, you went back again? [*laughter*]

CURTIS: Back again. This time stationed there for a while.

BELT: Oh, okay. And the same thing, you didn't request it. They just tell you where to go.

CURTIS: No -- just tell you where to go. I went to Brooklyn and we were there. Our barracks was over at Fort Hamilton. The women. The men stayed at Brooklyn Army Terminal. But there was no quarters for the women. Uh, my office, there was one other WAC there and myself, but mostly after she left, it was just me. I had enlisted records and I had nine men working for me. I think it was. Yeah, nine -- nine men working for me. All of them --

BELT: Did you like that? You know --

CURTIS: Yeah, I liked it.

BELT: Giving orders to men was --

CURTIS: I never really felt I had to give them orders. We, daily, after a while they learned what they was to do.

BELT: Did they have to salute you?

CURTIS: -- and no. No, no. They salute officers. I'm not an officer.

BELT: Oh, okay.

CURTIS: They do what they had to do. They knew what the day's work was. And they would do it. Sometimes we would sit down and discuss what we were going to do, and maybe there was a new way of doing it -- a new regulation, or something. But most of them knew what to do and would --

BELT: And they were respectful to you --

CURTIS: And we didn't have many problems. And from there, let's see, I was there for four years.

BELT: Four years at Brooklyn?

CURTIS: Yeah.

BELT: Did you like that?

CURTIS: I didn't mind it too much. You had to have money in your pocket if you left on the weekend or something, because you had the toll roads and the tunnels and everything else. But it wasn't too bad. I enjoyed New York, itself, better when I was at Monmouth because you could go up and go to the opera or a show or anything and then leave the city. But when you were right there, you were in it, and I had one time I went on the

End Side 1

Begin Side 2

CURTIS:-- but we went and rode the subway. I didn't care for that at all. I did not like the tunnels, going through them. So I tried to take the bridges out, George Washington Bridge, but when they built Verrazano Bridge, why then you could scoot right out to Staten Island on the turnpikes. Get out of there. Ah, we had some good things happen. We had -- *[laughter]* We lived through all the Vietnam protesters and all that. They would always be at the gates at Fort Hamilton and also down at the port.

BELT: They would picket?

CURTIS: Picketing. Yeah, and calling us names and everything else like that. Well, the picketers, they were continually going at the port and at Fort Hamilton. They had them all the time. We tried to ignore them, but it was pretty hard when they walked right out in front of you when you were driving through the gates and all. But --

BELT: How did you feel about the picketers?

CURTIS: I think it's stupid, you know. I didn't like them. I didn't want them around me.

BELT: Did they ever assault anyone or --

CURTIS: No, the only time there was any roughhousing, was when they came down there and wanted to get into the port and there was some ships out there with troops on them. And the New York police on horseback came in there to get them out of there and they didn't want to come out, so Bobby Kennedy came in there -- came into the port and all --

BELT: Did you see him?

CURTIS: Yeah, he was right there at the gate and watched everything out of the window of

our office and the civilian port men, dockworkers, came up and you know, you get those guys, they aren't too nice. They came up with bats and whatever they had and they worked those demonstrators over real good out there. And they left and they come around for quite a while after that.

BELT: You mean there was physically fighting?

CURTIS: Yeah, they really -- the cops again, the dockworkers just went back in the gate and back down. They weren't out there, you know, so the cops just ignored it and all. I don't blame them. But then, for a long time, the cops would come in and stay there right around the gate and all so, this one had a horse, a beautiful bay horse, and he would bring him over and tie him right underneath my window. And I remember every once in a while, he'd stick his head right out the window opening. He'd stick his head into my window, you know. I would have a horse's head over my shoulder. *[laughter]* So I kept some apples or something and I would give him an apple. The cop said that I was spoiling his horse. I said, "Well, you leave him there so I'll give him something." But it was interesting and we had parades and all. It's a shame now all that's gone; they have turned that all over to civilians and I think a lot of it's been torn down and all. Ah --

BELT: During all this time did your parents come out to see you? They couldn't see you overseas -- did you see them in the States?

CURTIS: Yeah, they did. Mother and dad came out when I was at Valley Forge. They came out on the train and seen me. And then when I was in Maryland, they drove out to Maryland and stayed for a while. When I was, I can't remember when I was in Maryland, yeah. Valley Forge. They came out, and then, when I was, of course I hadn't got to California yet, so from New York, now we're going to back to San Francisco.

BELT: The same thing. You don't request, they just tell you where to go.

CURTIS: Well, this one was a little different. They called me and told me how would I like to go to San Francisco to the WAC Staff Advisor's Office and I said, "You got to be kidding. You wouldn't be sending me to the WAC Staff Advisor's Office. Who's pulling my leg?"

BELT: Why did you say that?

CURTIS: Well, they always took the younger women. She had to be a certain height and certain weight and be real good looking and I did not fit that profile. And so I said, "Now look, you've never seen me but I do not fit the profile." *[laughter from Belt]* I said, "I know who you assigned to those offices and all." She tried, she totally tried to convince me from

Washington. She called me. I told her "no" and hung up on her. I did. I hung up on her twice. And 'cause I figured that someone was pulling my leg, you know. Pretty soon, a voice came on the phone and said, "This is Colonel Hoisington, Sergeant Curtis, you are going to San Francisco to be in the WAC Staff Advisor's Office with Colonel Hart." And I said, "Yes, ma'am. When do I leave?" [laughter] So she -- I had to make that my orders for the next week and I was out of there and gone. Colonel Hart had requested me. She was the Captain that I worked for in Italy fifteen years before and she had requested that I be assigned to San Francisco --

BELT: The lady you had said was hard to work for that you admired?

CURTIS: Yes, yes.

BELT: And she requested you?

CURTIS: She requested me. So that -- so I --

BELT: Made you feel good?

CURTIS: Oh, yes. And she was a wonderful person and so I went to San Francisco and just the two of us in the office --

BELT: What are you going to do for her?

CURTIS: Well, I did all the administrative work and all the typing and everything else like that, but I also handled all the phone calls, people, we had all these posts, army posts all over the 6th Army area in the West, you know and wherever there was women, we had to check on them all the time. And she would make visits to the posts, or I would, one or the other. And any problems that came up --

BELT: You would visit a post also?

CURTIS: Yeah, and I visited posts also. Anything that would happen, we kept in daily contact with Washington with the Director's office, in the Women's Army Corps at that time. That was before it became all Army and every body was -- we had a wonderful office and I got to meet General Hoisington in person several times. And she was the first woman to make General and Colonel Hart and all of them -- so many of my old friends, you know, now have gotten up to the higher ranks and all the things, so that was a good duty. It was a good duty. Four years, it was real good. My folks came out there and lived out there during winters. They became snowbirds to California and I had an apartment and could live off-post

at that point in time.

BELT: Did you like that?

CURTIS: Yeah, I like that. Real close to post. I was about six blocks away. So it was nice. I had a nice apartment and all.

BELT: You were there four years you say?

CURTIS: Yeah, and then I left -- well, my mother got real sick. She was out there and they brought her home and then I requested to be back to Fitzsimons so I could be where she was and see what happened 'cause they didn't think she was going to live too long which she didn't. Two years more than we thought. So I came back and was assigned. That was my request, was to Fitzsimons.

BELT: And they granted that request?

CURTIS: And they granted that request. It was what they called a compassionate assignment. So I came back to Fitzsimons and I was personnel sergeant at Fitzsimons. I had all of the officers and enlisted personnel under me. So --

BELT: What did you do exactly?

CURTIS: I was in charge of all the people looking for enlisted personnel and did all the records and everything. I had 236 people under me. Separation and all, so there was just a Major and myself.

BELT: So what rank are you now, Shirley?

CURTIS: Sergeant First Class. I made that in California.

BELT: Okay. Oh, she promoted you?

CURTIS: She gave me two promotions. I got my E-5 in Italy and then my E-7 in --

BELT: That's right. Yeah.

CURTIS: Yeah, so -- she was there the day I got dumped in the water.

BELT: She was. *[laughter]*

BELT: What did you think when you said you were going to have a compassionate leave?

CURTIS: Yeah, she was all for it 'cause they had to sign it. General Hoisington got it for me.

BELT: Ah-ha --

CURTIS: Sure, but anyway, we had to put in paperwork and all kinds of stuff. Why the doctors' statements and all that.

BELT: How long were you in Fitzsimons then?

CURTIS: So let's see, it was 1970 and I retired in 1972.

BELT: What -- How was it when you had your retirement? How did you, were you excited about it? Or what were your feelings?

CURTIS: Well, I just wanted -- at that point in time, I was going to have to go to Fort McClellan, Alabama and train troops and I didn't want to go. And I had --

BELT: You didn't want to leave Colorado?

CURTIS: I didn't want to go anywhere and I was tired and I decided to get out. Lot of people were getting out at that point in time. So I decided to retire. I just faded away. Didn't bother me that I left, you know.

BELT: It didn't?

CURTIS: No. I was living off post when I was at Fitz and all, so I just left. Then I went hunting for a job. And that did bother me. *[laughter]*

BELT: Back into civilian life.

CURTIS: Yeah.

BELT: So you felt you had adjusted fairly easily then?

CURTIS: Not too easily. There was -- I had never known anything except the military. It took me quite a bit before I got it. Then I went to work as a federal law, a federal police officer and all. So that took me a while to get over it, but it was a good twenty-two years.

BELT: Twenty-two years?

CURTIS: I'd do it again. I'd do it again.

BELT: I've heard that from so many military

CURTIS: So much has changed, but I don't know. I think I would do it about the same.

BELT: Is there anything on this tape that you can think that you would like to add, that you might have forgotten as we went through this?

CURTIS: No, I don't think so. I think I have hit it all. I don't think there's anything else.

BELT: Okay. Now you want, you requested that this tape, a copy of this tape instead of going to you and your family. You are requesting that a copy of this tape goes to where, Shirley?

CURTIS: To the WAC, Women's Army Museum, at Fort Lee, Virginia.

BELT: Okay. And that's where you'd like that tape sent?

CURTIS: Yeah.

BELT: Okay. Well, we will do that for you, Shirley.

CURTIS: Okay. They have tapes from as many women as they could. I just haven't never been down there in order to do a tape for them and all. I've had -- been somewhere that have some other people do tapes and want people to send to them, but I've never had to do mine. So this will be a chance for them to have it.

BELT: Okay, well we'll do that. I appreciate your time and your interview.

CURTIS: Thank you.

BELT: Thank you.