

This interview is being conducted on Wednesday, January 28, 2026 at the Carillon Clubhouse in Plainfield, Illinois. My name is Fran Prokop and I am speaking with Faye Ellen Rogers (nee Graham) who is a veteran of the United States Army and served during the Vietnam Era. Faye learned of the Veterans' History Project through me and she has kindly consented to participate in the National Archives Veterans' History Project. Here is her story:

Faye, when and where were you born?

I was born in Prattville, Alabama on October 11, 1946.

What were your parents' occupations?

My Mom actually was a housewife and she did odd – I guess some housekeeping jobs on the side, and my Father worked for an industry that made lamp shades.

Do you remember the name of that company?

I think it was L.A. Young Spring & Wire Company. They did lamps as well.

How many brothers and sisters did you have?

I had four sisters, two brothers.

Did any other family members serve in the military?

No, only my Father, in my immediate family.

What branch was your Father in?

My Father was in the Navy.

During World War II Maybe?

He was in Germany.

How did you enter the service – drafted or enlist?

I enlisted.

How did that happen? Where at?

Well, I got an interest in the military, actually seeing commercials on TV and finding out a little bit about what was entailed in joining the military. And it was appealing to me at the time because I was messed up deciding whether I wanted to go to immediate full-time college or go in the military. So I did start to college for

one year, I believe it was, and then after that I thought I want to try the military right now. I was doing okay in school though; but it was just appealing to me to go to the military.

What school did you go to?

At the time I went to Loop Junior College in Chicago – downtown Chicago,

Since you were born in Alabama, how did you get to Chicago? Did your family move here?

My family – my Father came to Chicago and found a job and we came later.

So did you grow up in Chicago?

I actually grew up in Chicago from the age of 10 – and I did most of grammar school, junior high and high school and about a year or so of college in Chicago.

Why did you choose that particular branch of service?

For me it was a change; it was a change to travel and see other parts of the country – it was a change from my life as it was. I guess my nature – I’m a little more adventurous wanting to travel because even years after that I traveled – even as a missionary; I went away to college and finished – bible university, you know, so I love traveling. I went overseas – not as a military person – but I went overseas as a missionary.

Later on?

Later.

Back to the Army – how was your departure for training camp? Where did you go and how did you get there?

Once I joined, my Mother and Dad approved it, I joined up with the military. I think it was the first time that I had flown, yeah, and getting there was like a new lift.

Where did you go?

I went to -- I had eight weeks of basic training at Fort McClellan, Alabama – and that was quite unforgettable.

That's interesting – I'd like to hear about that. Tell me about it – what happened – how were your early days of training. Any instructor that you recall in particular? What was your routine?

At that time I think I had a Lieutenant -- this was female – Lieutenant Hanecke; it was very interesting; it was very taxing.

What time did you get up in the morning?

Oh, we had to be up probably 5:30, at least; we learned how to get dressed in everything in four minutes. We had to be in formation and downstairs at six o'clock every morning. At some point in the training I took Leadership Training and I actually had to be like Platoon Leader to call them down and get in formation going to our particular position.

Do you think they chose you because you had one year of college and maybe one year or so older than the other recruits?

Yes, I wasn't really older. Actually when I went in I was just 19.

The other girls were not the same age?

No; some were older; several were older. I was just a year older than they would actually allow you to join; I think that was 18. You could only join the military when you was like 18, I thought.

You mean not younger? I think you can join at any age.

The military?

I'm sure there's an upper limit but I don't think it's 18.

I thought it was 18; I thought you had to be 18 at the time.

I don't think you could be younger –

Right, exactly.

So you were 19.

Yes, I was 19. It was just so different – wow – you gotta be up and at '3m here –

Right, right. So at 6 a.m. you were downstairs, you went to mess hall?

We had to go – I believe we went to eat first, yeah at the mess hall on the post. And I do remember the food was really good – it was good.

That's one of the questions – how did you adapt to military life – the physical regimen, the barracks, the food –

The physical was quite challenging, but I was a young woman and physically fit.

And how about the food and the social life?

The food was good; the social life – we really weren't allowed too much social life the first six weeks because it was a regiment of scheduling, you know.

Did you have classroom teaching?

During that first six weeks it was filled with classroom training as a new "soldier" and we learned a lot about I guess logistics; we learned about how, things like learning to read a map.

What about marching?

We learned order, you know; we learned how to march; we learned how to keep in step, keep in time, and there was reasoning behind that. We learned how to persevere even when the weather was kind of bad. We had training learning how to shoot rifles; we learned – go on the range and shoot rifles. We learned how to survive during "wartime" survival. We learned unarmed self-defense –

Unarmed self-defense – very good. So you learned – you were very busy –

Oh, yeah. We flew in helicopters – being able to withstand that. I don't particularly like flying in helicopters but we had to do that. And we learned how to hit the dirt, crawl under barbed wire fences with a rifle, I think at that time it was an M-16; had to learn and be trained on how to use the M-16.

Disable it and put it back together again?

Yeah. And then they had to reenact like if we were attacked and how we were to behave and how we would use our gear, wear a gas mask and stuff.

Wow – that's quite extensive!

Yeah; it was very extensive training.

So what happened after you finished the eight weeks?

After eight weeks then they – I guess they surveyed you and your desires – what you were looking for, what you were equipped to do – and testing and stuff – they kind of decided on where to send you for your permanent duty station. I guess I

scored more higher in personnel management so I was sent to Fort Riley, Kansas and I worked for the IG – Inspector General.

And what were your duties there?

I was a Personnel Specialist and after that I had an opportunity to learn – back then it was shorthand – so I had my MOS was for Personnel Specialist and Court Reporting. I did some court reporting.

Okay, you learned Gregg shorthand.

In high school I did what they called Pittman. –

Right, those were the two types of shorthand.

But I ended up with Gregg.

Did you use a court reporting machine?

I did that but I didn't continue much in it; I specialized in the personnel specialist where we went through the personnel files and recorded different stuff for the soldiers to be sent out – where they were going – different places -- from that post and who were coming in and all like that. We worked with those folders.

And this was during the Vietnam War. So were these guys going to Vietnam and coming back?

Some were – some were. And other places that were just support for them.

Right. So during your entire time – did you get transferred to any other place or did you stay in Kansas?

Well, --

I should ask how long were you in Fort Riley, Kansas?

Fort Riley, Kansas – I was there for the three years – my whole three years. But I was sent out to get training –

Specialized training?

Yeah. The short hand and the court reporting, exactly.

And did you use the Stenograph machine?

Yes, I did.

You used that stenograph machine – to do what? You did not take live testimony of any kind?

Yes.

Oh, you did.

In a courtroom a couple of times?

Why were you in the courtroom ?

Because I was trained to be a court reporter.

I understand -- For what kind of hearing – what type of cases were heard?

What were you recording?

Oh, I vaguely remember that because I did it only twice and then I decided that I would prefer to work in the office with the personnel folders.

But I mean were these like servicemen who had come to problems and they were court martialed?

It was court martial, if I remember correctly; it was court martial; yeah, that was the type of thing that I had to do – court martial.

And did you have a tape recorder besides yourself doing the machine?

I didn't do – at that time I did the machine shorthand and then I had to later transcribe, you know, with the tape recorder. Yeah, I did that only twice – but it was quite an experience.

So you spent your entire three years in the military there at Fort Riley, Kansas?

Yeah, I did. I worked in Post Supply before I went to –

In various positions there –

Yeah.

Did you have a regular 9 to 5 job?

Oh, it was probably 8 to 5.

Okay, but did you work weekends or around the clock?

No weekends.

You just worked Monday to Friday.

No weekends, just Monday through Friday.

So you were free on the weekends?

Free, yeah; we had some type of curfew but it was a lot freer than basic training. I will say that when I worked for Post Supply for just a few short months and then I was moved to Personnel Specialist.

So that was basically your position, personnel specialist.

Yes, it was. It's just that they tried me out in Post Supply because I was already trained before I came into the military. I was already trained with – keypunch operator training before I went into the military.

Prior to – so you never were in a combat situation or you never went overseas?

No, I was trained for combat; I was definitely trained for combat because of the era that I was in.

But you never used it –

Right, but I never went into a combat situation. They just mocked it so that actually until the day we had the last meeting, we thought we had been invaded. You didn't even know; they took us to an area that was – they had people there that looked like they had been wounded and everything. Yes, that was really something. After maybe about 15 minutes of going through this area, it looked like it had been a combat area where they had been fighting, and after about 15 minutes or so you realize, this is training!

Right, but it looked pretty realistic.

Like, wait, what's this – 'cuz they made an announcement saying "We have been attacked" by so and so and you really couldn't fake it off too much but then after a while you could tell – you could tell real wounds from fake wounds – but it was part of a training.

All part of your training – oaky – so what was the highest rank that you achieved?

When I ETS'd -- I was an E-5 and they talked to me; they said if I would reenlist that I would immediately be given E-6 because I had a good record with them. But I was young and three years was enough for me.

Right, right. So, how about friendships formed and camaraderie of service.

Did you become friendly with other people you trained with?

I made a couple of lifelong friends and I kept up with one of them – and the rest, after a while, you know.

Did you ever see these friends after you got out of service?

Yes, I did. Two of them.

Personally, I mean, did you go to reunions or anything?

Uh, I went – well, I knew where she lived and when I was in that city I went to visit her. Her name is Helen Pierson from St. Louis.

How did you stay in touch with family and friends when you were in the service? Did you call, since you were in the States.

Well, back then, you know, they didn't have cell phones.

I know – they had regular phones.

Yeah, but, it wasn't all that –

Did you write letters?

I wrote letters – my Mom was the one that saved up – not the vouchers – what do you call those -- anyway my Mom was my banker and I was – bonds – savings bonds – my Mom had them sent to her and right after I joined the military my family moved to a nice home and I thought I wish I was there but as soon as I was qualified to get, you know, a two-week leave, I came home.

Where did they move to?

They moved to just a different place in Chicago – out south.

So you came home on leave, after your basic training?

Yes, yes,

And then you went to Fort Riley, Kansas. Well, that's not too far away so you could come back and forth in three years.

I flew home – military – I flew home for my leaves.

So what were your recreational or off-duty pursuits? What did you do when you weren't working?

A group of us ladies would go shopping. We had volley ball competition and I was on that team.

Sports?

Yeah.

You had regular sports where you would play against other teams?

We'd play against other off-base, I think it was off-base competition.

Just volleyball, no baseball or other sports?

No, just volleyball.

So that was the main one. Did you go into town – Fort Riley?

I think there was a little place, Junction City, on weekends sometimes they would go dancing, yeah.

That's pretty nice.

Didn't do a lot.

When you are finally – when your three years were up and you were finished, how did you return home? Did you fly home?

I flew home.

How was your reception by family and friends?

They were glad that I was coming home; they were happy and so was I.

Had the war escalated any more by that time – did it get worse?

I don't remember –

Johnson was President.

I don't really remember. I think – when I got out of the military things seemed fairly peaceful, actually. But I had a friend that had been previously injured in Vietnam, so –

Did you know them personally?

Yes, I did.

And how did you feel about that?

Uh, matter of fact I had one friend, Jesse Brown, he ended up being in the Veterans Affairs and working under Clinton – President Clinton. But he was wounded very badly in Vietnam. He was a friend of mine.

Did he lose any limbs or anything?

No, but I think it was his left arm was badly wounded.

How did that make you feel?

Oh, he was a good friend so I wasn't happy about that. Actually when I met him he was wounded so – a lot was going on in Vietnam, but here, you know, of course this is the United States and we were in it. A lot got killed.

Right, right. After you left the service did you ever use the GI Bill?

I surely did. Well, I finished my college.

Where did you end up going to college?

I ended up going to college in Omaha, Nebraska.

What's the name of that college?

It's Grace University.

You said you were interested in theology?

Yes. My major – my degree and major was in Christian Education and Missions. It was a religious university.

What did you do? You said you traveled a lot. Did you end up going to other countries and becoming a Missionary?

Actually I went to Quito, Ecuador before I graduated to work with missionaries, see how they function.

Did you like that?

I did. Yeah, I loved that.

How long were you there?

Oh, it was just part of my training. I think about three months. I didn't live there.

So where did you go after that?

Well, that was college. Right after --- I used the GI Bill and I used the military -- I'm trying to think -- when I was in college I was getting something from the VA.

Oh.

You know, you can go to school; you can go to college; you can get your college degree using the veteran benefits.

So you completed three more years probably there.

I did, exactly. I had a few credits but I graduated from there.

From Grace University. And did you -- are you a member today of any veterans' organizations?

Here, at Carillon.

Do you use the VA benefits today?

Uh, they tell me that I'm eligible -- because I did have. When I got out of the military I did have VA benefits but after a year I moved away and I got disconnected; didn't realize that they were sending mail and stuff to my old address and by the time I found out that situation, they was saying you missed your appointment, like that, so that ended. And now, just recently, I'm finding out that -- they can't disconnect someone just because of a missed appointment was not a good thing, so they stopped doing that and they encouraged me to reapply.

So you got reinstated?

I tried to be reinstated but it's been a long time.

Is Bill Cooper helping you?

Yes, he is. Right now just waiting -- I don't know whether to find my military records or to find my VA medical records.

Both. Why don't you get both.

I think they're looking for just VA records.

What kind of medical records did you have?

At that time I was – I had bladder problems and so they gave me a 10% because of that, so now they're checking into it now.

Well, good, good, I'm glad that you're getting back on track.

It's a long time –

Yeah, sure is, and you've traveled around and everything. So you did have contact with fellow veterans over the years, but not recently. You saw Helen Pierson in St. Louis –

Oh, that's been so many years ago.

You haven't seen her recently?

No.

And you're not in touch with any veterans?

The only renewal that I have to do with veterans is, since I've moved to Carillon, I see that they interact – they are concerned about veterans – and that Honor Flight – I'm telling you – that Honor Flight was – I did that article –

Were you on it?

It was over the top.

You took the Honor Flight?

I did.

When was that?

In November of 2025.

Wow, that's great! Did you take off from Midway Airport?

See, I didn't do – that was the first one they did for –

Women only?

No, not for women only – for – not flying –

Oh, how did you go?

We went there; it was like 38 veterans; I was the only female and they were doing it for people that were not able to fly!

Oh!

So I told them –I said, I fly but I have some very serious problems when I fly. And they said we'll try putting you on the, I forget what they call it, on the ground –

Was it a train or a bus? What was it?

One of the ladies here is a volunteer and she went as my attendant (Audrey Mead)

I mean, what did you go in?

Oh, she took me.

In her car?

Yes.

Oh, she drove you individually?

Yes, see, it was held in Wheaton at this Veterans Center –

Oh, at Cantigny?

Yes, Cantigny.

Wait a minute – so you never really went to Washington D.C.?

No, I did not.

You went to a ceremony at Cantigny.

They were trying to do a group that could not fly. They were on vents; they were in wheelchairs; and they were people that could not fly. And there was 38 of them from the area, I guess. And they honored them, and I was part of that.

Wonderful – I didn't know about that at all. So you had a special ceremony at Cantigny for all these veterans?

Yes, all of them.

That's wonderful!

People will tell me you're on Facebook – did you see all those pictures? I said no, I didn't see them. And later on I got a chance – someone sent them to me.

Good, good.

Seem that was something that we – you didn't experience when you first got out of the military. The family was just glad to see you but that Honor Flight thing – they call it Eagles on the Ground" or something like that.

But you could fly now, couldn't you?

I can fly but flying does some terrible things to me; it's very painful – my ears.

So you'd rather not.

I'd rather not because I take high blood pressure medication and I don't push that anymore, so

Well, good, I'm glad you had that experience.

It was such a reception, all day long. It was like a block long – people were lined up on both sides of the sidewalk.

You know, they should advertise that more. I didn't hear anything about that other than what you're telling me. I know about the Honor Flight. I didn't hear anything about Cantigny – what you're talking about.

Right, right. Eagles Landing – that's what they call it. Something new they were trying.

Oh, I see. Okay, Eagles Landing. All right; good to know they have that.

So now, after all this – (Faye handed me a written article about the “Flightless Honor Flight” for veterans who do not fly – very nice article –

It was a reception that some time it would be so nice if people would get it when they first get out of the military and that's what they were about that day. They were letting us know that they appreciated us and it was just –

Project Eagles Landing – is the title. I know Audrey Mead -- how did I miss this article in the December Talk of the Town? Didn't read about it. Very nice – that was the December TOTT. Faye has a nice article in our Talk of the Town monthly newsletter for December about her Flightless Honor Flight.

Faye, how do you think that your military service affected your life?

Well, I think it had more effect than I realized at the time but in later years certain things that I do like -- I guess you're supposed to make your bed every day – and I do. Ever since military I make my bed specifically every day because you got into that habit of being so neat. I got into a habit of good order - good habits. Before that growing up I shared a bed probably with our upbringing and stuff, but in the military it's not just bedmaking, it's a particular way. We had to have those sheets so tight you could bounce a quarter off of it.

Do you think it's a good idea for our young people today to go into the military?

It depends; I think it's a good thing. I think it's a good alternative for young people, actually especially for guys, you know – men have a different type of outlook and responsibility than women in our society and I think it's a good alternative for us, I really do.

I think so too. I agree with you. So any particular life lessons learned from the military?

Life lessons – yeah, and I think it's mostly perseverance. I think mostly perseverance. When you're in the military you can't be coming up with all these excuses about different stuff.

Right.

Where you gotta be; what you gotta do. You do what's expected of you and you keep your commitment because no one made you come in.

Right.

And once you get in the military you do what you were signed up to do and every now and then you hear people say, oh, the military did this, the military did that, you know, they have a negative attitude – but I don't have a negative attitude at all because there were advantages; there were advantages. A lot of time when young people go into the military they don't have certain things – maybe not ready for responsibilities and stuff, and the military gives them an opportunity to not be so irresponsible to live from one day to the next, you know, food, shelter and the like – and in the midst of it though, back when I was in the military, they offered all kinds of training. I had a chance to go to night school; I got college credits while I was in the military, evening classes; it was opportunities, and I took advantage of it

Great opportunities.

I took advantage of it; that's my takeaway from the military.

That's good.

My takeaway – it was three years, good years to be in and it helped me in my education; I went to school on the GI Bill and I bought houses – two times under the GI Bill – so it was a very positive thing in my life; it was.

Well, that's good. I'm glad it worked out for you. Is there anything that you would want to add to your story that we haven't covered in this interview?

Any anecdotes or stories that happened in the service that you would add?

I don't have anything to add.

You were happy that you went into the service – the end result of it all—

I didn't have bad days in the military, because I was young and an answer to what I was looking for at that time. I wanted to venture out; I wanted to meet more people. I wanted to find out what the world had to offer in a different situation; I wanted to travel and that kind of opened up the avenue for me to -- to travel and the more I traveled the more I wanted to, so -- and that was because I went ahead and made that choice.

Right, right.

So I'm really thankful for what I experienced.

Well, thank you for taking the time to share your recollections about your military service; it is really appreciated and thank you for this interview also. I appreciate it personally, so thank you very much, Faye.

You're welcome.

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