

**Anne Marie DeNisco, nee Cyprus
Veteran**

**Mike Russert
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Interviewers**

**Interviewed 17 May 2007
Buffalo and Erie County Historical Society
Buffalo, New York**

Q: Could you give me your full name, date of birth, and place of birth please?

AD: Anne Marie DeNisco, formerly Cyprus, date of birth 10/28/1964 and Buffalo, NY I was born

Q: What was your educational background prior to joining the service?

AD: High School graduate

Q: Why did you volunteer to go into the Army?

AD: I honestly don't know. I just was, it was, something I did on a whim and plus I wanted to get out of the house.

Q: How did your mom feel about your whim?

AD: Mom wasn't too thrilled, I was scared to death but it all worked out.

Q: Why did you pick the Army rather than another branch?

AD: I don't know. I honestly don't know. Because you heard more the Army than anything else.

Q: Did you just go to the recruiting station?

AD: Yep

Q: Did they come to your school or anything?

AD: Well I was going to try my sister and then they didn't take her so then I was kind of stuck. I had to go because they wouldn't take her and I'm still signed up.

Q: So, you enlisted here in Buffalo?

AD: Yes

Q: Where did you go for your basic?

AD: Fort Dix

Q: How long were you there?

AD: 8 weeks for basic and another 8 for training for my AIT

Q: What was that?

AD: Food Service Specialist

Q: How did you feel about your time at DIX? Was this your first time away from home?

AD: Oh yeah. I was terrified. It was actually quite an eye-opener. First night I stayed there, I don't know, I got woke up to somebody throwing a fire extinguisher in the room and the lights just being clicked down and I was scared to death. I don't think I ate for like three or four days. It was just such a culture shock for me. At home with Mom and Dad to being on your own by yourself being told to go here, there, and everywhere and then you had so many other people around you that were doing the same thing. Everybody was sleep at home and you know, it was kind of nice to, I guess that's how you made your friends. Everybody cogenerated together.

Q: How did you stay in contact with your parents at home?

AD: Wrote letters and made a phone call once a week.

Q: Did you have coed training?

AD: No, no that was before. We would do some things with the guys, well the only time you see the guys, was in the mess hall. To eat or be a KP or something.

Q: Were your drill instructors male or female?

AD: They were both

Q: What did you think of basic?

AD: Basic, you learn a lot, you are constantly on the go. Learning something, just very much a learning experience between learning how to march, fire a weapon. Do road marches, being physical. I don't know, a lot of us just weren't really that physically fit but you sure learn how to be physically fit. And I still am physically fit because I take very, it's important now and I don't mind it.

Q: Have you ever fired a weapon before?

AD: No. But that was a lot of fun to learn that. What else did we, there's just so much to do there. Be on guard duty. Being out in the woods, not showering. A lot of enlightening experiences. Being fired at and crawling under barbed-wire, and getting gasses, and it was all, it was fun.

Q: How did you like about being food services?

AD: When I took my task, there was only a couple choices that were offered to me and I worked in the kitchen all my life, cooked with my mom. I figured that sounds like something interesting. So, I did that. And it was because not only were you just a regular line cook and working at a mess hall, I was able to do culinary arts which broaden your horizon and competed, and took classes and that was really fun. That was a good time

Q: You mentioned here that you were the only female in your unit?

AD: That was a different unit. That's after I got out of active duty.

Q: how many females were in the section with you?

AD: Oh, it was pretty much half and half.

Q: What did you do after your AIT?

AD: Got stationed at Fort Campbell and I was there for, I don't know, a couple of years until my time was up, my contract was up.

Q: So you were with the 101st?

AD: 101st.

Q: Did you go to jump school?

AD: No I did not. There big thing at Fort Campbell is air assault and I saw too many people breaking legs and what not. Just didn't look like fun to me. And it was a lot of infantry on that post too. A lot of crazy guys.

Q: How about just mentioning your experiences there, what you remember?

AD: Fort Campbell, that was my first time, so I get there right out of basic and AIT and go to Fort Campbell and I was just, I knew what to do automatically. Everybody thought I was going to see the CID because I just knew too much and I didn't even know what the CID was. And then they explained to me and I'm like, you know I'm just here to do my thing. There was a girl that was working in the office with the mess sergeant and she knew how to type and she was leaving. So once they found out that I knew how to type, that was it. I was in the office and I admit, it was kind of nice because it was normal like 9 to 5 type shift instead of coming in at the crack of dawn scrambling eggs, you know with toothpicks in your eyes. It was nice, I was doing a lot. I was 19 and I was ordering the food for feeding 200 people. Figuring out menus, running around doing all kinds of administrative things. It was a big change from being, living with mom and dad.

Q: You keep saying that

AD: I enjoyed it

Q: No, I mean not living with mom and dad.

AD: So, being there for that time, I then went to, they did a culinarians contest, and I had no idea what that even was until I asked. So I took a class at a college and the instructor was a former Sergeant Major who had his own catering business and he showed us everything. How to do ice sculptures, how to make things out of melted chocolate. It was just an incredible experience. I have lot of pictures from that. Not really a lot but enough to where *shows pictures*. These are the things I had made and I did very well. I was almost going to compete Army wide but my time was coming up so I got out instead of competing.

Q: How long were you in the regular Army?

AD: I was in for 3 years, which wasn't a lot of time but after seeing what I saw, I just thought it's time to go home and I didn't really want to do it 24-7.

Q: Did you stay at Campbell for the entire time?

AD: Yeah. I didn't go nowhere else. I would have like to have gone other places but it just didn't happen

Q: Now, where were you living? Living on base in barracks?

AD: No, I lived with a couple other people in a trailer off post. I had my sister come and live with me. We actually had a ball. Was both our first time out of the house. Made you grow up fast.

Q: what were some instances that you remember the most that were inspiring, that were amusing?

AD: Just during active duty or during the whole thing?

Q: The whole experience

AD: One of my drill sergeants. All he had to do was look at my face and he knew if I was mad, sad, glad and he would be the first one to tell me to get down and knock out pushups all the time. Because I'd usually be upset, because you learn so much at basic but you didn't get any sleep you were a constant zombie so you'd be nodding off just any time you sat down. We'd be down in our room like cleaning our weapons until like whatever time it was, or shining our boots. I'd always give a face and want to be upset because I was always mad because I was like, I just want to go to bed. But yeah, he was fine, and I do remember him. After I got out there, I went into the reserves, where it was just like one big family. Everybody had a good time. We all knew we were there for a reason and a job we had to do and there were always jokesters. I used to work with this guy and used to always whip out these old rotten teeth and shove them in his mouth and start cracking jokes and everybody would be rolling. That was a good time.

Q: Now where were you for the reserves? Here in Buffalo?

AD: I was in Buffalo for a long time then I went to the Falls and it was actually out of Lodi, New Jersey

Q: When you were in Buffalo, were you out of one of the armories?

AD: No, it was actually a reserve center in north Florist. I went there for like forever is seemed.

Q: What rank were you?

AD: When I got out of the service I was an E-7

Q: With how many years?

AD: 20

Q: So you did get retirement?

AD: Yeah, I retired. I just hit 20 and then it was like around July, I put in my paperwork. They weren't letting anybody get out so I don't know.

Q: Were there rumors about going overseas at all?

AD: Yes. Yeah a lot of rumors about that. A lot of people I didn't know were going over

there because we were a training unit and we were training Iraqi's, that's what they were doing, to take over to become their own Army and take over and do what they had to do.

Q: So you were training Iraqi's over here?

AD: That's what the people that were getting pulled to go overseas, that's what they would be doing

Q: So you went to, probably went active duty to ANCOC(Advanced Noncommissioned Officer Course) and BNCOB(Basic Noncommissioned Officer Course)?

AD: Yes, I did that. Well that was actually for my summer camp, or my annual training, I would go there.

Q: Where did you go for that?

AD: For BNCOB I went to Fort Indiantown Gap. Then for ANCOB I was at Fort Lee. That's where I used to do my summer camp would be at Fort Lee when I became a food service instructor. That was a good place because when you had time off you could to Washington or go to the beach or something. Was a nice spot.

Q: What were some of the things you did as an instructor?

AD: We would teach in the classroom, I mean just basic cooking things like how to boil an egg and how to make a pancake and how to make a salad. It was stuff but you know everybody would always come and see what we're doing and see what kind of freebies they could get. Especially on fried chicken day. But that was where they had the culinary arts school there and became an all branch school instead of just the Army, you'd see the Marines, Air Force, everybody because they started consolidating things after, I don't know what year it was. Where we were, it was very basic but if you went upstairs, that's where they did all of the culinary arts classes. You could see the different things that they were being trained to either compete, because they have the food network now they have competitions between Fort Bragg and Fort Lewis, and Germany and all of these other places. Or you got to cook for a General or someone like that. That was something, I liked doing it but it wasn't to the extent to when I was active duty.

Q: Did you ever prepare for some dignitaries?

AD: No, never did. But it was an interesting experience. And then getting out of there, we had heard rumors, when I was in the reserves, that we were going to get rid of the cooks. So I started scrambling, what am I going to do? I became a supply sergeant. I was a supply sergeant for a long time. And I was supply sergeant for the drill instructors and we would go to Fort Leonard Wood Missouri every year and that was a lot of fun. You'd see the kids get off the bus that were just entering basic training and they were scared to death. They were so scared and they didn't let up on them. But everybody has to go through that. But it was interesting.

Q: How do you feel why the people that we've interviewed that came back from Iraq, they have contracted out to all the contractors like Halliburton and so on to do food prep?

AD: I didn't know they really did that. So they send people from the United States over there just to prepare food?

Q: No, Halliburton has contracted, I believe it was Halliburton, where they bring in basically foreigners to make the food on American bases. For example, one group they were all from Africa and subcontracted. They were preparing American Food but they were having trouble preparing because they didn't know how to prepare American food.

AD: That's terrible. I don't dig that. There's Americans here out of work. Why not hire Americans?

Q: We've heard like whole units would go over and bring a mess section and then find out that they have these civilians doing all the cooking so they use the cooks and mess sergeants in other capacities.

AD: Probably needed them, also being as the Army is so short. That's probably the only reason why they're doing it.

Q: I didn't know if you were aware of that.

AD: No I didn't know that. You know, I thought they were using Iraqi's.

Q: This one unit talked about how they brought in, I forgot what country in Africa, and they were having difficulty because they did not know how to use American foods how to make things American. I guess they were real spicy and there's a lot of spices and so

AD: Now I think a lot of it is kind of bizarre though. Like we have people here that would probably want to do something like that and need work.

Q: When you left service were you able to use a GI bill for college?

AD: Yeah it was called VEAP, Veterans Education Assistance Program. Yeah I did go to college with that. That was worth it because you also got like, they paid for your college and they also gave you a check every month for, living. At least that way it was affordable to do something like that.

Q: What did VEAP stand for?

AD: Veterans Education Assistance Program

Q: Did you stay in contact with anyone that served with you?

AD: You know, I really didn't but a couple years ago I had gone down to Fort Lee to instruct and we were out in the field area because we were going to have to show the trainees how to use the burners and you know, things like that and I saw a girl I was in basic and AIT with and just fell down because of the odds of you ever bumping into somebody like that is pretty slim.

Q: Have you ever thought of contacting anyone?

AD: I don't know how I would get ahold of people. I could try to contact her

Q: How do you think your 20 years in the service had an effect on your life?

AD: Well, it was such like a family atmosphere. I really enjoyed it in that way because everyone looked out for each other, everybody was together all of the time. It affected me to the point that family is very important more so than it probably was when I first

went in and you know, you control your own destiny. If you want to do something just have the mind and will to do it and you do anything you put your mind to

Q: Could you hold this up *hands photo of interviewee*

AD: That was a few years ago when we were out at the rifle range and I was just walking out from firing and somebody snapped that picture. You can tell it's old because I still have a steel pot hanging off me. Those were fun days.

Q: How about these *hands additional photos*

AD: Since I've worked in the mess hall the biggest holiday that we did was Thanksgiving. Oh here's me competing too. I like the culinary arts. In order to have everything look fresh when you competed for culinary arts, you had to work through the night. So I'm like a zombie at this point in time. But the biggest holiday for the mess halls were Thanksgiving so we spent a lot of time doing decorations, making the food look good. What else did we do? Ice sculptures because it was always like the big time we have all kinds of food and people that were stuck there that didn't get to go home, we wanted to make it nice for them. It was a good time.

Q: Thank you for your interview

AD: Oh okay