

Transcription: Sharon Frederick

Today is Wednesday, November 17, 2010. My name is James Crabtree, and this morning I'll be interviewing Major Sharon Frederick. This interview is being conducted by telephone. I'm at the General Land Office Building in Austin, Texas, and Major Frederick is at her home in Harker Heights, Texas. This interview is being conducted in support of the Texas Veterans Land Board Voices of Veterans Oral History Program. Ma'am, thank you very much for taking the time to talk with us today. I guess the first question we always usually start off with is just tell us a little bit about your childhood and your background before you entered the service.

Sharon Frederick: I grew up in Abilene, Texas in west Texas, went to school at Abilene Christian College, started out, which now is Abilene Christian University, married a military member of the Air Force, traveled around for several years and relocated to Austin back in 1986. I've been around the area ever since. I went back to school and finished my Associate from the Community College of the Air Force, Associate in Security Administration, and then went on to complete a Bachelors in Social Psychology, then continued on about four years later, got my Masters in Education and Special Education with an emphasis on minorities. I worked for a while with the Department of Human Services, Child Protective Services, Internal Revenue Service. Then I decided to go back to school again for a PhD in Educational Administration, and worked for Austin Community College. I just traveled around a while and then settled down to my career before I actually joined the military.

So you joined in 1986?

Sharon Frederick: No, let's see, yes, '87. In 1987 in the Air Force Reserve.

Air Force Reserve. What was it that prompted you to join the military?

Sharon Frederick: After traveling around with my husband, I loved the connectedness with the military from the family members to the military members, and it was truly a community within a community, and so even though after my husband and I got divorced and I was no longer a military spouse, I missed it. I missed being around the military and everything that it stood for and the camaraderie, and I knew that I also had to go back to school because I had been a single parent, so I made use of the education benefits and wanted to get back into that military community, so it served me well and I decided to join the Reserves.

So you were in the Reserves during college, I guess, with the idea that once you finished college you would go on active duty?

Sharon Frederick: Well, I never went on active duty. I went back to school with the assistance of the GI Bill. I joined the Air Force Reserves. Then I continued to work. I thought about going active duty, and after my parents talked me out of that because I traveled around with my husband for so long and overseas, and they really just wanted me and my daughter to be home. So I thought OK, well the best of both worlds. I'll join the Reserves. I really won't have to travel too much, and also be able to go back to school because I dropped out when I got married. So I thought it just offered the best, for me, the best opportunity to be a part-time weekend warrior and go to school and work on my educational goals.

Sure, and during that time were you, I know now you are in the Medical Services Corps, is that what you were doing even then initially?

Sharon Frederick: Actually when I joined the Air Force Reserves, I was a security police with Air Base Ground Defense. Unfortunately, I thought I was going into law enforcement, so that was something that my recruiter failed to see the difference between the two.

Sure, I've never heard of a recruiter ever telling somebody the wrong thing.

Sharon Frederick: Oh yeah, so I ended up as the Air Base Ground Defense, and all the heavy weapons, M-60 and all that, and it was quite an experience. I was the only female most of the time, in an all-male unit. Two years after I, let's see, I guess three years after that, after I joined that I went to Desert Storm.

Tell us a little bit about that entire experience. I guess you had a daughter at that point?

Sharon Frederick: Yes, I did.

Tell us about the whole deployment and everything.

Sharon Frederick: Well, it was kind of surreal because everyone else were getting orders and I was hearing from my friends then, oh, you're gonna be next. I was nah, I'm not going anywhere. We're not going anywhere. And then I received a phone call, and after hearing all about the horror stories about what I'm going to do, you're going to die within two minutes because the gear that you had are gas mask, a lot of that, and so you hear all these stories, and it was very, it was not only I was intimidated because number one I was a female, and going over with all these guys at security police, so I really tried to fit in with them because being the only female, just so I could be one of the guys, you know, and not be a wimp and everything, and I thought oh my gosh. Of course my family was devastated and being a single parent, I had to send my daughter to live with my parents in west Texas.

How old was your daughter?

Sharon Frederick: She was about 12.

And how did she handle the whole situation?

Sharon Frederick: Oh, not very well. We had just relocated from Germany three years earlier. I divorced her dad, so she was already going through a lot of transitions, and getting ready to start middle school and had to start at a whole new school and try to make new friends and everything, so that was very, very difficult. And I never thought that I would have to do anything like that.

So your unit was activated basically?

Sharon Frederick: Yes.

How much time did you have between that activation notice and your actual deployment?

Sharon Frederick: Two weeks.

Two weeks. OK, that's a pretty short period of time.

Sharon Frederick: Two weeks.

So tell us, you said you took your daughter to your parents to stay with them for the duration.

Sharon Frederick: Yes.

Then where did you go to next?

Sharon Frederick: Then we shipped out from Austin, and actually at the time I also was raising a two-year-old that was a cousin of mine whose mother was incarcerated, so I also had to take her back to her grandmother as well. So I shipped out of Austin and landed in Saudi. We kind of moved around. They didn't know, have a place for us, so we kind of moved around for a while in Saudi Arabia and then ended up in Dubai.

When you were in Saudi Arabia, were you living in one of those big tent cities?

Sharon Frederick: Yes. We sure were. And not a lot of luxuries like they have now with the Internet and being able to use Instant Messaging and phone calls, and you get letters once every couple of weeks. So very, very, very different.

How long did you spend in Saudi Arabia?

Sharon Frederick: About three weeks before they moved us to Dubai International Airport, and that was, and then we took one other female, security police that joined our unit, so at least there were two females. There were two of us and 45 guys, and we all lived in the same building together.

I'm sure that's got to be difficult just in general, but especially in a combat type situation.

Sharon Frederick: Yes, the females were not regarded very highly in of course the Muslim countries, especially a female in the military who was not a quote unquote secretary.

Sure, yeah, that's unheard of over there. Was there some relief when you moved from Saudi Arabia to Dubai? Did you feel like you were kind of getting a little bit away from potential danger at that point?

Sharon Frederick: Well no, because what I had to do with the security police was not only guard the flight line, but we guarded the refueler tankers, so here we were sitting ducks with all this fuel, and then we also had to do intra control, so checking vehicles. They had a lot of day laborers there from other countries, you know, who was pro or anti, threw bombs under these vehicles and I couldn't pat down male soldiers, but I had to, I mean male Saudi or Arabic, but I had to stand there and guard the soldiers while they were being patted down, or the civilian. So you just lived under a threat every day not knowing what was going to happen.

Sure, especially if you're at that entrance control point, you're the first line defense for the suicide bombers or any of that sort of thing. Of course that happened in Beirut in '83 and so I'm sure that's got to have been a concern for everyone at that time.

Sharon Frederick: Yes.

So you were there, how long did you end up spending in Dubai?

Sharon Frederick: Three and a half months.

Were you there when the actual combat started?

Sharon Frederick: Yes.

Tell us about your memories of that day because I know a lot of people here in the United States, it was the first time they had ever really, it was kind of broadcast live on CNN with, they had their broadcasters there in Baghdad and that sort of thing, and I remember as a kid watching it and it was such a different thing I guess for most people who had never seen something like that live. Tell us what it was like for you being over there close to that.

Sharon Frederick: Well, at one point I think we were, we were all scared to death of course because before that we had security but we were able to go to downtown Dubai, we were able to wear civilian clothing, and we went downtown and of course we didn't want to wear our uniforms, and so it was like OK, well this isn't so bad. Then as soon as the war started, then we were on lock down and we had to, I also had to provide security on the buses, the transports for the soldiers back and forth from various locations in Dubai. And we had to wear jumpsuits over our uniforms and we had our weapons and we guarded the soldiers. Then it was like reality hit. I know there were some soldiers who would count planes when they were coming in and coming back out to make sure they all came back, and it was just a feeling of, to be honest, it was almost like a self fulfilling prophecy of OK, we know if we're here, we're dying, and it's like you accepted that fact. And you know if Saddam gassed us, we're dead. So we're not even going to bother trying to get out, and we had really old gear because we were Reserve. I mean literally we had really old stuff. So it was almost like an accepted fact if anything happened, we knew we weren't going to make it, and that's how we operated.

When he started firing the SCUD missiles, did any of them even come close to Dubai? Do you remember?

Sharon Frederick: No, not that I could remember. I don't remember.

I know that's a bit of a ways from Kuwait. I know that he had fired them. He was occupying Kuwait, but he also had started I guess trying to fire the SCUDs at U.S. forces in Saudi Arabia and that sort of thing. Were you able to follow what was going on? Did you guys have CNN there or any of the live feeds so you could kind of see what was happening when the war started?

Sharon Frederick: No, we did not. I mean I guess our commander did and would brief us on information. We were, one thing interesting before we left Saudi, we were there when the bomb went off in the hotel where the soldiers were staying, and we weren't too far away. I forgot what it was called. I think it started with a B. I don't remember the name of that hotel where the soldiers were killed. So we had what we were told is like we had a little drill and we were just told if something happens, run that direction, and that's it. It was just there's no rally point. I mean literally our commander just stood there and said "run in that direction." So we weren't given too much information and I felt like we were kind of on our own so to speak.

Were there any times when you were doing the entrance control point assignment that you ever felt more nervous than at other points? Any particular incidents stand out?

Sharon Frederick: I did when, because we didn't have much training before that to know really what to look for, so at one point when you have the little mirror thing and something was hanging down, I guess that caused a huge panic because I called it in on that radio because I thought it was something, which it turned out to be nothing, and then all of my comrades they teased me for like two days like calling a national incident. So it was embarrassing, but I tried to play it off like one of the guys, but -

Well, better safe than sorry, too, I would guess.

Sharon Frederick: Yes, absolutely. So to me that made me very nervous, and then I wondered would I know what it was if it was there, or would I miss it because I really didn't know what I was looking for?

So once everything was over and it ended fairly quickly, how long was it at that point before you were able to come back home?

Sharon Frederick: It was about two to three weeks because then we were waiting on flights out, and they just put us on planes and said get back the best way you can. You are in uniform and you have orders. You don't have to pay. Just show them your orders and tell them where you are trying to get back to. So we kind of bounced all around. Wherever the plane stopped, we would just get off and get on another plane and hop-scotched back to the United States.

Did your family know you were coming back? Were you able to let them know?

Sharon Frederick: No, not until I got back to the States was I able to use a phone.

Tell us about getting back and finally seeing your parents and your daughter again.

Sharon Frederick: Oh, that was I mean a feeling that I could say was like your life flashed before your eyes, and you are there but you're not there. It's like you're looking at what was taking place, and just feeling so blessed and appreciative of everything – the trees, the grass, the United States. I mean literally it's like taking nothing for granted, and that's what it was most of.

How was your daughter when she saw you? Was she pretty elated?

Sharon Frederick: Oh yes she was, she kind of acted out while I was gone and my parents had to keep her in line, so she was ready for mom to come back.

Was that reunion at the airport in Abilene?

Sharon Frederick: No, we flew into Austin when Bergstrom was still there, we flew in there and a couple of days later I drove to Abilene.

That's great. So at that point you had gotten back home. What were your next steps then? When was you started working towards getting into the Medical Corps?

Sharon Frederick: Well, when I came back I decided no more security police. That was the first thing. So I crash trained into paralegal, so it was still with the Air Force Reserve and I became a paralegal. I did that for about seven years with the Air Force Reserve. Even though the experience was traumatic because also when we came back, there was no SRP. We went through a little process of paperwork. There was no like there is today counseling, medical SRP. I lost some of my hearing. There was nothing. You even weren't told about the VA as far as none of that. It just wasn't something that we were aware of to get the assistance that we needed, counseling, any of that. So I stayed in the Reserves, paralegal field for seven years, and then the air base closed at Bergstrom and we had to find another unit. So I found another unit in San Antonio, still with the paralegal. At that point I had finished my Bachelors and Masters Degree and ran into someone from the Army Reserve who was recruiting for the Medical Services Corps. At the time I had just enrolled into the doctoral program, so they just made it sound really wonderful like oh my gosh, you are working on your PhD? We have a wonderful program and direct commission. I said oh, I'd worked for the Army overseas as a civilian, so I know a little bit about the Army, and I thought I'm not going through Army basic training. The Air Force was too easy. We went through PT. I didn't have to wear PDUs anymore. I wore dress blues in the Air Force as a paralegal, and I thought I'm not doing pushups and getups and PT and all of that, no way, no how. They said you don't have to do that. You just go to the officer. You are officer basic corps at Fort Sam, and come down and you're Second Lieutenant. So I thought about it, and thought OK, I'll do that. And so I switched over at that time, and joined the Medical Services Corps. In 1998 I was commissioned.

That's great. And now you've risen to the rank of Major.

Sharon Frederick: Yes.

Tell us a little bit about what you've done and what you do in your role in the Medical Services Corps.

Sharon Frederick: On the civilian side it's the equivalent of hospital care administration, but also, I mean not just that, also doing all of the medical planning for Operations, and training and security, ensuring that when soldiers go out on their missions that the medical piece is embedded into their MDNP process, ensuring that the medical component is taken care of from location of hospitals, clinics, to the change point, to combat lifesavers, to medics. So it was having the responsibility for all of the medical clinics for all of operations, in addition to running a medical clinic. I deployed to Kosovo in support of Enduring Freedom in 2005, and I worked at a level 2 hospital as the medical planner, and we also went outside the wire and conducted MED CAPS and VET CAPS and DENT CAPS – little clinics in the villages, medical clinical, and then veterinarian clinics where we immunized their horses, their cattle, worked with the farmers, and then we had dental caps I guess you call it. CAPs, it's like community action programs where we set up and usually worked with the village elders. They acted inside of locations, and then we would set up like a free clinic, and for dental services, maybe the next month we would do medical, the next month veterinarian, and we also would send out the doctors and dentists or medics up into the hills if they identified there were elderly who could not come to the clinic, then we would go to them.

I would think that would be a kind of a rewarding feeling being able to go and help people locally like that.

Sharon Frederick: It was exhilarating. It made you appreciate all of the resources that we have that we could share with someone else so during the **time of ____ [23:53 min into recording]** being away from family again, another deployment, it kind of made it all worthwhile when you go through the things you go through with a separation from family and your support group and your comfort zone when you can see the benefits of why you were there, because they were so thankful and appreciative in Kosovo, and we also volunteered at a local orphanage, and that was just like the highlight of our work when we were able to do that.

So how long ultimately did you spend on that deployment in Kosovo?

Sharon Frederick: We trained for six months -

That's a long time -

Sharon Frederick: Yes, and then 12 months of boots on ground, and we returned and I stayed on active duty for an additional three months doing the medical SRP processes.

So you were almost active duty two years then -

Sharon Frederick: Two years away from my civilian job, yes.

Tell us a little bit, ma'am, how that worked with I know there's the USERRA laws in place and there's groups like Employer Support of the Guard and Reserve, but in your situation being gone from your civilian job for two years, how was that coming back? Did you meet any resistance or that sort of thing?

Sharon Frederick: Well, no, I worked and am still working at Austin Community College, and they were very, very supportive, and I think it made them realize just how much work I did because I was a director and I had about five or six programs and about 45 employees. So when I left, they deeded out all of our responsibilities between like four people. I thought four people had to do the job that I was doing? So yeah. So they were very excited when I came back and resumed some of my duties and responsibilities. Some of them they remained with the people who assumed those duties, and that was OK, my plate was full. But I came back for only two years and then I redeployed again, in my recent deployment to Iraq.

OK, tell us about that deployment.

Sharon Frederick: That deployment, the train up was only a month, and we stayed 10 months boots on ground with about three weeks in Kuwait training, and it was totally different this time because of the circumstances. Again, this was much more stressful. We could go outside the wire let's say in Kosovo because it was, it was considered combat zone, yes, but not -

Yeah, not really.

Sharon Frederick: Exactly. It was a peacekeeping mission, where Iraq was a combat zone. So I felt the same old feelings resurfaced from Desert Storm with heightened alert at all times, because there were breaches in security, there was incoming, I had to travel in convoys and also fly to visit another clinic. I supervised two clinics. I had to deal with soldier issues, suicidal ideations, troubled soldiers. It was very, let's see, the burden was more so there in Iraq because of my responsibilities as an OIC which I was not an OIC, I was a medical planner. In Kosovo, I

was OIC, so the responsibility of a **KILU Shaful [28:15 min. into recording]**, being part of a command staff, and the expectations were very high from my commander, so those were the long 12-hour days, 7 days or 6 days a week, in addition dealing with a lot of young soldiers who were now with the new sustainment for gays and the switch to smaller units and when you are ready to deploy, you build your unit bringing people from other units or across the state of Texas, so they had never worked together as a group. So the first couple of months was just trying to build a team and cohesion, and that's a heavy burden on an OIC. I mean really having to be the one to build up that team to work together and then take care of yourself. So there was not enough time to take care -

Where were you stationed when you were in Iraq?

Sharon Frederick: We were in southern Iraq in **Tolio at Kab Adda [29:45 min. into recording]**, so closer to Kuwait versus the second clinic that I supervised was more I guess eastern Iraq.

Did you ever have a chance to go out with the civilian population in Iraq and do any of the sort of clinics that you had done in Kosovo?

Sharon Frederick: Oh no, no, our mission was totally different. In fact it was stipulated in our Op work there will be no medical, dental, or veterinarian and operations like that. There were schools. We were able to go to schools in the provinces, but aside from that, no, no humanitarian missions whatsoever. Those were left to the PRT teams.

How did your family deal with your deployment to Iraq, especially I guess your daughter would be quite a bit older, but -

Sharon Frederick: Yes, not very well. I think they also because of all of the media, you know, the roadside and IDs and everything that was going on from incoming mortars and so we had threats almost every other day about the potential kidnapping, you know, from the Intel, so which I didn't dare share with them. So even keeping that from family, that was very taxing in and of itself to keep that and to maintain this positive, even if you were depressed or had a lot of anxiety with the heightened alert, you could not share that. So having to keep that bottled up because you also couldn't share your concern with your soldiers because they saw you as the leader as being the one to come to. A lot of putting up barriers that you didn't want your soldiers or your other leadership or your colleagues to know whatever you were going through.

What were the dates that you were in Iraq?

Sharon Frederick: I arrived mid-August 2009, and we left June 14, 2010.

OK, so you were just recently over there then.

Sharon Frederick: Yes.

Did any of your predecessors or anyone tell you anything about where you were had changed if at all since the initial invasion in '03? Had it gotten more peaceful or more quiet where you were than it had been initially or had it been getting worse?

Sharon Frederick: No, it was better and they had really built up a camp. There were not as many mortar rounds going off. They were isolated and in anger because it was time for the election, so when something happened that we could tell that if the insurgents were upset about something, then we would get the mortar rounds, or on other camps that we had soldiers because we had soldiers spread out all over. I was the medical officer or medical planner for our brigade and we were spread out, so maintaining contact with all of the clinics on several COBs and FOBs and with the soldiers there because things were going on, a lot of bombs as well.

Your unit when you were in Iraq, it was all Texas National Guard, is that right?

Sharon Frederick: We were all Texas but we had augmentees from a lot of the states to, they were spillers, but we were a Texas unit.

Was your headquarters or is your headquarters still at Camp Mabry?

Sharon Frederick: No, we relocated a couple of years ago to Temple, no, well yes, the same brigade, 36th ____ Brigade is located out of Temple. The Division is still at Camp Mabry.

Sure, that makes sense.

Sharon Frederick: Our Brigade is in Temple.

So you got back home just this last June. Did you go back to Austin Community College again at that point?

Sharon Frederick: Yeah, I stayed on active until August, August 23rd, and I came back to work a week later, September 1st, and so I'm still adjusting, yes, very much so.

And so now you are back to working your civilian job again and then do you still I guess have drill one weekend a month type of thing?

Sharon Frederick: Yes, I decided to retire in February, so I think with this deployment, it took more out of me a lot, and also because being the medical officer, part of my responsibilities, the bulk of my responsibilities during the pre mode is to ensure that all those with the SRP process, that was very, very, very what should I say, intense, because I mean a unit cannot deploy if you are not at a certain number to make it through the SRP, so that was literally around the clock working from 6:00 or 7:00 in the morning until 9:00, 10:00, midnight, 1:00 or 2:00 getting the records together, keeping track of all 300 soldiers, making sure they get their appointments, facilitating and making sure we have everything. So I worked at the SRP site every single day for 30 days working with those civilian and soldiers who were involved in the incident, the shooting in November. So for me and worked personally with one of the deceased, and the injured, so we were already in Iraq at the time, but it was, I will never be the same.

Sure, no I understand, and that's such an upsetting circumstance that would happen on a base that everybody knows that is supposed to be secure and by one of your own is unbelievable. I can absolutely understand, I would be enraged myself just, I mean I think every American was enraged, but to have known somebody would be even worse.

Sharon Frederick: Right, and to know we left in August and if our mobilization would have been two months later, I would have been right there.

Had you ever had any contact with that guy, with the shooter?

Sharon Frederick: No, I did not and I tell myself OK, happened to come across him, in all and all my years at medical, so we all have the same war life and Army medical is Fort Sam, so for all of our classes, our schools, our conferences, so I'm sure at some point we were in the same place at some point in time because we're all at Fort Sam for operatives and training.

So now that you're getting close, you say you're going to retire in February -

Sharon Frederick: Yes.

Do you think you are going to, looking back, gonna miss some of it?

Sharon Frederick: I will. It's almost like, I mean it's been a part of my life for – February it will be 24 years, and again, that sense of camaraderie and the sense of pride and sense of duty that, I mean I'm already feeling like February I won't be in uniform? I won't have that connection but it's such a small community. You always run into someone that you know, maybe you were stationed with or I will maintain my contact with my friends and everything, and living in a military community you will always be around the military. I don't think I would ever want to relocate somewhere where I was not around a military community. I will maintain that for the rest of my days.

I'm sure. Of course you can also be involved if you're not already with groups like the American Legion or Veterans of Foreign Wars, and stay involved that way, so that's always another way to continue.

Sharon Frederick: Exactly, yes, absolutely.

I think I mentioned before we started the interview that we have archives here at the Land Office that go back to 1700s. We have Stephen F. Austin's original Registro here. We have the land grant that David Crockett's widow received after he was killed at The Alamo, and our goal is to add these interviews into those archives for posterity in the hope that potentially maybe hundreds of years from now, somebody might be listening to these interviews just to learn about what it was like to be in the military 200 years ago. With that in mind is there anything that you would want to say about your service or just anything you'd want to pass on?

Sharon Frederick: Yes, I would say it was first of all the best decision of my life. I have no regrets. To be able to ensure that others have the freedoms that we enjoy, being a part of the military, to include laying your life on the line, to protect and serve is something that I would do again over and over and over and over. I love serving. I love giving. I love being able to provide others with the opportunity for, a chance of life, liberty, and happiness. I would say that it's the best way to honor this country and to play a part in ensuring peace throughout the world, and I am proud and honored to have served.

Yes ma'am, well everybody here at the Land Office from Commissioner Patterson on down is proud of your service, and we want to thank you for your service and sacrifice to our nation, and hopefully this interview is just one very small way of saying thank you, and like I'd mentioned earlier before we started the interview, we're going to send you copies of this interview on CD and we'll also be sending you a nice commemorative binder with a letter and certificate in it as well. It's just kind of a small thing, but it's one of our ways of saying thanks.

Sharon Frederick: Thank you.

Yes ma'am, and then also, and I'll talk to you off line and give you my work email address, but if there's any photographs or documents or anything else you'd want added to our file, you can always email those to us or mail them to us and we can scan them and send them back to you, or that sort of thing. So we try to build a pretty nice file for every veteran that we interview. And if you have any comrades or any other veterans that you know of that are at all interested in being interviewed, please just have them give me a call because we try to interview as many veterans as we can and we basically are just a word of mouth type of thing.

Sharon Frederick: OK.

Well again, thank you very much ma'am for your service and have a great day.

Sharon Frederick: Thank you very much.

[End of recording]