



PATRICIA E. LEAHY

ONE OF THE FIRST FEMALE MILITARY POLICE

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Despite her background, Patricia Leahy never quite saw herself as a member of the armed forces. But there she was in 1975, patrolling the grounds of a U.S. Army base in Korea as a military police officer with the 503rd Military Police Unit.

Leahy, who was born in Indiana and moved to southwestern Wisconsin as a child, told her story at length to the Wisconsin Veterans Museum in its Oral Histories collection in 2012. She was going to school at the University of Wisconsin-Platteville for criminal justice when she first realized the route her career was about to take.

“One of the professors said, ‘You know, they’re looking for people with experience,’” she said in her oral history interview. “I said, ‘Well how do you get experience?’ He said, ‘Young lady, have you never heard of the military?’ I thought he was crazy.”

One day, on her way to Dubuque, Iowa, she took note of a military recruitment advertisement on the side of the road and called the recruiter a short while later.

“I told him that I was going to college and I needed experience in criminal justice,” Leahy said. “Since the MP (Military Police) Corps just opened up in November of that year, he was pretty interested in me going in with a college degree in criminal justice and going into the MP school.”

Leahy had signed up to be one of the first female military police officers in the U.S. She traveled to Alabama for basic training in September 1973 and then to Georgia for military police training. Out of four platoons in military police training at Fort Gordon, she was one of just eight women. There, she learned many technical skills and marched alongside the men during drills.

“There was no separation (between the men and the women),” she

said about some of the physical training drills. “We didn’t have any particular time that we (had to run) because we didn’t march in parades because our skirts wouldn’t stretch enough for the march with the men. We marched the classes every day, but we were always behind because the men marched faster than we could because we had skirts that could not stretch.”

Leahy said that although she was one of only a few women training to be a military police officer, she never felt that as if she was being looked over or stereotyped by those around her.

“We were treated very well,” she said.

After completing military police training, it was off to Fort Leonard Wood in Missouri, where she was stationed for 16 months. One day, she received a phone call that changed her life for good. The voice on the other end told her that she was about to be sent to Korea. At first, she thought it was a joke. But a few months later, it was off to Korea for a 12-month stint as a military police officer.

“The first thing I remember about Korea, I said, ‘Oh no, I am not staying here a year,’” she said.

Leahy was stationed north of Seoul in Bupyeong on a small post alongside about 100 others. Her duties included security for the Korean Regional Exchange and being put on patrol inside the base. Because she was serving during the Vietnam War era, Leahy was almost always on guard and recalled one time when the base was placed on “red alert.”

Leahy said that just a few weeks before she was set to return back to the U.S., there was a fatal incident near the demilitarized zone. She grabbed her M16 rifle and prepared for the worst.

**We were ready to fight...
They didn’t tell us where to go; they just said that if you hear the 101st Airborne is in the air, we’re at war.”**

Nothing ever came of the ordeal, but Leahy said it was an eye-opening experience. Shortly after, she returned back to the U.S. and landed in Oakland, California. She joined the Army National Guard and re-classed to serve with the 13th Evacuation Hospital Wing for Madison, Wisconsin and served three additional years.

Leahy lives in Charlesburg, Wisconsin with her husband, who served in the Air Force during the Vietnam War. The couple have four children together, three who also have military backgrounds. She said that even though she initially didn’t see herself in the military, she’s glad that she ultimately enlisted. Her only piece of advice to those who are interested, she said, is to join directly out of high school.

“There’s so much opportunity there,” she said. “You don’t know about those different opportunities when you’re an 18-year old or a 22-year old. I never regretted going into the military.”

Leahy’s story is one of more than 2,000 readily available in the Wisconsin Veterans Museum’s Oral History Collection. Interviews contain the personal stories and military experiences of Wisconsin connected Veterans of World War I to the present day. To access the collection, visit <http://bit.ly/WVMOralHistory>.