

Margie Watson of Smithville enlisted in the US Navy 1971-1973. Boot camp was in Orlando, FL, and additional training was a school in Bainbridge, MD. Her overseas post was Nea Makri, Greece for one year. She returned stateside to Norfolk, VA, where she was discharged at the rank of Seaman.

"I enlisted at Paris, Texas – it was the closest place. They took all my paperwork, then sent me to Dallas for a physical. About a week later, I flew to boot camp from Love Field," she said.

Watson served as a radio operator in the Navy. "I had training on how to use the telecommunicator to correspond with other ships and other stations," she said. "When I first got to radioman school, they put me in a class and I was the only girl in there with about 30 men. Our first class was typing class and there were only about four who made it through that class. The next class no other women were included – it was about a month later when we finally got another girl in our class. Our class had about 28 make it all the way through."

Watson said, "I got along with the guys in class and made sure I passed all the tests; the hardest part was when we were about two weeks prior to graduation, we had to go through prac-deck. They simulated everything (conditions, equipment, etc) we would have to do when we were to be working."

She said, "Greece was my first duty station and I think I was the second female on that base. They had to include female barracks with male barracks, just a different wing. I was the only one there because the other female lived off base. I didn't have anyone to talk to, because when we got off work, she went home.

"I always wanted to join! It was my intention to make a career. I became pregnant and could not find a good babysitter. I could take him to daycare on base, but after I looked around, I decided it was not the way I wanted to raise my baby. They put babies in cribs, and if not time to get them up, they left them in the crib to cry. I searched, but couldn't find a private babysitter."

Watson said that if others would like to join the military and hope to see different countries, that is good. She said they need to know that assignments are usually to stay in one duty station for a year before moving. "Four years go by very quickly!" She liked her job in the Navy. She said she had eight-hour shifts, and never had to worry about what to wear! Watson lived in the barracks at first, then got an apartment when she had her baby, which was after she returned stateside.

The most difficult part of military lifestyle for Watson was that she had to obtain permission for everything. "I had to ask – when you are on duty, you just couldn't get up and do things. You could only do what job was required of you. You didn't get a chance to look at what others were doing. If you are a radioman, you stay at what you are working on." She liked working on the teletype. "I already knew how to type and I was a good communicator. When at the teletype duty station, you stand up, so it was a little hard to get accustomed to standing for eight hours."

While in Greece she was able to enjoy some sightseeing and enjoyed bicycle riding. "I saw the Acropolis, the ocean, the countryside."

Military service helped Watson with life-skills. "I learned to keep myself disciplined." She said she thought the US could learn from Native American tribes. "I think the tribe treats veterans better."

“My parents were Simeon and Ora Watson,” said Watson. Her siblings are Juanita, Nathan and Maxine. A sister, Orene, and brother, Wendell, are deceased. Both Nathan and Wendell served in the Marine Corps.

Her advice for future generations – “Work hard and do the best you can. Call your mother once in a while!”

During the Covid-19 Pandemic, Watson said her son did the grocery shopping, so she could avoid crowds. “It was just me and the cats here all the time, so I am attached to them! Now the Choctaw Community Center takes us everywhere. To keep myself active and my health up, I go with them to keep from sitting at home. I play volleyball with them, and we go everywhere for tournaments.”