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Lea Vivian Walton:  
Oakland Army Base Oral History Project

Interviews conducted by  
Robin Li  
in 2009

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Lea Vivian Walton, "Oakland Army Base Oral History Project" conducted by Robin Li in 2009, Regional Oral History Office, The Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley, 2009.

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Interview 1: January 22, 2009  
Begin Audio File 1

01-00:00:20

Li: This is Robin Li speaking with Lea Walton on January 22, 2009 in Rodeo, California for the Oakland Army Base Project. Just to begin, can you please state your name and when and where you were born?

01-00:00:31

Walton: OK. Lea Vivian Walton, and I was born February 25, 1945 in Las Vegas, New Mexico.

01-00:00:43

Li: OK. So in Las Vegas, New Mexico?

01-00:00:46

Walton: Right.

01-00:00:47

Li: All right. And can you tell me a little bit about your background: what your parents did, what it was like growing up?

01-00:00:54

Walton: I was born and raised in Las Vegas, New Mexico. My father was a rancher. I grew up on a huge ranch, over 200,000 acres. We ran 10,000 head of cattle, and it was like a community with all of the employees and the different cowboys. When I was thirteen, I started cooking for my dad at the ranch house during summer breaks. And cooking entailed three meals a day for about twenty cowboys, and so I learned how to cook in masses. My payment for that summer vacation was one year I'd get a new pair of boots, the next year was a new saddle. So no money exchanged hands. It was a wonderful, wonderful opportunity. We lived thirty miles from the nearest town, so when I was going to school we had another place in town.

01-00:02:10

Li: Where you'd live during the school year?

01-00:02:11

Walton: Yeah. We'd just go to the ranch on the weekends. Then when I was 16, I started barrel racing.

01-00:02:18

Li: Barrel racing?

01-00:02:19

Walton: Rodeoing. I decided that I wanted to be a rodeo queen, and in order to be a rodeo queen you had to participate in a lot of the different events in a rodeo. So I'm sure not going to ride a bronco, and I ended up with the barrel racing where there are three barrels and you really make a circle eight, in effect, and you're going against the clock. So my dad, when I asked him if I could do

this, he said, "Sure." I had my horse, of course, that I had been on for years, and trained him. Then dad gave me a pickup and a trailer and said, "Go at it. You're on your own." Oh my goodness! Rodeos were on the weekends, in the summertime, and they would be twenty, thirty, fifty miles away. I finally talked a little neighbor boy into going with me so I wouldn't be by myself, but it was really fun, and I did win the rodeo queen when I was seventeen. So that's how I grew up. I went to several different colleges. College life wasn't for me. I ended up at a business college in Albuquerque, New Mexico. And then in 1965, I told my family, "I'm going to California." Daddy says, "What are you going to do there?" And I said, "Well, I want to get into the real world, you know?"

01-00:03:57

Li: And that meant not New Mexico? Okay.

01-00:03:59

Walton: Not in cowboy country. And my dad promised me, "If you'll stay and cook for me, I'll give you \$300 a month and a new Mustang." Well, I wanted that 1965 Mustang so bad, but not bad enough to stay. I came to California.

01-00:04:23

Li: So in 1965, you told your father you wanted to come to California?

01-00:04:27

Walton: Right. So in 1965, I packed up my bags. Fortunately, I had some wonderful friends that lived in Stockton, California, and I went to live with them. And I finally got a job, and that was with the Defense Depot in Tracy, and I started there as a GS4, secretary to the Transportation Officer.

01-00:04:53

Li: So was this the first time you had contact with a military organization?

01-00:04:58

Walton: Yeah, absolutely. When I was in business college, I wanted to be a legal secretary. And when I came to Stockton, I put in my application for several lawyers. Well, I just wasn't good enough with my shorthand, frankly. So I thought, well, that isn't going to work. And so I ended up going to work for Sears in their accounting department, while I was waiting to hear from the military. In those days, you took a civilian—it was called a Federal Service Entrance Exam. Anyway, it was a test, and that test determined what grades you would be eligible for, okay? And in my field of business, that's how I got into the secretarial field and working for the Transportation Officer in Tracy.

01-00:06:06

Li: And what did you do for the Transportation Officer?

01-00:06:08

Walton: Okay, I was his secretary. I did all of the timekeeping. In those days, this was in sixty-five, we were just getting kind of involved in Vietnam. And we had a 24/7 workforce, and I did the timecards for 120 people on that 24/7, did all the

travel arrangements for people visiting us as well as our military and civilian managers that went on travel. And just like normal, secretarial duties, you know? I also did all of the secretarial work for four of the branch chiefs that were under my supervisor, the transportation officer.

01-00:07:00

Li: Okay, and how long were you at Tracy for?

01-00:07:02

Walton: Pardon me?

01-00:07:03

Li: How long were you in Tracy?

01-00:07:04

Walton: I was at Tracy from sixty-five to sixty-nine. And my late husband, I had met him about sixty-seven. He was in the transportation as a consultant for the commercial side. And he told me, "You know what? If you really want to get ahead, you need to go to college and get your transportation degree." So lo and behold, there was an opening that became available at Oakland Army Base, in October of sixty-nine, and I went there as a GS7. So I went from my five to my seven. And while I was there, I met the most wonderful person. Her name was Laura Tom, she was our Director for Transportation, and she took me under her wing and she taught me everything from A to Z. I mean, she was a marvelous mentor because she was so highly respected in both the military, the civilians, and the industry, the commercial carrier industry that we relied upon for the transportation services. And it was just amazing and remarkable. I was there, that was at MOTBA, and I was at MOTBA for about four years. And an opening came open for a promotion in the Military Traffic Management Command. That's what we called upstairs. We were both on the second floor, but if you got to go to work for the headquarters, then you were more important, you know?

01-00:08:59

Li: So it was called upstairs even on the same floor?

01-00:09:01

Walton: Right. [laughter] So I took that job as a GS9. I had worked my way from a seven to an eight in MOTBA.

01-00:09:10

Li: So did you ever go back to school then, as your husband suggested?

01-00:09:13

Walton: Yes, I went to night school for five years to get my degree in transportation. I took my—who became my husband, he wasn't at that time—I took his advice. And he and I did my homework. I went to school three nights a week for five years, the problem being that some of the courses aren't always offered, you know, as a night school. But anyway, so we got through it together, and I got my degree. And also, in those days the Interstate Commerce Commission was

the governing body for transportation, and I got my degree with the ICC and my—let's see, what do they call it? I can't remember right now. But I passed the test for the ICC commission so I could become an ICC practitioner if I had wanted to.

01-00:10:16

Li: Okay, so you could have gone into private industry as well?

01-00:10:19

Walton: Right. So from there, I was at MTMC for, let's see, about 1975 until—I kept trying to get my GS11. That was my goal. I had set that goal when I was a GS4, and—

01-00:10:45

Li: What was it about GS11 that seemed like the magic?

01-00:10:47

Walton: I don't know. I guess at Defense Depot Tracy, the GS11's were in the management field, and I just decided I was going to be a leader and not, you know, a follower. And so that was my goal. I kept trying and trying. I got my GS10 at MTMC. I kept applying for GS11's, and of course the competition is very stiff. And keep in mind, I'm not being antichauvist, but in the days that I was in government service, transportation field was a man's world.

01-00:11:31

Li: Right. I would imagine.

01-00:11:32

Walton: There wasn't any women in management. The managers were all men except for my wonderful mentor, Laura Tom. And when we went to meetings and did things, we were one of very few women. The women were in clerical positions, and that's where they stayed. So it was tough competition, but I finally got my GS11 by going back to Defense Depot Tracy

01-00:12:01

Li: Really?

01-00:12:02

Walton: Yeah. And it was very ironic, because I had applied for two jobs, one at Tracy and one in another department at MTMC. And I was selected for both, and I could have stayed at MTMC, and we lived here, the commute would have been a lot better than Tracy, but I was just so determined to let those people know I was better than they expected, so I was going to Tracy.

01-00:12:41

Li: Or that you were in management now instead of—?

01-00:12:43

Walton: Right. So I went back to Tracy I left here every Monday morning about 5:00 a.m., drove to Tracy, and I stayed there until Friday nights. I found a

wonderful friend that had a little mobile home, and I just paid the space rent and stayed there during the week. Because the commute is like seventy miles one way. You can't do that every day. And it worked out okay for two years. And I learned so much in that time. In the position that I had, I was the Chief of Transportation in the Shipping Department and Warehousing. And so any and all problems that came up, you had to solve them on your own. There isn't anybody else around. Of course you have a superior, a colonel, as a director, but we were on a 7/24, and in many cases we, well, there were three branch chiefs: myself and two fellows. And we took turns being on the twenty-four hour call.

01-00:14:00

Li: And the other two were men, I assume, right?

01-00:14:03

Walton: Yes. But we would take turns being on call the twenty-four hours. But since I had to come home every weekend, I told them I would take the Monday through Thursday as twenty-four call, and they wouldn't have to do but every other weekend. And of course they agreed to that, you know? I had more days on call than they did. And it was wonderful. It was an experience to behold. The first time I got a call, it was like twelve o'clock at night and you had to get there right away. Fortunately I only lived a mile from the Depot. So here I am, I'm trying to put some makeup on and some clothes and get over to wherever the crisis was taking place. Well, I managed to do that. But later on, I would get these phone calls. We had hard-toe work boots that we had to wear in the warehouse, and hats that I called helmets. You know, the hardhats? And I'd throw those on and a bathrobe and away I'd go. But it was an experience that was just unbelievable. I learned so much about transportation that helped me in the future as a manager, working with other people.

01-00:15:32

Li: Do you think it made your job challenging, being a woman in that position at that time?

01-00:15:35

Walton: It was terrible. [laughter] It was very, very challenging. One advantage that I had was that I had a boss—when I first left Tracy in sixty-nine and went to MOTBA, my boss that I had had, I was on a swing shift at that time and he told me, "Lea, there's something you have to remember." He said, "Be sure that you earn and gain the respect of your peers and your subordinates," he said, "As well as the head of the departments." He says, "This isn't a popularity contest. They don't have to like you. But if they respect you, you can go as far as you want to." And I just kept that in mind. I tried, of course, to hope everyone liked me. There wasn't going to be that; there's always personalities involved. But I do feel, in the thirty-two years, I gained respect. And I had the advantage of that insight into what respect was. But yeah, there's lots of times in those days with prejudice of women. But I learned that

if you can do your job well—I guess the worst part that I had was I had to work ten times harder to prove myself, you know? If it took seven days a week to do something, I worked that seven days. But if you can prove yourself worthy without any pointing and playing the woman role, then they respect you. Everyone respects you, both women and men.

01-00:17:41

Li: Was it difficult to move up from the GS4 through the GS10, or were those easier moves to make versus going up toward management, GS11 and beyond?

01-00:17:52

Walton: I think it was from a GS4 to a GS10, from sixty-five to about eighty-one, each step at a time, that's how long it took me.

01-00:18:08

Li: Wow. Sixteen years.

01-00:18:10

Walton: Yeah. And then when I got to eleven, I was the eleven for two years. I went back to MTMC, where they had a twelve opening, and I was selected for the twelve. So I was back in my niche. At that time, Laura Tom had moved over from MOTBA to MTMC, and she was again my director. And that's where I learned so much from her in those days. I was a twelve for only a couple of years. When Laura retired, I was selected to be the director, and that was the crowning moment of my life, you know? To be able to succeed her when I was a person that knew her as a GS7, and she had followed my career and given me such wonderful advice all those years. So it was eighty-three that I received the thirteen, and it was ninety-six before I got my fourteen. So I can tell you, it was a long time.

01-00:19:45

Li: Wow. [laughter] That's a long time.

01-00:19:49

Walton: And then eighty-three, okay, I got the thirteen, I became the Director of Transportation and I spent three years. In eighty-six, an opportunity came open at the General Services Administration, and that was in San Francisco. It was a thirteen, so it was just a lateral transfer. But I wanted to see what the civilian world was like, and not dealing with the military like with Department of Defense.

01-00:20:26

Li: Were the GSA offices downtown San Francisco?

01-00:20:29

Walton: Yeah, it was downtown, but now it's in the Federal Building in San Francisco. GSA is the really, when you look at the Code of Federal Regulations, they are the boss of all transportation for all services, whether it's military or civilian. They relinquished that to the Department of Defense way back in the fifties,

and so Department of Defense had their own ways of doing things and their own regulations, again, following the code of regulation. GSA then took over the transportation for all civilian federal agencies: the social security, the IRS, the FAA, all of those. And it was a really exciting time because at GSA, they looked upon their most important role in the government as the public buildings, because they were in charge of all public buildings, and for the automobiles, because they were in charge of the contracts and the leasing for all federal agencies, both DOD and civilian agencies, for all of the cars that our government owned or government-driven cars. So those were their two primaries. Then they took over a large portion of the communications systems. Transportation was in a cellar. They could care less about it. As long as their customers got their goods from point A to point B, they were happy. But there wasn't any attention or new, innovative ideas given to us. My biggest complaint was I didn't have any computers when I first went to GSA.

01-00:22:37

Li: Beginning in 1986 there were no computers?

01-00:22:39

Walton: That was in eighty-six. We had one computer that twenty of us shared, and it was terrible. So this gave me a challenge that I was able to—I could do what I wanted to within the regulations, of course, but I didn't answer to anyone. I mean, I had a boss, of course, the director of the entire Federal Supply Service, and I reported to him and kept him informed of everything. But when it came to dealing with the commercial industry and with fellow government agencies, I did it on a one-on-one basis. I remember the first week I was there and I asked a gentleman that had hired me, and I said, "Bob, I have a letter to write. Who signs this?" He says, "Are you writing it?" I said, "Yes." He said, "You sign it." I couldn't believe this, because in the military you have to go through five different people before—you write the letter—but five different people have to okay it. And so by the time it gets back to you, you don't even recognize the letter. It all has been changed. So that was the most eye-waking event. Oh my gosh! I'm in charge! And I really had a wonderful, let's see, I was there eleven, twelve years, and I had a wonderful rapport with not only my peers but the other government agencies and the commercial industry. The federal government depends on the commercial industry. They don't want to admit it, but if a truck can't move your goods, than nothing happens.

01-00:24:47

Li: Did you find that your degree in transportation was helpful for the kind of work you were doing?

01-00:24:50

Walton: That it was what?

01-00:24:51

Li: That your degree in transportation was helpful for the kind of work you were doing?

01-00:24:54

Walton: Yes. It helped me to get the grades, to move up through the GS grades.

01-00:25:00

Li: Okay, okay. So you were at Oakland Army Base for a stint from 1969 until, what is it?

01-00:25:13

Walton: Seventy-eight.

01-00:25:14

Li: 1978. And then you left, you went back to Tracy. And then returned again to Oakland Army Base in—?

01-00:25:21

Walton: 1980.

01-00:25:22

Li: 1980, okay. And so from sixty-nine to seventy-eight, you know, during the tail end of the Vietnam War, what was it like working on the Oakland Army Base during that time period?

01-00:25:35

Walton: Honey, we were so busy. It was phenomenal. I guess it all started, really, in the early—well, it had been going on since sixty-five, sixty-six. Excuse me, at Defense Depot Tracy we were very busy, you know, the 24/7 shifts, and we were shipping just tons and tons and tons of goods.

01-00:26:03

Li: That was mostly by rail from Tracy

01-00:26:05

Walton: A lot of it was by rail, but a great majority of it was truck. Because you have to truck, you can move it faster—if you're using truck—to a discharge point. Rail was for the heavy, heavy commodities, the canned goods and bulk items. We were designated as one of the depots responsible for moving the emergency supplies overseas by air, and that could be drugs or it could be airplane parts, you know? We had what we called a 999, which meant that an airplane was down and we needed to get a part to it. So you negotiate with the airlines and you make sure that you get everything to where it needs to be.

01-00:27:01

Li: Right, and you'd be using commercial airlines?

01-00:27:04

Walton: Yeah, we did. We had contracts with the major air cargo carriers, and in those days it was like Flying Tiger and—I can't remember some of the others that were so popular in the olden days. We did a lot of shipping by vessels, by ships, APL, Sealand, Matson. We did tons and tons of shipping by them.

01-00:27:39

Li: Is this through the Oakland Army Base or the Defense Depot?

01-00:27:41

Walton: Oakland Army Base. We would load at Defense Depot Tracy onto trucks, and then the trucks would truck them to Oakland, the port of Oakland, and it would go through the army base for the transfer of title, you know, to make sure all the paperwork was there. And they would load them on commercial vessels and take them to the overseas destination.

01-00:28:07

Li: It seems like in that time period, too, commercial shipping was changing so much in terms of containerization and the different kinds of shipping technologies that were being used. How did the Army adjust to that? Was that part of your responsibility to accommodate those changes?

01-00:28:26

Walton: Absolutely. Especially like when we got to, quote, peace time. There were a lot of different avenues that we had, choices of using different transportation modes. But you had to work with, very closely, all of the commercial carriers, for all modes of transportation, being air, land, or sea. We also worked with the military's sea lift command, which had their own ships. But they could only use those if the commercial vessels couldn't accommodate the military needs as part of the code of federal regulations that the military will not supersede or take away from any of the revenue that would be going to the commercial industry. Because it's a domino effect. The commercial industry is supporting all of the other avenues within a public atmosphere. The employment and all of the different stages that they need to do. But I think the most unique thing was that as it became more peacetime, we were more selective of what types of transportation we used. We became more cost-conscious, and we put the dollar to better use by doing more negotiating with both the commercial carriers for all modes of transportation. And so that was a change from the old way. It wasn't that you were just recklessly spending the dollars before, but the emergency tended to overwhelm what you did as far as economics.

01-00:30:39

Li: Right, during the time, during wartime.

01-00:30:41

Walton: Right. And as we came into peacetime, then we negotiated a lot better. We did a better job of spending the transportation dollars. Then we had Desert Storm, and we were right back to the mode we had for Vietnam, only we—in many ways—had better technology of tracking, of course, and dealing with the movement of the goods. But it was a time that was very extraordinary. The thing that I remember the most is that when we went into Desert Storm, what were we there? About two or three days? In the meantime, we had prepared all of these goods to be transported to the Middle East. We had 9,000 containers, ocean containers, full of goods: subsistence, medical supplies,

equipment. And we didn't need it. So there's 9,000 of these containers sitting on docks in the Middle East at different locations, and the commercial vessels, the steamship companies, were trying to get them back to the United States and trying to unload them as quickly as they could. Keep in mind that when you see a container going down the road, you see wheels under it, right? That's called a chassis. Well, when you load that box on a steamship vessel, you leave the chassis here and you just take the box. All of a sudden, we've got 9,000 boxes coming back but we don't have enough chassis. So they're sitting in the ports, like the Port of Oakland, and we can't get rid of them fast enough or unloaded fast enough. So it was a very interesting type of a situation. We finally worked it all out.

01-00:33:03

Li:

What did you do? How did you resolve it?

01-00:33:04

Walton:

Well, we had a lot of help from a lot of different people. One of the ones that I remember the most was a humanities group, and I can't remember the name of it. But they took all of the subsistence, the canned goods—we didn't have any perishables, they were all nonperishable—and they distributed them to all of the needy places that needed them. Okay. Harvest, I think is the name of it, Harvest House. And they were able to disperse it throughout the United States and so it served a good purpose, so nothing went unused, we didn't throw it away. We left a lot of stuff in Vietnam that we had to, you know, heavy equipment and stuff. But we didn't leave anything of major concern in the Middle East.

01-00:34:00

Li:

So to go back, so what kinds of things were going through Oakland Army Base during that Vietnam period when you were there? What kinds of things were being transported?

01-00:34:09

Walton:

What kind of what?

01-00:34:10

Li:

What kinds of items were being transported during that time period?

01-00:34:12

Walton:

Anything and everything. [laughter] By container, by either ocean or land transportation, it was all the subsistence, the medical supplies, that were nonperishable. Tanks, all of the heavy equipment. We loaded lots and lots of heavy equipment out of Travis Air Force Base on the big C5s that could probably accommodate—I don't remember the term, whether it was a battalion or what—but a whole unit, you know, a fighting unit, to include the personnel as well as the equipment that was required. And tons and tons of nonperishable subsistence. Canned goods and dried food and those horrible meals that there are, MREs or something that they call them.

01-00:35:17

Li: And were you in charge of also the transportation for the soldiers that were coming in and out of the base as well?

01-00:35:23

Walton: Yes. We had inbound and outbound. Now, at the Oakland Army Base during the Vietnam situation, the transportation unit that I was with was only with the freight; in other words, just the items that had to be shipped. We had what we called a unit that was in charge of the personal vehicles for the young soldiers in the military, the officers and everything, shipping their automobiles overseas, and their baggage. We did ship a whole lot of the baggage that we called the small items, the duffle bags and things that were beyond carrying. Say if a soldier had two duffle bags, he'd carry one and we'd ship the other one.

01-00:36:15

Li: So what was an average day like for you, then? I guess maybe in this first period that you were on the base, from sixty-nine to seventy-eight, what were your duties? What would an average day contain for you?

01-00:36:31

Walton: I was at Defense Depot Tracy from 1965 to 1969, Oakland Army Base from 1969 to 1978 and again from 1978 to 1986.

01-00:36:38

Li: Okay, I guess between sixty-nine and seventy eight you were?

01-00:36:44

Walton: I was at the Oakland Army Base.

01-00:36:45

Li: The Oakland Army Base, okay. So during that period, during those nine years, what kinds of work were you doing?

01-00:36:52

Walton: Okay, it was all transportation. I was a freight rate specialist, which means that you select a commercial carrier based on the published rates that they have, their published costs, in layman's language. You designate those carriers to prepare bills of lading. I worked at what we called the truck desk for a long time. Each driver of a commercial truck would come in and get his paperwork. He would go down and he would load from the warehouse, and then he would return and he'd have to then sign the paperwork for what he received. We would match up his paperwork to ensure that he had all the items he was supposed to have, and then he would sign the final bill of lading and he would be on his way. That got very hairy sometimes, especially late in the afternoon where the truck drivers all merged on you at one time, you know, and you were trying to get everyone out of there as quickly as possible so you could go home, too. But we did those kinds of things. Then when I went over to the Military Traffic Management Command, I went to a unit that was in transportation, where we were auditors. We audited both the

Department of Defense agencies, all the military bases, to ensure that they were using the best transportation at the lowest cost.

01-00:38:31

Li: Okay, is this what you were describing earlier, the increased interest in making savvy economic choices about?

01-00:38:36

Walton: Right. And then we also monitored, we had two divisions within that department, and one division was the one that selected the carriers for transportation services, gave the information to the military bases. And so we audited their choices to ensure that they were the most correct—as technicians, you know, you're in a hurry or you don't see just all of the different ramifications that you can apply to a particular origin and destination. So that's when we would go in and audit their daily work to ensure that the government's money was being used at the best price.

01-00:39:26

Li: Right. Were there many other women auditors at that time?

01-00:39:28

Walton: Auditors?

01-00:39:29

Li: Yeah, that were women?

01-00:39:30

Walton: No, I was the only woman among the auditors workforce of six in our department. We were the first-line auditor. Then we sent our findings to an auditor which is the General Accounting Office, the GAO, in Washington, D.C. We would send them our findings, and then they in turn would audit to ensure our findings were correct. But they also audited everything, mostly anything that was less than 10,000 pounds, then they audited all of those bills, of lading . And so we had the two services that were watching over, and of course the GAO does a lot of other auditing, not just for transportation but to ensure that the funds are spent, the government's money, we the people's money, is spent properly.

01-00:40:22

Li: So did you feel like you were working more for the U.S. government or more for the U.S. military, or both?

01-00:40:30

Walton: When I was with Department of Defense, I was working for the military, and for all of the civilians who were a part of the Department of Defense, which takes in the Army, the Air Force, the Navy, the Marine Corps, and in wartime the Coast Guard. In peacetime, GSA has the responsibility of the Coast Guard for transportation services. But I felt that I was totally immersed in working for the good of the Department of Defense, and they, when I went to GSA, it was the same thing. There, my picture was a lot different because I had more

agencies. There are more civilian agencies than there are military, and so I had that responsibility of ensuring that they were receiving—because it was their allocated moneys that they were spending on their transportation services—so we had to make sure that we were giving them the best information. We did a lot of negotiations for them, on their behalf, so that they would get the lowest cost. The thing that I was most proud of was with the U.S. Coast Guard. I took them over [clears throat]. Excuse me. When I first went to GSA, in helping them ship their goods to Alaska and Hawaii. Now for the Coast Guard, there is a lot of installations that they're responsible for in Alaska and Hawaii. And that means ocean transportation, and once it reaches the islands or Alaska there's a lot of inland, by road transportation, and airlift, et cetera. But for five years, I was able to negotiate their transportation costs for the U.S. Coast Guard as the total. We saved a \$1 million for five years, each year. That's what gave me that Meritorious Award from the Coast Guard when I retired, because they had realized the \$5 million savings of five years for their transportation services. And more importantly, they were getting the service that they needed, you know? We always say the government uses the cheapest. The heck with the service. But that is not really our goal, and it's not in the regulations. The regulations are that you will select the carrier that can provide the service at the lowest cost. So service was number one. So in working, you just work for everybody.

01-00:43:31

Li:

Yeah. Did that feel patriotic then, even though it was a civilian, you know, not in time of war, but to do that kind of work, to help save money for the Coast Guard?

01-00:43:39

Walton:

Was that what?

01-00:43:40

Li:

Did it feel patriotic to you?

01-00:43:41

Walton:

Of course! Of course. We felt very patriotic, especially in the Mideast, in Desert Storm. You know? We had been kind of complacent from the Vietnam to that time, and we all became very patriotic. I can remember when I was at Tracy and we had a catastrophe with deploying the military and goods. I can't remember exactly what it was now, but we had a group of people that were protesting and they were standing outside of our gates, you know, at the Defense Depot Tracy at quarters. And we just all felt so used, you know? we thought, heck, we're working seven days a week, twenty-four hours a day, and some of our shifts were going from ten to twelve hours, and nonstop. But we were doing it because yes, we were patriotic. We wanted to make sure that our military had the goods we were responsible for getting to them. And then in the Vietnam times and all the riots or all of the protests that we had in the Bay Area and I was at Oakland Army Base, you just feel like you want to go out and shake them, you know? [laughter] I felt more betrayed. How could you

not support your soldiers who are dying for you? Now we've had the same thing—not as bad, fortunately—with Iraq and Afghanistan. But the people who, I think, that don't understand it, see it only as a political rage, they're just missing out on so much knowledge and good feelings.

01-00:46:00

Li: Do you remember protests going on during the Vietnam era near the Oakland Army Base, when you would go to work?

01-00:36:05

Walton: Yes, we had all kinds of protests. We'd have to go in a back gate and wander around to different areas to get into the main parking area. And bomb scares, we had bomb threats all the time. We were on alert, it seemed like, every other day. We had some idiot calling in and threatening a bomb, and immediately we all evacuated the building because you don't want to take any chances. Fortunately, none of them were true. But yeah, it was a very distressing era and time.

01-00:46:55

Li: Yeah, yeah. Well it seems like especially you must have been so busy just with the work. And then to have these disruptions happening in your work day.

01-00:47:04

Walton: Yes, yes. It's just really, I can't explain it. It's very distressing. And after a while, you have an anger against those people who are protesting. Yes, we all have the right, you know, for free speech and protest. But the disruptive-ness is what irritates.

01-00:47:36

Li: Yeah. For the soldiers who were on base, did you see them being affected by the protest as well in terms of morale or—?

01-00:47:44

Walton: No, not really. I think that most civilian employees or anyone who works for the government or the military, they're doing it because they want to and they're not, you know, they don't feel a let down. Except for an anger that, "Hey, you are interrupting us."

01-00:48:13

Li: Yeah. Well, I know that I've spoken with some other people who've said that a lot of the deceased soldiers were coming through Oakland Army Base as well. That must have been difficult, to be witnessing the sacrifice people were making for the war, and then also have the protesters there.

01-00:48:32

Walton: Yes, it was. It was, very much. I wasn't involved in the movement of the passengers or what we called the passenger traffic. Our Passenger Management was in another department so I didn't really deal with the individual soldiers. Helen Fleck can tell you, or did she tell you, some of her

experiences because she was more in the area of seeing to the soldiers' welfare.

01-00:49:10

Li: Right. So then the second era that you were at the army base, you went back there in 1983, is that right?

01-00:49:18

Walton: In 1980.

01-00:48:19

Li: In seventy-eight. Well, you went to Tracy?

01-00:49:21

Walton: I was at Tracy from 1965 to 1969 the first time and from 1978 to 1980 the second time.

01-00:49:24

Li: Okay, seventy-eight, the army base.

01-00:49:27

Walton: Can we take a break?

01-00:49:28

Li: Yeah, sure.

(break in audio)

01-00:49:31

Li: Okay, so when you returned to the Oakland Army Base in?

01-00:49:35

Walton: 1980.

01-00:49:36

Li: In 1980. What was your position at that time?

01-00:49:39

Walton: I came back as the Chief of the Carrier Services Branch, and that was a GS12.

01-00:49:47

Li: Okay. And were there any other women who were GS12s at the base at the time?

01-00:49:54

Walton: I'm trying to think. I think we had some, maybe one, in International Traffic. We were in the Inland Traffic, which was dealing with more the land transportation, including ocean and air. International was responsible for the major contracts with the ocean steamship companies. They negotiated the rates; we just used the carriers or the steamship companies that they had negotiated for. And as I remember, there was one 12 at that time.

01-00:50:41

Li: Did you see yourself at the time as a trailblazer? I mean, the feminist movement was going on and there was so much—did you see yourself as part of that moment?

01-00:50:55

Walton: In the movement of?

01-00:50:56

Li: You know, the women's movement and—

01-00:50:57

Walton: Women's?

01-00:50:59

Li: Yeah.

01-00:51:00

Walton: No. [laughter] To be perfectly honest with you, I didn't want to be a feminist. My goals were to be the best I could in what I was doing, irrespective [clears throat], excuse me, of whether I was a female or not. I didn't want any special treatment, I didn't. To me, I saw the feminist movement as out there beating the drum and, you know, "We need this, you've got to give us this!" And I wouldn't follow that. [coughs]

01-00:51:49

Li: I mean, it must have been an interesting time though, because I'm sure that people probably look at your career accomplishments and want to place you in that movement, you know?

01-00:51:57

Walton: Yes, yes. Several times. [laughter]

01-00:52:02

Li: So have you had to sort of challenge that?

01-00:52:04

Walton: Yes, I challenged it very much; in fact, one day that comes to mind. It was, goodness, in the middle-nineties, and I was at GSA and we had a big, huge, what they called town-hall meetings where, I don't know, all of their dignitaries and heads of staff would come in from Washington D.C., gather all the employees together, and give them a preaching. You know? A pep talk. And at one of these conferences, my director introduced me to a director that was really his boss from Washington D.C. and he said, "Mr. so and so, I want you to meet Lea Duval." And the guy looks at me and he says, "You're Lea?" And I said, "Yes sir." He said, "I've heard so much about you. I thought you were a man." And I was flabbergasted. How dare you. I spell my name L-E-A. You think a man's going to, spell his name that way? And I was insulted, okay? So just before the meeting, myself and one of my associates were sitting at the head table. We had to be there to answer questions that the

directors couldn't answer. And I told, I whispered in Delia's ear what this, jerk is what I called him, had thought that I was a man when heard the name Lea. And Delia—she was such a wonderful girl—she looks at me and she said, "Well, Lea, that's because you're the only one here with balls."  
 [laughter] You know, the rest of them are all pussy-footing around. I was known for my very soft-spoken voice, never got upset, never went into anger fits. But if I had a conviction. If I thought that we should be doing something one way and I had peers or superiors that wanted to do it another way, I was the first to stand up and would argue and get myself in trouble. You know? But it always turned out that they would accept either part of what I was saying or they'd accept all of it. But everyone thought I was just a soft-spoken, easy-going person that they could just do what they wanted to. And I know one of my employees once was asked at a meeting that he was attending, and there were some commercial carriers there who were giving a presentation. At the break time, they asked Paul, "Paul, does Lea ever get mad? Do you ever hear her raise her voice?" He said, "No. I've known Lea for ten years. She just carries a velvet whip." [laughter] So that was the gist of it. I just feel very fortunate that I was trained in that mode, because I felt that I had the respect of everyone. Whether they liked me or not, they respected me and my ideas and the work that I was doing.

01-00:56:08

Li: But it seems that that composure would be admired by people with a military background, that discipline.

01-00:56:18

Walton: Yes, they admired that very well. The only trouble is that if you try and oppose them, then you're in big trouble. You know? You don't say no to a general.

01-00:56:31

Li: Even if he's wrong? [laughter]

01-00:56:34

Walton: Whether he's right or wrong. My approach was to say that, "Okay, we can do it this way and these are the consequences. Or we can do it this way and these are the consequences." So give them a choice. And if they think it's their decision, you can get them. If you go in bullheaded and say, "It's got to be this way or none," you're not going to get any cooperation.

01-00:57:08

Li: You know, I'm going to just stop this tape and start—

[End Audio File 1]

Begin Audio File 2

02-00:00:16

Li: Okay, this is Robin Li speaking with Lea Walton on January 22, 2009 in Rodeo, California for the Oakland Army Base Oral History Project. So I wanted to ask you, so what degrees did you hold? You got your bachelor's in transportation?

02-00:00:36

Walton: No, I had business administration. And I guess the transportation was an associate degree.

02-00:00:51

Li: And did most people who had a GS14, was that standard that you would have a graduate degree?

02-00:00:57

Walton: Most of it was standard that you had a graduate degree. I just snuck in.  
[laughter]

02-00:01:08

Li: For your average work week when you were at Oakland Army Base, were you working overtime a lot? Did you—?

02-00:01:15

Walton: Yes. During the Vietnam conflict, at both Tracy and at Oakland Army Base, when I was at MOTBA, there were hours—our normal work day was about ten hours, six days a week.

02-00:01:35

Li: And did you get paid overtime?

02-00:01:06

Walton: We got paid overtime if not a manager. As a manager, I worked, let's see, almost every Saturday. And I was at the office nine or ten hours. I didn't get overtime pay. Managers don't get overtime pay. All we get is what we call comp pay or comp time, where you can take off an hour or two, you know, as you accrue the hours. But it was just something that had to be done. It wasn't a matter of being heroic and working all of those long hours. It was more that the job had to be done so we just did it, and that's—

02-00:02:27

Li: And your husband was understanding about that?

02-00:02:31

Walton: Yes, yes. Very much. My late husband—see, I met Gary in 1999, after I had retired. And my husband had died in ninety-seven. He and I were together thirty years, and he watched me grow up from a GS4 to a 14 and supported me in every, every way.

02-00:02:58

Li: It seems like it would require a strong spouse to be able to have a career like that.

02-00:03:02

Walton:

Yeah. In fact he's the one that pushed me in the beginning to get my education in transportation and to also apply myself for promotions. And he, being in transportation on the commercial side, it helped a great deal because I could talk to him and give him my problems. He was my sounding board if I needed some additional assistance or anything.

02-00:03:38

Li:

It sounds like in your job you had to do a lot of movement between civilian and military people. You were working with both sides. Was that difficult, to shift back and forth?

02-00:03:49

Walton:

Not really, no. You find the majority of the military that you're dealing with, especially if it's like, the non-com officers, the sergeants and the people who are actually doing the grunt work. They're very accommodating. They're eager to learn, number one. I did a lot of teaching when I went to GSA. GSA had a training program where they would give transportation classes to both military and civilian agencies. And we did this in a five-day course. I got selected as an instructor—I loved it, I think I always wanted to be a schoolteacher and didn't know it—but I would go out to all over the United States and Hawaii, I did a lot of teaching to both military and civilian agencies. And they were so eager to learn. They were like sponges. They want to know, and you make it fun. You are with them for five days, so you have an opportunity to find out what they need—I would design my program. We had a standard program, but I would do research to find out what kind of products or items that they were shipping, and I would design it around whatever they needed. I would streamline it to that effect. So they really, really enjoyed it. That's what I had planned to do after I retired in ninety-seven. I was going to be a contractor and do teaching. And my late husband was very ill and unfortunately he died six months after I retired. So I just kind of sat down and became an old grandma, you know? I just gave up my ambitions, and then three years later I met Gary, and a new life.

02-00:06:13

Li:

New chapter in life. Can I ask you about life on the base? Did you spend any leisure time at the Oakland Army Base?

02-00:06:25

Walton:

No, I didn't. Except I participated in the annual golf tournament.

02-00:06:32

Li:

Really?

02-00:06:33

Walton:

Yeah. My late husband was an avid, avid golfer, and I played golf with him. And so we would go and it was the Army-Air Force Exchange, where they do a benefit. All of the proceeds go to the Army and the Air Force, usually the dependents. But we would get on a bus at the Oakland Army base and we'd

go down to Fort Ord. And it was just wonderful. You'd have the whole day of playing golf, and then a beautiful dinner at the Fort Ord Facilities, which are just astounding, especially their officers' club that looks out on the Pacific Ocean. So I participated in that every year. We went to a lot of functions at Fort Mason that the Army Base sponsored, and we always had our hail for new employees and farewell for old employees in the military. So those were really the only two activities that I participated in. I didn't enjoy the bowling alley or other activities.

02-00:07:53

Li:

Right, right. Because there was a bar and things like that on the base, but you didn't, yeah. Was that an issue of rank in some ways, that you would—you know, were you associated with a higher level of military as well because of the positions that you held, even as a civilian employee? So you wouldn't necessarily socialize as much with people at a lower rank? No?

02-00:08:21

Walton:

No. I see what you're asking. I had the fortunate opportunity to enjoy both upper and the lower. I always thought of my employees as associates. If they were a GS4 secretary or one of my GS11 or 12 technicians, we were just a family. I did this family thing that every birthday when I was at the Oakland Army Base—I think my staff was about thirty, thirty-five—and so every month we had a birthday day and I baked a cake, and we had those people whose birthday was that month. And then when I went to GSA, I had a smaller group. There were only about twenty of us, so I would do it individually for each person on their birthday. I'd bake a homemade cake and bring it into the office. And that just became something that, these were my children is the way I felt about it, and after being there for twelve years and when I retired, it was so important to me that my successor would be the same, that that person would treat these as humans that were—they're not just workers. You get involved in their personal lives or you're part of their weddings or baby showers or whatever. And I was very fortunate when I retired. We were able to recruit two months before I retired, and I was on the recruiting panel. There were five of us. Four men and me. And we interviewed all of the eligible candidates, and the one that stood out the most was a woman. I had known her through her work at the Oakland Army Base. I had known her through some of the courses that I had taught and some of the seminars. We did big conferences and seminars all the time. And I was impressed with her background, and everybody else was too. The men on the panel were really impressed. And so I was so fortunate that Sharon was selected, and she just followed through. It's still the family, you know? And she came to work two months while I was still there. We had two months for a transition, which is very, very unusual. When I took the job at GSA, the guy had been gone for about six months. So I walked in, you know—cold.

02-00:11:25

Li:

You had to figure it all out, yeah.

02-00:11:28

Walton:

But I had a wonderful staff, and they just accepted me with open arms. I didn't know any of them, but we became good friends and everything. And that's another. I think that's what you have to do in a job. You know, you can't just—I don't know how people can just walk in and sit down at their desk, do their job, and walk back out. You know, without having some kind of a rapport. The supervisor at Tracy when I was very young had told me that I had to earn the respect. He said, "Always remember. Work hard but play hard." And he was a philosopher in that. We would have huge tasks to do within a very short amount of time, and we would work for the first two or three hours, at first, just ninety miles an hour. When we got all that done, got it down to the computer room and all of the things were done, then we'd just sit back and we'd have a nice lunch. Maybe we'd take an hour for lunch instead of the thirty minutes. But that was his philosophy. That you have to treat your employees like people and family. And I was very fortunate being able to do that.

02-00:12:55

Li:

So did you enjoy working at the Army Base? Do you find the atmosphere there to be as family like in that same way as you found at GSA?

02-00:13:08

Walton:

Yes, yeah, I think so. It's tough now that we don't have any military around.

02-00:13:19

Li:

The Bay Area's really changed, hasn't it?

02-00:13:21

Walton:

Yeah. Travis, I guess, is the only thing that's left. And I haven't been up there in years.

02-00:13:36

Li:

Is there anything else you'd like to add about your time at the base that you want to talk about?

02-00:13:43

Walton:

No. Except it was a great time. It was a great experience to be at the Oakland Army Base, and I guess especially during the Vietnam era because you felt like you were doing something for your country. Of course I was a twenty-year-old naïve person by then, but you still felt good about it. I felt good at Tracy. When I went to work there as a secretary, I'd get all my chores done like by noon and I'd go ask one of the other supervisors, what could I do for them? And I learned transportation from the bottom up by volunteering. You know, just if they needed overtime, I would work overtime. And I did that my whole career. As a result, I was very, very fortunate and I was honored in so many ways. At my retirement, there were 200 people. They came from Washington D.C., all the way from Seattle, across the United States. It was just so thrilling. It was just wonderful to be recognized of having done something to make—if it's only a small portion of the transportation world or

the buying power of the services for what our military and civilians need, it was an honor. So I really enjoyed it.

02-00:15:32

Li: Thank you very much.

(break in audio)

02-00:15:36

Li: Sorry, we just wanted to come back and talk a little bit about Grant Davis, who worked at the Oakland Army Base.

02-00:15:41

Walton: Okay. Grant was one of my children. [laughter] In fact, the way I found out about your project was at our last Oakland Army Base Retiree Luncheon. And Grant was telling me, and then June Duncan had also told us about it, and this gentleman from UC was interviewing me or just talking to me. And I said, "You see that guy sitting?" And he said, "I have interviewed Grant Davis." And I said, "Yeah, you see that Grant Davis?" He was at the end of our table. I said, "I taught him everything he knows." And Grant said, "That's right, that's right, Lea." But Grant was such a pleasure to work with. He came in on the intern program. I had him for about a year. That was at MTMC, the Military Traffic Management Command. And he was such a taxing person. You couldn't keep him in one place for more than ten minutes. But you'd give him an assignment and he would follow through and no problems, right? But you never knew where he was or what he was doing. You gave him a time-frame to have something done and it was done. And we used to kid. We're best friends and we always have been. He attended our wedding. No, his wife broke her leg, so he sent his daughter to our wedding. But Grant was a great person. And what I got the most—and I appreciate the most—from Grant is that Grant was also the steward for the union, the AFGE, which is the civilian union shop. And he was so wonderful. I would just come close to doing something that unbeknownst and unintentionally violating a union rule or something. And Grant would come in and he'd say, "Lea, we need to talk." And he kept me out of trouble for about three years. And then when he graduated from the intern program, he received a promotion over in our International Traffic and he became a branch chief. And you know what? He made one of the best supervisors that anybody could ever see. He was just wonderful. Everyone was so skeptical because of the heavy union involvement. At that time, I think he had worked himself up to vice-president or something, and he had to give that up when he became management. But everyone just really admired and were very enthused about his leadership. So yeah, Grant and I are good friends.

02-00:18:49

Li: Did you feel a sense of pride?

02-00:18:50

Walton: Pardon?

02-00:18:51

Li: Did you feel a sense of pride seeing him progress to such heights?

02-00:18:55

Walton: I think a little bit. I was very surprised. I thought, oh no, can he do this or not? Because I had seen him from the other side of the fence for so long. But I knew that he had the intelligence to do the work. There was no question there. But how he was going to relate to people—and he just related to them wonderfully; in fact, he was one of our presidents of the National Defense Transportation Association. That's a worldwide organization of all transporters, and locally here, the San Francisco chapter, he was one of our presidents. But he's just a great guy. I just like to tease him that I taught him everything he knows. [laughter]

02-00:19:43

Li: All right, thank you very much.

[End Audio File 2]