

Jodie Cariveau: Air Force Strategic Air Command, Retired



Jodie Cariveau works as an administrative assistant for SB/SE's Office of Chief Counsel in Laguna Niguel. She reflects back on her time in the Air Force's Strategic Air Command.

I joined the Air Force one month after I graduated from high school. I went to basic training at Lackland Air Force base at San Antonio, Texas, where I was inducted into the Strategic Air Command. Coming from an orphanage, I thought this was heaven. I had a room to sleep in, clothes to wear and food and money all my own: \$96 dollars every two months. I even made extra cash shining other girls' shoes and starching skirts until they nearly stood on their own. I'd starch our field hats too, placing them over coffee cans to keep their shape. I'll never forget going through the gas chamber (it cured my sinus trouble for over ten years) and crawling under barbwire as part of our training. But my favorite thing to do was march with the drill team. We were the snappiest team on base and oh, we looked good.

Our recreation center was Mitchell Hall. I loved to dance there whenever I had the chance. Soon the guys were asking me to teach them. They didn't know my name so they would tap me on the shoulder and say, "Hey! It's my turn now!" One day I was walking from the women's barracks to the rec. center when I looked up to see—and hear—the guys singing a new version of our marching song. "Jodie's there when you left your right! She's gonna dance again tonight! Sound off—one, two, three, four!" After that my name was "Jodie" and I grew to love it because of all the respect and affection that went with it.

My next home was Fort Francis E. Warren in Cheyenne, Wyoming, a base known as the "land that God forgot." Coming off the plane our first duty was to shovel 12 inches of snow off the sidewalk in front of the barracks. The fort was an "On the Job" training base; it was there I learned about the nuts and bolts of airplanes and also the job of administrative staff. While there I learned to ride horses and hunt in the nearby mountains. I went to the rodeo, sang at the base club, and, of course, danced.

My permanent base was Travis Air Force Base in Fairfield, California. Travis was an embarkation and debarkation center which meant it was the first and last stop for planes traveling overseas. I became a secretary to a major and then to a captain.

I totally loved the Air Force, mostly because in my day the chiefs as well as the troops were all so respectful and a great bunch to work for. We did our jobs and we still had lots of fun.