

Interview Transcript
October 21, 2006
Military Women's Memorial

Marene Nyberg Allison
Quincy, Massachusetts
1976-1980 | 1980-1986
U.S. Military Academy, Army

00:00:02 Marcy Reborchick

—camera mic, which worked out really well in our test. So, in a small space. Okay, Can you do just a sound check?

00:00:18 Marene Allison

Yes, I can. That's not a problem for me.

00:00:22 Marcy Reborchick

Just say, could you say a few things, please?

00:00:25 Marene Allison

Hi, my name is Marene Allison, and I'm here for the Women's Conference. It's beautiful, Washington, D.C. on a great morning.

00:00:32 Marcy Reborchick

Great, okay.

00:00:40 Marene Allison

And one would ask, why do you drink Starbucks from a straw? Because the lids leak.

00:00:45 Marcy Reborchick

[Laughs] Oh, they do. They do.

00:00:46 Marene Allison

Yes, yes, and I have a beautiful spot on my jacket.

00:00:49 Marcy Reborchick

Oh. All right. So, okay. Let's see.

00:00:57 Marene Allison

Here's my form.

00:00:58 Marcy Reborchick

Oh, terrific. Thank you. And did you —oh, you're from Quincy. Or are you...?

00:01:02 Marene Allison

That's where I, yeah, that's where I was born. Quincy City Hospital.

00:01:06 Marcy Reborchick

Oh, okay. I live, I'm from Hall.

00:01:08 Marene Allison

Oh, okay, all right. I grew up in Halifax, down near Plymouth.

00:01:12 Marcy Reborchick

Oh, okay, great. Okay, so we're kind of almost neighbors [both laugh].

00:01:16 Marene Allison

Yes, Yeah, Hall. And then we played Hall in— It was in the same league as we were, because Silver Lake High School and Hall situate.

00:01:27 Marcy Reborchick

Yeah. I actually went to Notre Dame Academy in Hingham, so I—

00:01:30 Marene Allison

Okay.

00:01:31 Marcy Reborchick

Yeah, and—

00:01:32 Marene Allison

That whole Massachusetts South Shore thing going on.

00:01:35 Marcy Reborchick

[Laughs] Exactly. Okay, so you are no longer— what— how long were you in the Army then?

00:01:41 Marene Allison

For six years.

00:01:42 Marcy Reborchick

Six years, okay. And highest rank of captain. Okay. All right. So I guess I'll just go ahead and start, because I believe we are recording. Yep. Okay. My name is Marcy Reborchick, and I'm interviewing Marene Allison on the 21st of October at the Women's Memorial during the Academy Women's Symposium. Marene Allison is a 1980 graduate of West Point and served in the Army, obtaining the rank of captain. This interview is being recorded for the Women in Military Service for America Memorial Foundation's Oral History Program in collaboration with the Library of Congress Veterans History Project. So, Marene, could you please give me your full name for the record?

00:02:30 Marene Allison

It's Marene Nyberg Allison.

00:02:32 Marcy Reborchick

Okay, and could you spell your last name?

00:02:34 Marene Allison

Allison, A-L-L-I-S-O-N.

00:02:37 Marcy Reborchick

When and where were you born?

00:02:39 Marene Allison

I was born in Quincy, Massachusetts, September 21st, 1958.

00:02:45 Marcy Reborchick

Could you tell me about your parents, so what were your parents' names and what they did for a living?

00:02:51 Marene Allison

My mother is Muriel Nyberg, and she was a registered nurse, she worked for 30 years in the Veterans Administration hospital system. And my father is John Nyberg, and his parents immigrated when he was, just as he was being born, to the United States from Sweden—you can tell by the blonde hair and blue eyes [laughs]—but he was a workman, carpenter.

00:03:21 Marcy Reborchick

Very good, very good. What was it like growing up in Halifax?

00:03:29 Marene Allison

Halifax is on the south shore in Massachusetts. It is typically Massachusetts, it's a highly democratic state, but I happen to be in Margaret Heckler's district, which was a Republican district in Massachusetts. And, you know, it was a place of fair opportunity. Women's roles— people aren't seen as, oh, you're a woman or a man, or you can't do this, or you can't do that. In Massachusetts, it's more on skill and what you can achieve versus sex or national origin, so it was a great place for a young woman to grow up. And I was really active in my high school to include being class president, large amount of activities with 4-H, and animals, and all sorts of things. And so the apple— the world was my apple.

00:04:27 Marcy Reborchick

Very good. How many— could you tell me about your siblings?

00:04:32 Marene Allison

I have one older brother, John, and—everybody in my family, you have to understand, is John. We did the John name real well. And my brother's name is John, we call him Jackie, and he actually— When I was twelve years old, he's six years older than me, his draft number came up in the lottery for Vietnam, and he enlisted into the Navy. And he became a dental technician in the United States Navy and served for, I think it was two or three years.

00:05:03 Marcy Reborchick

Very good. Where and when did you graduate from high school?

00:05:08 Marene Allison

I graduated from Civil Lake Regional High School in Kingston, Massachusetts in 1976.

00:05:15 Marcy Reborchick

And if you could— I know that the Congress passed legislation in 1975 to allow women to enter the academies. And how, it seems— how is it that you came to be in the first class? How did you find out about the academy and what interested you in going? And if you could also talk about the process of getting in.

00:05:36 Marene Allison

It's rather interesting, and I guess I probably ought to tell you the college experience. I was actually looking to go to Wellesley, the all-women's school. And at the time was before the Bakke case [*Regents of the University of California v. Bakke*, from the Supreme Court], and it was okay to have quotas of how many whites or blacks from certain areas of the country could come to a school. So, because I was a white female

from southeastern Massachusetts, they had their quota, so they were full up. I also—and I said, well, I really want to go away to school. I didn't want to go— stay at home. So I also looked at ROTC and how could I go into the Army or the Air Force. My father was in the Air Force, and my uncle had been in the Army, so I was really looking to go into the Air Force. And so, I actually applied to the Air Force Academy. And how I found out about the academies accepting women was the most liberal paper in the world—the Boston Globe—had an article about the academies were opening up for women, and if you wanted to apply, you know, send a letter, call this number, and that's what I did. And so, basically it was a news article. And I started through the process, and at the time, the academy— people from the academy didn't know, kind of, what to do with us and what things are going to be. So I did my physical, and I did my physical fitness test. I did this all for the Air Force Academy, because that was my main objective.

00:07:16

I also was— at the time, you have to do your senator and congressional nominations. So I sent in all my paperwork for the Air Force Academy to Margaret Heckler, and I also sent it to Senator Kennedy. From Senator Kennedy, I got kind of this balled up letter back, probably an intern, just stuffed the letter in there that said I was not, you know— couldn't get a nomination from Senator Kennedy. And Margaret Heckler actually, she had met a— she had an intern in her office who had also interned in my school, and he knew who I was. So, she was looking at the applications one day, and he came and told me this. She was looking at the applications, and mine was on his desk, and he said, “if I was going to send one of these two people as my principal nominee to a military academy, which one?” He goes, “I don't know this one, but I know her,” which was me. And Margaret Heckler decided that instead of going to the Air Force Academy, she would give me her principal nomination to West Point. And I had never been to West Point—and I realized it was the Army, but I didn't know much about West Point, and I showed up on our day never having seen West Point.

00:08:32 Marcy Reborchick

And how many women were in your first class?

00:08:36 Marene Allison

We showed up on July 7th, 1976, with 119 women.

00:08:42 Marcy Reborchick

Out of a class of how many?

00:08:44 Marene Allison

I think at the time we were around 1,200, 1,300 cadets.

00:08:50 Marcy Reborchick

And how many of those women actually graduated?

00:08:53 Marene Allison

63 of us graduating.

00:08:55 Marcy Reborchick

63.

00:08:55 Marene Allison

Four years later.

00:08:58 Marcy Reborchick

Right. I read someplace that the Air Force Academy had sort of a plan for transitioning their women into the academies. They sort of, they positioned the women as the best of the best, as they did the men. But for West Point and the Naval Academy, they just sort of said, well, they'll have to sink or swim, and they'll have to do it on their own. Is this consistent with your experience and how is this consistent with your experience?

00:09:23 Marene Allison

Well, the superintendent at the Military Academy had made this statement right at graduation week of West Point before we came in. So in May 1976, he had told the corps cadets, women would come to West Point over his dead body. Less than 45 days later, we walked across the plain. And most of the cadets didn't know women were there once they had left West Point for the summer. So many of them read it in the Stars and Stripes overseas on their cadet leadership training tours, they read it in the paper if they were down in Fort Benning, Georgia. So, from a change management perspective, we took the absolute worst way. You can do it the right way, the wrong way, the worst way. West Point decided to take the worst way. And basically, the superintendent basically said, well, women aren't going to be here. And then the cadets left. And then when they came back, of course, we were there. It was very evident they had not prepared. Things, simple things like the bathrooms were not done. They had not decided how they were going to do some of the uniforms. They had not properly instructed some of the cadets on how to treat women. So, it was very evident going through it that these people didn't really think we were supposed to be here.

00:10:50 Marcy Reborchick

Well, how did— so the first year when you showed up, what kind of uniform did they cobble together for you?

00:10:57 Marene Allison

Well, they had— well, first of all, we had cadet uniforms, and they were somewhat modified. Now, for the women, what they had done was they took the gray pants with the black stripes, and they put a plastic zipper in it. Okay, so by the time we hadn't even been at the academy 12 hours, and you have to go across the plain and you do your oath of office, about half the women's zippers had already broken by that time. So here we are, 17, 18, 19-year-old women with chain of command men that are 19, 20, 21, and you're in this kind of odd, unique situation. The other thing is the white tops that the cadets are known for, they were men's shirts. So, men don't have breasts like women have breasts. So then, trying to get the uniform to look like a man in the uniform was very difficult for the women, especially with women's figures. One of the other ones, the funniest one, is somebody made the decision that women with the full dress-over white—which is our parade uniform, which is very formal—that women's behinds might be larger than men's, so we'll cut off the tails. Which we took as, well, they didn't ever think we were going to be first classmen, because first classmen, the seniors at the back of the formation, actually would be there, and you'd have a white bum and a full dress coat. That might stand up just a tad bit more than a full dress coat that's going over a woman's figure. So they issued us full dress coats without tails, and then a year or two later, when they realized that this could be a problem because we really weren't going away quite as quickly as they wanted to, so they reissued us new full dress coats. Probably one of the ones that was— the guys didn't know how to do the women's standards, so haircuts. So some of the guys— I had a platoon sergeant that decided that my hair should be short as the guys. And I actually, by August of 1976, had hair less than one inch long all over my head. And the tactical officer had said to me, you know, “Cadet Nyberg, new Cadet Nyberg, don't get another haircut.” It's, yes, sir. And then the platoon sergeant said, “new Cadet Nyberg, go get another haircut.” So I just kept going, getting haircuts till finally they figured it out.

00:13:26 Marcy Reborchick

And you would think that they would follow the standards of the active duty army, perhaps, for women.

00:13:32 Marene Allison

You would think, but they're still having a little issue with that, even today, 30 years later.

00:13:36 Marcy Reborchick

Really? Even today.

00:13:38 Marene Allison

Yes, yes.

00:13:40 Marcy Reborchick

Well, what was your major then at the academy, at West Point?

00:13:42 Marene Allison

We didn't have majors at the time, but my engineering sequence was electrical engineering. And that was a brand new major there, because they were turning into a computer science department. This is way before we even had laptop computers, so. [Laughs] It seems so old now.

00:14:01 Marcy Reborchick

Tell me a little bit about the activities and things that you did at the academy.

00:14:06 Marene Allison

One of the things that I first did while I was there— well, first of all, they wanted me to come to West Point because I played field hockey, and I was on a state championship team, and just enjoyed it. And now, even 30 years later, we're still waiting for that field hockey team to develop, but they do now have a lot more sports now. And of course, there were only 119 of us, and then to try to get sports teams together that first year was very difficult. So, I got into some other areas. I worked in the theater support group for a while, that puts on all the productions at West Point. At the time Ella Fitzgerald and Pink Floyd. So, it was a lot of fun doing that as an additional activity, but I decided I really wanted to get back into some physical activity. So, I went with the swim team, and I actually was a manager on the men's swim team for a while, and worked with— there was one or two women that actually swam. And then I got into a sport called orienteering, which is a military skills sport, and I actually ended up being good at it. Enjoyed it, loved it, got me away from the academy, I could run all I wanted to, and I ended up being the top female U.S. competitor in 1980 at the college level. So it really was something I could get into.

00:15:25 Marcy Reborchick

Yeah, that's orienteers, with a compass, and—

00:15:27 Marene Allison

Orienteers map and a compass, and you find points, and you run through the woods.

00:15:31 Marcy Reborchick

Very good, very good. And that, of course, is a good skill for an Army officer to have.

00:15:35 Marene Allison

It's a pretty good skill for an Army officer, you can't complain about that.

00:15:39 Marcy Reborchick

How about the physical standards? How do they integrate the women into the physical requirements?

00:15:46 Marene Allison

They had different standards from the Army, but they seemed to be less than what they probably needed for women cadets. And you've got to remember, this is way back in 1976, and Title IX had only been four years, so we really— this is the first group of women that had the opportunity to have athletics at schools. And so— But not all schools had really fully implemented right away. Some took a few years to figure out, hey, that means we have to have women's sports programs. So the women, a lot of women were athletic and good at what they did, so the academy was always trying to modify what it should be and what it shouldn't be. And especially our Buckner summer, where it's the field combat training, and they weren't quite sure how women were going to do when we got there.

00:16:47 Marcy Reborchick

So, did they have specific requirements, then, for each summer, for your summer courses that you had to do? Each summer they had some course that you had to complete?

00:16:58 Marene Allison

Yeah, your first summer is your beast summer, and it's just your basic cadet training. And then your second summer is where you learn about the branches, and you have, like, infantry week, and recondo training, and patrolling. And what you've got to understand in 19, in 1977, the idea of women even learning about combat patrolling, and understanding the placement of Howitzers and field artillery pieces, and driving tanks was hugely new for the Army, for the military. It was shocking. Soldiers had never seen a woman on a tank. They had never seen a woman fire an artillery piece. It was perceived that women would never be able to do any of these. They were all men's jobs at the time. And so, there was a certain amount of it where everyone just expected the women to fail. And so if you accomplished it, people were like, how did they do that? There was no expectation of success for the women. And then your third summer, you go on cadet leadership training, you go out to a unit, and you're a lieutenant. And that was much— because they couldn't figure out which branches the women— because at the time, you have to remember, women weren't in all the branches. So, well, West Pointers don't go to medical service and AG units, but can women go to MP units? And so there was this kind of, where could we go, and what could we do. And then your first class summer, you lead out at Camp Buckner or in the beast barracks. You were the leadership.

00:18:41 Marcy Reborchick

So you were, well, because women weren't in combat, I mean, they weren't allowed to go into those combat positions until many years later. So, you were sort of restricted on which area you could go, so which area did you end up taking?

00:18:56 Marene Allison

I ended up going to a military police unit. Yeah, military police. I, actually, for my cadet troop leadership training, I went to the Berlin Brigade. So, I actually got to be at the MP company in Berlin, Germany before the wall fell. So it was phenomenal, I mean historically, it's just great. So it was there with, you know, Checkpoint Charlie and all the espionage and intrigue of Berlin, Germany in 1978, I guess it was, very interesting. Kind of fun, kind of fun.

00:19:28 Marcy Reborchick

Very good, very good. Well, tell me, what— did you have a cadet rank or position, and what did you hold while you were there?

00:19:37 Marene Allison

Oh, I think I get, the highest is cadet lieutenant, and partly it was because I wasn't orienteering all the time. Today, they do it much differently where cadets who are captains of their sports teams, they will hold that captain rank. But at the time, the sports, people involved in sports or activities were kind of left to the side, which was fine for me because I wasn't doing the parades, and I wasn't around the company very much anyway. So for me, if I could just run, and be out in the woods, and do my orienteering, I was very, very happy with that.

00:20:13 Marcy Reborchick

Very good. Tell me, just tell us some of the remembrances of Academy life. What do you remember most about the daily schedule or the activities?

00:20:24 Marene Allison

Never sleeping. Never getting enough sleep. I think I'm still in sleep deficit, either that or from my son, but I still feel like I'm in sleep deficit sometimes from the Academy days. You just jam so much in, and it's almost like you get trained that you can always do more, and you can get more done. And in fact, sitting at the registration desk with another woman from the Coast Guard Academy, she said, I think I'm just a last-minute junkie, and I said, I think we all are, we got trained that way. Because you never have time to fully plan everything out and do everything the way you want. Everything has to be spur of the moment. Finish that paper while you're studying for a math test, while

you're doing a physics lab. So you always learn how to multitask and put more on the plate.

00:21:17 Marcy Reborchick

What was the most difficult thing for you to deal with while you were there?

00:21:23 Marene Allison

It was the fact that the men really didn't want, and probably don't want us there, was the hardest thing. Because I had grown up in Massachusetts, nobody said women shouldn't be there. Nobody said, oh, you shouldn't be class president because you're a woman. I mean, I ran against a man, I beat him, and that was okay. Fair is— you know, all's fair. So they— to come to West Point and to see guys that had gone to high schools with women in it, now all of a sudden saying, well, women shouldn't be here. Why? Well, because there was some tradition in that to see that— to actually be discriminated against for the very first time in my life, and I couldn't understand that. My whole life has been built on ability, and here they were: because you're a woman, you're not able.

00:22:17 Marcy Reborchick

Well, was the leadership at the academy able to come to your aid in any way to sort of offset some of that, the bad feelings of the men cadets?

00:22:27 Marene Allison

There were, but they also faced extreme pressure, and it was okay for the officers to discriminate against women. And Lance Janda in his book, *Stronger Than Custom*, even had documented where the military science department had out and out discriminated. So, if a man wrote a paper and I wrote a paper, exactly the same, word for word, he might get an A and I'd get a C minus.

00:22:58 Marcy Reborchick

What is the experience that you felt, you're most proud of while you were there?

00:23:03 Marene Allison

Most proud of while I was there. I think making the World Orienteering Team, to go— to actually, with everything else that's going on, to make the U.S. Orienteering Team was just, to me, it was just phenomenal. To think of all the things, all the academics, all the things you're required, and then still have enough time and energy—this is why I'm still on a sleep deficit, by the way—but to be able to run enough, to get trained enough to be on the U.S. World Orienteering Team for students. Just unbelievable.

00:23:45 Marcy Reborchick

Do you still run?

00:23:46 Marene Allison

Yes, I still run, not as much as I— I'm now more into the walking. But yes, I still like to work out, I bicycle, I like to be active, and kayak, and do all sorts of fun things.

00:24:01 Marcy Reborchick

What was your guiding thought or personal standard that helped you achieve success at West Point?

00:24:08 Marene Allison

Survival. That was— I am going to survive. I am not going to quit, and I am going to make it through. And that was just, every day you took as only that day, and woke up and said I will make it till tonight, and then I will start again tomorrow. In fact, on graduation day we had, I had kind of like a joke that I was telling my roommate. I said, can you imagine, what if we wake up and we think it's graduation day, but it's our day all over again? And she said, "No, Marene, we're going up there and we're getting our diplomas and we are leaving here!"

00:24:48 Marcy Reborchick

And how did it feel, though? How did it feel to be one of the first graduates or, I mean, well, among the first graduates?

00:24:56 Marene Allison

It was, I don't— You were vindicated. I mean, you were— I did it. Against all odds, against a society that didn't know if it was ready for us, against a culture that didn't want us here, and in a lot of ways still doesn't want us here. I mean, we have people at this event that would love to write an article about us women should not be in the military. And I am just— it made me just confirm that I can do what I want to do, and I can achieve all great things. So it was one of those— it was a gorgeous day, it was a gorgeous June day. And when we realized we made it, we did it, was— but we didn't have time to actually savor that day or that moment because you're so busy trying to get out of there, but we did it. And now when we look back on it, was like, wow, whoa. Wouldn't it have been great? And I have to give General Goodpastor, who was the superintendent at the time, a lot of credit, because he did have a women's reception. And we were afraid then to even, oh, should we go because we're going to be ostracized. Oh, a woman's event? Because we hadn't had women's events. And we actually took a picture on the First Division Barracks steps, which showed up in *Life Magazine*. And one woman, because she didn't want to belong to that woman group,

she didn't show up. And since that time, she said she's sorry for that. But when I look at that picture now, and I look at those women, and it took us almost 20 years to be able to even express that feeling of, oh my God, this was awesome.

00:26:52 Marcy Reborchick

It really is. I mean, and how much time did you have after that day? You had to be back, and you'd have to be in the army. I mean, did you—?

00:27:01 Marene Allison

We had 30 days to leave.

00:27:03 Marcy Reborchick

30 days leave, okay.

00:27:04 Marene Allison

I actually ended up having 60 days leave because I was going to compete in Switzerland for the orienteering. So, but it really was, you leave, and we didn't— even though we knew we had done it, there was no, like, joy of, oh my God, we did it. And my roommate, my best friend, was getting married. So it was about the wedding that weekend, getting married. It was about doing the things, “oh, I'm going to have to go to France to train for the orienteering championships.” So, a lot of it was kind of— the magnitude of the event was completely missed. I think, I know for me—and I think a lot of the women would say the same thing—they just thought, oh my God, this is awesome. Didn't hit until years later. Or at some later date, it was like, well, what did I—? just graduated from West Point. Hey, that's way cool. It took a while to really think about. We were— So many things had happened to us, so much bad vibe about that. And now, there were 63 women lieutenants out there in the Army. And we were, we were still an oddity. Where we thought, just right when we thought, “oh, I'm going to blend in here,” then we stood out again because now here we were, women who completely understood deployment of field artillery, and infantry tactics, and land navigation skills. We were more like male officers coming in. And, so again, you were different. Just when we wanted to be the same, we were different again.

00:28:53 Marcy Reborchick

And tell me, then, about what did you— when you leave, after your leave and you come back, do you just report to a unit at that point, or do you go to any more training?

00:29:05 Marene Allison

We go, everyone at the time went to officer basic training. I think they do some infantry type thing now, or socialization thing down at Fort Benning, and then they go to their

basic course. But at the time, we went right off to Officer Basic, and I went to the military police school down at Fort McClellan, Alabama at the time. So I came back and went right into MP school.

00:29:26 Marcy Reborchick

So how did the officers treat you—or the enlisted, for that matter—how did they treat you, being a West Point graduate, once you made it to your unit?

00:29:35 Marene Allison

Actually, the ROTC guys and girls, they kind of like laughed at us a little bit because we're so used to that rigid environment, and the Army wasn't quite so rigid. And so, they looked at us as a group, but more as individuals, for the first time to be looked at as an individual. And it was—I look at my officer basic courses, it was just a lot of fun, because I could run when I wanted. I had, for the first time, I had my own room. Well, I shared it with somebody, but it was more casual, I could come and go when I wanted to, I had a car outside the barracks. So for us, for me, it was a lot of fun. And I guess it was a lot, a lot of fun because that's where I met my husband. And we— He was down the hall, and my roommate's cousin had come and changed the oil, but he had gotten the wrong filter, so there was oil on the floor. And so my husband felt that he was going to follow the oil trail, which came to my room, and told me that I needed to pick it up. And I handed him a rag and said, if you want to pick up the oil, it's not my oil, you can feel free to pick it up. And he said, "well, you should tell your roommate." And I said, no, you should tell my roommate, because I'm not picking it up. We've now been married 26 years, and have a 20, almost 23-year-old son [laughs].

00:30:57 Marcy Reborchick

Very good.

00:30:59 Marene Allison

He must have liked that or something [both laugh].

00:31:02 Marcy Reborchick

Now, did he stay in the Army, or did you both get out at the same time?

00:31:07 Marene Allison

No. What happened was we were both— Well, he was assigned to Herlong, California, and I was at Fort Hood, Texas, the typical military marriage. And then we finally, we did joint domicile. That's how he asked me to marry him. It was pre-qualification. Was I interested in joint domicile? And I said, well, you have to be married to have joint domicile. And then about six weeks later, he asked me to marry him. And so he asked

me to marry him, and less than 48 hours later, we were married at Fort Hood, Texas. And then he came from Herlong to Fort Hood, and we were— I was in the 2nd Army Division MP Company, and he was in the 1st CAV MP Company. And so, we had kind of dueling companies there. When we were ready for our company commands, the Secretary of Defense at the time decided that they would move women out of those forward maneuver units, and they were going to put women back into the more rare area echelons. So, it was almost impossible for me to get a company command. And then we went to our officer advanced course, and while at the officer advanced course, they, they decided we were going to stay at Fort McClellan because they didn't know what to do, where the women could go, so a training company command. And at the time, at Fort McClellan, our son was only 18 months old, and my husband and I, our data rank is 30 days off. So, on the command list at Fort McClellan, my name would have been first, and then the very next month he would have gotten command, and they were training commands. So we asked if we could hold one of us off the list until the other got through the command, and they said they would take that as a refusal of command. So, since Dick Cheney didn't want us to be in harm's way, my husband and I left and became special agents in the FBI, and carried guns every day for our jobs. So, I left to become a special agent in the FBI.

00:33:08 Marcy Reborchick

Okay. So, after six years, did you— Oh, and I guess within the FBI, you can't really do reserves, I guess.

00:33:13 Marene Allison

At the time you couldn't. Today you can, but at the time you had to give up your full commission. So I had to completely come out and was completely out of the Army.

00:33:23 Marcy Reborchick

Okay, all right.

00:33:24 Marene Allison

So I joined, so we joined the FBI.

00:33:28 Marcy Reborchick

Okay, so do you work, then, in DC as in the FBI?

00:33:32 Marene Allison

No, actually we came in and we were in San Diego, California for four years.

00:33:40 Marcy Reborchick

Well, how do you think that the academy experience, then, affected you long term? Did it set you up with a good work ethic or whatever for—?

00:33:49 Marene Allison

No, I think it gives me a lousy work ethic, I always wait until the last minute. My poor networking panel out there is, you know, oh my God, when are we going to do this? But, oh no, we'll be fine. Yeah, probably lousy that way. But getting things done, wanting to get things done, knowing no matter what it is, no matter how big it is, we can do it. In fact, at my company now, during [Hurricane] Katrina, it's a drug company, and we couldn't get people to help us to bring the drugs down. So, we found a hospital ourselves, and we found trailers, and we dragged trailers from West Virginia to New Orleans to set up an organ— a drug dispensing for the people on the panhandle or the lower delta of New Orleans that didn't have drugs. And so, there was no idea of, "no, you can't do it." And that's probably, that's the, kind of, the good and the bad of it. Sometimes you can get into things that are, "oh my God, why did I do this? Well, I know I can get through it," you know, type thing.

00:34:55 Marcy Reborchick

Very good. So what advice would you give to a young person today, or young woman today?

00:35:01 Marene Allison

The military is an absolutely wonderful experience. It gives you phenomenal opportunities. It also reflects American business in a lot of ways, that especially women coming from the academies and ROTC, you're going to have a lot of the math and science. This is what the military needs. So, if you have those skills and you go into business, you're going to be in predominantly male organizations. And for myself, I was a military police officer, and then I became in the FBI, which isn't—it was, at the time, less than 10% women—which is even now less than what the Army is. And then now I'm head of corporate security for a Fortune 50 company. I am the only woman at that higher rank, and even of the top 500 companies, there's less than 11 women who are heads of security. So typically, women who are in the Army are going to be in typically male-dominated fields, unless you start your own business and you hire only women. So it is a very good experience. The bonding, and the fact that now even the academy women feel like we can talk about the experience and we can bond as a group. You talk about the Yaya sisterhood, we've got it in spades, it's great. And then the networking. If you think between the military and your contacts—and I actually have a guy that I was a second lieutenant with down at Fort Hood, Texas—he is now the head of investigations

of one of my competitor companies, but we had very similar experiences, so even though the companies compete, we actually—

[Part 1 video ends]

00:00:00 Marene Allison

—work together very closely. But it is just an amazing— I know where you're from, I know what you know, and I like you, becomes your first— There's a sense of trust that's created between the people that you served with, men as well as women. So it gives you that kind of leg up.

00:00:20 Marcy Reborchick

Very good, very good. Well, if you had to do it over again, would you do anything differently?

00:00:25 Marene Allison

If I had to do it over. I would have taken the four-year ROTC scholarship to MIT—no. You know, I guess, no. I'm a child of the "whatever happens to you." You know, I could've fought and screamed and said I'm not going because I didn't get the Air Force Academy. But I just went to West Point. My whole life has been kind of an adventure. I didn't have one of those hard, fast plans, I still am not quite sure what I want to be when I grow up. Accomplishment for me has always been around my career, I feel like, and now I'm looking at accomplishment on friends and networking. And it's so good to really have that, and I can't say that I would— there were some bad times, and there were some really really good times, but it's a part of the tapestry of who I am, and I would not change that one thread.

00:01:27 Marcy Reborchick

Your parents must have been very proud of your graduation and Army career. What was their reaction when you finally, when you graduated in 1980?

00:01:38 Marene Allison

Well they were— Well, we weren't a country at war at the time, in fact we were just the opposite, so they were probably pretty relieved that if I chose to go in the military, at least we weren't at war. But they were enormously proud. Two very humble folks, my father met my mother while he was on his military tour in Massachusetts, stayed in Massachusetts, and to actually have a daughter and son that had served in the military, and a daughter to graduate. My mother had been worried the whole time I was there, my father was worried, but to get the notoriety, I mean Margaret Heckler came to our

house for the graduation party. And to be on the front page of the newspaper, for two very humble folk, it was phenomenal for them.

00:02:32 Marcy Reborchick

That's great. Is there— what lasting impression or impact did your time in the military give you?

00:02:41 Marene Allison

Um, my time in the military. You know, when I left I didn't think it was really anything, but I have to say that the military officers, their sense of duty and loyalty, integrity, and their ability to get things done, I mean. Home Depot and CEO [name] is trying to grab people for that. Businesses, there's book after book, military leadership style. Oh, if we could get more military officers in, because they get things done. There's a big sense of you have to collaborate to get the best mode of action, but many times, people are just paralyzed to actually do something, because there could be consequences. And people in the military understand there are consequences every single day. And sometimes there is no good situation, there's only the best one you can get out of this. Whether it's hiring or firing, or a new business unit, or profitability, there are many different things that you have to make decisions on and move on, you can not dwell in the what if. And I think the military is a trainer of I have to move to the other side. If I really dwell on that what if, it could stop me, it will paralyze me in my tracks. Which isn't really good when you're trying to take [unclear].

00:04:15 Marcy Reborchick

Very good. Is there anything else that you'd like to say that I didn't ask?

00:04:21 Marene Allison

I just want to say that it has taken since the very original charter membership to the Memorial, I have never filled out any of the forms, so for the Women's Memorial to finally get me here, and what the Women's Memorial does for women and for the military is just absolutely phenomenal. And I am so happy that Wilma Vaught and the rest of the Memorial are a part of my network. Thank you.

00:04:51 Marcy Reborchick

Thank you very much. That's great.