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BARBARA L. (COUCH) TURNER

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I enlisted in the U.S. Navy in November 1974. Went to Boot Camp in Orlando, Company 3170. My Company Commander was DP2 Jouay Koppari. We were her second company and about three weeks into boot I was given the challenge of being the RCPO (Recruit Company Petty Officer). I joined the Navy under the "Buddy" Program with my friend from High School, Karen Meek. Karen was given the job of MAA. Between the two of us, we kept the company squared away! It was a blast!

We then both received orders to HT-18 at NAS Whiting Field in Milton, FL. Being females we were both assigned to administrative jobs. Neither one of us had been to "A" School prior to our first assignment. So we checked in as undesignated Airman Apprentices. We shared a room in the barracks and were very fortunate to have each other as friends. Karen wanted to fly in the H-1 Huey helicopters that were in HT-18. To make a long story short, I was the one who became one of the first three female Aircrewmen. I received my "Wings of Gold" in February 1976. I couldn't go to Aircrewman school, because that was for men only! So I had to get all of my training on my own time. The squadron even put me on the night shift (3 - 11 PM) so I had to get my training during my off time during the day. I went in at 0700 5 - 6 days a week and trained for my wings, went back to the barracks to take a shower and go back to work at night. I did this for three full months so I could prove to myself that I was made of the right stuff. It paid off. Karen fell in love and got married and left the service after our initial three year hitch. I got orders to Sigonella, Sicily and had to go alone. Being from Kansas, I was, needless to say, a little apprehensive about going half way around the world by myself.

I was only supposed to be in Sicily for 18 months (unaccompanied), but came home to the good old U.S.A three years later, married to a sailor and with a two month old son. My husband, Ben, was already in Sicily when I arrived. He was an ABH1 and worked at the Air Terminal. I was assigned to AIMD. I met him when I first checked in. I had been put in a room with two other girls who led less than pure lives (to say the least). So I had gone to see the barracks officer to get my room changed, when I met Ben. We got married in August 1978 and our first son, John, was born in Naples, Italy in September 1980. I was one of the first females to

get to wear the first maternity uniform. I was selected as the NAF Sigonella Sailor of the Year in 1980.

We were transferred to NAS Chase Field, Beeville, Tx. I went to VT-24 and Ben to NAS. I made AZ2 while in VT-24. I was selected as the VT-24 Sailor of the Year and the Training Air Wing Three Sailor of the Year in 1982. I also gave birth to our second son, Mike, in January 1983. We then received orders to Norfolk. Ben went aboard the USS Guam and I to AIMD. Getting orders together was not easy. We both had to spend many conversations with our respective detailers in order to get orders to the same duty location. Ben was told more than once that I was not issued in his sea bag! I made AZ1 while at AIMD Norfolk and Ben made Chief onboard USS Guam. I gave birth to our third and final son, T.J. in January 1985.

Then we found ourselves back in Europe. This time we went to Naples, Italy. We spent three very hard years there. Ben traveled most of the time and I worked 12 hour days, six days a week (most of the time) at COMFAIRMED. Needless to say, duty in Naples liked to have killed me. It was not easy trying to raise three boys, under the age of 5, while living in a foreign country and having my husband gone more than being at home. But we survived and I made Chief in 1987.

Our next set of orders took us right back to Norfolk. This time I went to VA-42 and Ben to the USS Nassau. The very day I checked into VA-42, the results for a commissioning program called the LDO (Limited Duty Officer) Program that I had applied for came out. My name was number 2 on that list. That meant that I was going to be commissioned and have to change jobs again. I was commissioned an Ensign LDO on October 1, 1990 while Ben was at sea during the Persian Gulf war. Negotiating orders now became even more of a challenge.

Since I could not stay at VA-42, I had to get new orders. I was ordered to HC-6 (Helicopter Combat Support Squadron SIX) at NAS Norfolk. Since this was sea duty, Ben had to try to get shore duty orders somewhere in the same vicinity. He was able to get transferred to NAS Oceana. I finally got to go to sea. My first deployment to the Mediterranean was seven months (day for day) onboard the USS Butte (an ammunition ship). I was the Maintenance Officer for two H-46 Sea Knight helo's. We had six pilots, one Chief and 21 E-6 and below in our Detachment. Four of the enlisted were female and one female pilot. It was amazing! I loved it! (except for the fact that I had to leave my family behind) My husband and I swapped roles in our jobs. Now he was the stay at home dad and I was on a ship. I deployed again on the USS Santa Barbara (also an ammo ship) for a six week jaunt that turned into six months. We left in September of 1992 and came home in February 1993.

Ben did wonderful with the boys and had no major problems, except that two of them came down with Chicken Pox at the same time. He even joined the HC-6 Spouse's Club and was the token male. He had a couple of "meetings" at our house and it was spotless, the boys were well behaved and the wives just raved about all of that. Ben retired in October of 1993 with 25 years in the Navy.

I was transferred to the Naval Aviation Schools Command here in Pensacola, FL in April 1994 and taught Aviation Maintenance Officer school and was subsequently assigned as the Assistant Aviation Survival Director. I was medically retired in November 1996 with 22 years. Our son's are now 15, 17 and 19. We have been married 21 years and live in Milton, FL. Who would have thought back in 1975 when I was stationed at HT-18 here in Milton, that I would be back.

Being married and having children, as you know, is possible. I was very fortunate to have met Ben and we are the luckiest parents in the world to have our three sons. While dealing with all of life's experiences in the Navy was not easy at any time, it can be done. We are just one of the success stories of a military couple.

If I had to do it all over again, I would in a heart beat! I hope you have enjoyed this Profile. Thank you Unit 32 for allowing me to tell my story.

Always Navy, Barb
Northwest Florida WAVES Unit #52
WAVES National Public Relations Chair