

**WOMEN VETERANS HISTORICAL PROJECT**  
**ORAL HISTORY COLLECTION**

INTERVIEWEE: Heather Brott

INTERVIEWER: Therese Strohmer

DATE: August 1, 2010

[Begin Interview]

[equipment test redacted]

TS: Well, today's August 1. I'm in Fayetteville, North Carolina with Heather Brott, and we're here for an oral history collection for The University of North Carolina at Greensboro and the Betty H. Carter Women Veterans Historical Project. Heather, how would you like your name to read on the collection?

HB: Heather Johnson Brott.

TS: Okay. Let me just double check and make sure that's picked up again. [recording paused] Well, Heather, why don't you start off by telling me when and where you were born?

HB: I was born in Enumclaw, Washington, in December of '67, on the eleventh.

TS: Eleventh of December.

HB: Yes.

TS: Did you have any brothers or sisters growing up?

HB: Actually, I—I was—yes and no. It's family craziness, you know. I have a single mother who had other children also. One was kidnapped, one was with his father, and when I was thirty I found out I had a brother that's older than me, so it's kind of—

TS: Oh my gosh!

HB: It's kind of an unusual situation.

TS: So when you were—when you were growing up, you didn't—Did you know you had any brothers or sisters?

HB: I knew I had my brother, my younger brother, and I got to spend some time with him but not a lot. And then my sister—she's also younger—she lived with us until she was about six, when she was taken by her father. And then she ended up living with her father until he passed away.

TS: How old were you then; when she was taken?

HB: I was ten? I think I was ten or eleven. I wasn't very old.

TS: Wow. That's a little different, growing up then.

HB: Yes. It's kind of a—It's different, yes.

TS: So, what did your mom do? She was raising you as a single mom and—

HB: She was. She was a cook. She worked, you know, two, sometimes three jobs. So, I—so really from maybe the age of seven I was, kind of, really raising myself, just because she—

TS: Like a latchkey kid?

HB: Yes, because she was always working, you know. So she was—you know, talking in the seventies, single mom wasn't—they didn't have the opportunities that they have now, as such. So, she did the best that she could, and I think it really made me actually who I am now because of that.

TS: In what ways, do you think?

HB: Well, I'm a very strong and independent person, and I know a lot of that has to do with that. But she was married four times, which—I've been married now twenty-three years, so having—It's always in back of that going, "Okay. Well, I know we just had an argument, but is it really all that bad?" You know what I mean?

TS: Right.

HB: Is it really that bad to just not be married anymore? So I think that kind of—

TS: You were grounded in a different way, with that.

HB: It was. And that's when I had my break in service also, you know. I chose to be a stay home mom, and my husband and I gave up a lot of things so that my girls could have a

parent that was at home with them all the time. And I think that has a lot to do with my upbringing, too.

TS: Interesting. So Uenclaws, is that how you say that?

HB: What's that?

TS: The name of the town you grew up in?

HB: Enumclaw. [laughs]

TS: Enumclaw, Washington.

HB: Yeah.

TS: What was that? Is that a rural community or a city or what?

HB: Well, when I was born it was very rural. It was—it is about maybe forty-minute drive—I think it's northeast of Tacoma area—of the Fort Lewis area. And when I was—when I was born, there wasn't anything there. It's quite large. It's quite large now because that whole area has grown up in Washington. That whole Tacoma-Seattle area and everything around it just exploded.

TS: Like one big city.

HB: Yes. So it's gotten a lot larger. It's—I've only been back a few times. I don't think my mom stayed there much after I was born. I think she went to a neighboring town.

TS: Yes? Did you grow—How many years were you there? Did you grow up there?

HB: Did not grow up there. I lived—We lived in many places in western Washington until '78, which was when I was eleven, and we moved to Illinois at that point.

TS: Oh okay.

HB: And then did most of my—most of my time in Illinois.

TS: In Illinois?

HB: Yes.

TS: So, what was it like in Illinois? What kind of town did you grow up there?

HB: It's a small town about thirty-five miles or so south of Chicago. Actually, right next to a little town—right next to a town called Joliet is where Lockport is. And most people say

“Joliet? Isn’t that where the prison is?” Yes, it is, but community—I mean a small community of steelworkers. We have two oil refineries. Well, we had two oil refineries there, so of course a lot of the older men worked in the refineries. And my—I ended up being adopted when I was fourteen by my dad, and he was born and raised in that town. And then he taught school there, you know.

TS: He knew everybody.

HB: He knew everybody. Try ditching school when you’re in high school and your father not only taught at your high school for fifteen years, [chuckles] but knows everybody, and your teachers come to your house for pool parties, you know. You don’t get away with much.

TS: I understand. I understand. Well, what was it like? Did you have, like, games that you played? Did you have a bike you rode or anything?

HB: I did. I mean, I got out and did a lot of stuff. I mean, I was always out doing something. Sometimes I was causing trouble, but nothing major; nothing major. No, we were always—but I was always that kid that was out. I wasn’t wearing the high heels and the makeup. I had my hair back in a ponytail and I was out throwing snowballs at the guys across the street, you know. We were out building snow forts. And that was me. “Bicycle, slide? Let’s see what can happen if we take this bicycle down this slide.” [both chuckle] It’s a wonder I didn’t have broken bones, like, continuously, growing up.

TS: It sounds like you had a sense of adventure, too, though.

HB: I did. I was always—always keeping busy.

TS: Well, did you like school?

HB: Parts of it.

TS: What parts did you like?

HB: I’m a social person, so for me it was a big social affair. [laughs]

TS: Yes?

HB: Yes. Oh, my grades were fine. They weren’t terrible, you know. They could have been better; they could have been worse. I was kind of middle of the road, you know. And my parents would get frustrated because I had to—I should have really, in hindsight, really should have come out knocking out straight As. I had the brains to do it, I just didn’t do it.

TS: Was there a particular subject that you did like or anything like that?

HB: I'm a home ec[onomics] person. When I started freshman year—freshman year, I think it was, I started taking sewing classes, and I'm an avid sewer.

TS: Really?

HB: And I'm an avid crafter. I'm—You know, sewing is my absolute favorite.

TS: Did you do anything like 4-H [a United States youth organization] or [girl] scouts or anything?

HB: No, not really. I just hung out with friends and sewed. I mean, I did—my first job was at a fabric store, just so I could get discount on the fabric I was buying for what I was making.

TS: That's kind of neat. So, did you have a sense of what you wanted to do growing up, like, what your future would be for you? Did you think about that at all?

HB: No—I always knew I wanted to be an attorney, from the time I was—I think I was twelve or thirteen when Sandra Day O'Connor was put on the Supreme Court. And I was very, very upset for a couple of weeks because I always thought I could be the first woman on the Supreme Court. Well, it didn't happen. [Therese chuckles]

TS: That was like early eighties, right?

HB: Yes. I always wanted to be on the Supreme Court; an attorney. I always just wanted to be an attorney.

TS: Was there any reason that you had that desire? I mean, was there a role model that you had for that?

HB: No, I think it had to do with the situation with my younger sister when she was taken, and it came down to a single mother in the seventies versus the father of the child whose parents had a lot of money and real estate. And so, you know, to me it was a completely unfair situation and the judge sided with the money. So, I think it had to do with that.

TS: Justice not necessarily going the right way, you didn't think?

HB: Yes, I think so.

TS: That's interesting. So, when you've got through your school years, what'd you do when you were finished with school?

HB: I actually took summer courses between my junior and senior year, and I finished up all my credits early, and I actually graduated in January of '86. And I left for the navy in February.

TS: Oh, you left straight—

HB: So, I left right away.

TS: I guess you did.

HB: Yes.

TS: What—Did—What was the reason that you decided to go in the navy?

HB: I was having issues with my parents at the time, and that was the fastest way out of the house. [chuckles]

TS: How did you decide on the navy? Was there a military background in your family?

HB: No. I mean, my grandfather was a retired submariner, so that was really about it. And then, of course, in later years I found out that my biological father was also a submariner, so that other—I didn't know that at the time. So, I didn't want to play in the dirt, necessarily. And I don't know why the navy just was there, and it just came natural, almost. I didn't—I never—I don't think I ever thought of any other branch.

TS: Did you go to the recruiter yourself or did they come to the high school and you got interested that way? Or do you remember how that interest kind of started?

HB: I started talking to them at the high school, you know. I did and then ended up at the recruiting station. I remember because I was working in—senior year I was a counselor's aide, so I'd always come in and work with—in the counselor's office. And of course they have to go there to sign in before they would go hit the cafeteria or whatnot. So, I'd start talking to them. I don't know. Maybe I had a hot one in crackerjack uniform. I don't know. [both laugh]

TS: That's funny. So, you decided to join the navy, and so you must have been seventeen, eighteen?

HB: Seventeen, because I didn't turn eighteen until—I actually went delayed entry program in the summer, which was kind of nice because at that time delayed entry program counted toward your—how many years for getting paid, you know.

TS: Exactly.

HB: And I guess they quit doing that about a year and a half later, but I spent probably about nine months in delayed entry before I left for basic.

TS: Tell me about basic training then. What was it like?

HB: Wow. Well, it was in Orlando, which they don't have anymore, for the navy. And it was—to go from doing whatever you wanted to and nobody's telling you what to do, to ending up in basic training, and going from your own room, to sharing a room with forty other people [chuckles] is a cultural eye-opener, I think.

TS: Was it?

HB: Yes, I think so. It—Yes. Man, I never had anybody get in my face and yell at me, because in the eighties—it's not like it is now. In the eighties they were smack-dab in your face, you know. And you might have gotten hit once or twice on occasion, accident or not. I don't know. But they were—the discipline was—It was definitely more instilled, I think.

TS: What kind of thing would you get disciplined for?

HB: Well, you would fail an inspection. You got your little foot lockers there, and you've got your socks rolled up, and you got your opening of your socks facing the wrong direction. You could guarantee you were going to be pushing, but probably you and your bunkmates on each side were also going to be pushing, because they should have noticed that your socks were backwards also. You know, things like that.

But just—things that you thought at the time, you know, when you're eighteen and you think, "This is the most ridiculous thing I've ever heard of." Because, of course, in the late eighties we never thought—we never thought war. Yes, I don't think so. We haven't had one in over fifteen years, you know, twenty years. We shouldn't—That was not anything you thought of. So, you're thinking something little, minor like this, was just minor. Then, as the years went by, if you sat back and thought about it and went, "Wow. You know what? This little minor infraction right there could get forty people killed." Because it's—no attention to the details. It's those details that—So, as you get older I think you see that, but back then you just kind of go, "This is ridiculous." [chuckles]

TS: Well, how did you deal with that, then, as a young teenager, really, still?

HB: Yes, still I was. I—I just rolled with it. I don't like to get in trouble, so I tried to make sure that a hundred percent of the time I was right, you know; tried to make sure of that. And I tried to make sure a hundred percent of the time that my bunkmates on either side were right, also. Just because I'm not one for—I don't like to get in trouble. That's just too much hassle to deal with. So, I just—In situations like that, you just kind of roll with the flow. I just—That's how I am. I just, "Okay. Well, this is only eight weeks, nine weeks of my life. It's going to go away and something else is going to come along," and that's what I kept telling myself. "This is just a short time then I'm leaving."

TS: What kind of things did you do in basic then, besides like making sure everything is in its place and rolled up right?

HB: You mean as far as activities go?

TS: Yes. Was there anything particularly hard or challenging for you?

HB: No. Actually, there really wasn't. It all came—navy basic, everything came extremely easy to me. You know, we did swim quals [qualifications] and I was a strong swimmer. You know, we did PT [physical training.] I was five foot two and weighted ninety-eight pounds, so I didn't have a lot of stuff to move around, you know. And I loved to run, and I had run cross-country in high school, so even the running portion was right there. Academically, I knew I was smart. I think the hardest part was staying awake in some of the classrooms. I learned how to sleep standing up in the back of the classroom. [both chuckle]

You'd have a drill instructor say—or a company commander, as the navy calls them, say, “Are you sleeping back there?”

Your eyes are open, but you're sleeping. And you're kind of coming to going, “No, I'm not sleeping.” [laughs]

TS: Not anymore. Well, now, when you signed up did you have a job in mind that you wanted to do or a career? Or did you have a sense, too, of, like, how long you were going to be in the navy?

HB: You know, I never had thought about it. I never—thought, “Well, I'll do my four years, I suppose.” I never went any further than that; never thought of that. Didn't figure—I wanted to do something with aviation. That I knew. I love airplanes and I wanted something in the aviation community, but I was kind of limited. Unfortunately—I knew I wanted to fly, but at eighteen and no college degree—so a pilot was definitely going to be out, especially as a woman, at that time. Air crewman or in-flight technician—being an AT was there, but they weren't allowing women in schools—in the flight school yet. I don't think they started letting women into the air crew flight school until maybe '80—the end of '86, or the '87, so. But I'm not exactly sure what the dates were.

I was—Fortunately, I was trained and I was able to be an air crewman once I got to Whidbey Island. I had a master chief that was fabulous. He was like [does voice impression] “You want to do this?” He was a crusty old guy. He was like, “You want to do this? I don't care. Go do this. Here's your flight suit. Go.” You know, so that's how I ended up getting into it.

And I ended up flying every day, so that was a good deal for me. And I was the—In my shop, I was the only woman. Here I was just barely eighteen years old, and I had—we were like an enclave shop, away from everybody else, for our airplanes. And I worked with pilots and student pilots and all the other enlisted rates to keep the airplanes up in the air. I almost became everybody's little sister—almost, you know. And don't dare anybody walk through that door and start yelling at me, because you're probably



going to have fourteen guys jump on your case and go, “Whoa! Wait a minute. What are you doing?” [chuckles]

TS: Real protective of you?

HB: Very much so. Yes, they were. And they let me do whatever I wanted to do, really.

TS: Was it easy to get to that point, or did it take a process to get to that point?

HB: I think—No, it was easy. But I think it was a lot of my personality. Because at the time, just allowing women into a lot of rates and a lot of areas, there were things with the good old boys club. Things like that. You know, of course, Tailhook scandal went on at that time, and— [The Tailhook scandal involved a series of incidents of sexual assault that took place during the 35<sup>th</sup> Annual Tailhook Association Symposium in September of 1991. A navy helicopter pilot named Paula Coughlin was central to the ensuing investigations, and is probably who Brott refers to below.]

TS: Did you know anybody in that scandal?

HB: I did.

TS: Did you? And what side, like the men or the women?

HB: The men.

TS: The men?

HB: Yes.

TS: What do you remember about that, then?

HB: Well, you know, I—I know a lot of women will probably be upset for this, but the—the main pilot involved, she had to have known what she was getting into when she got up on that third floor. They had shirts printed up before they left that said “I survived the third floor gauntlet”. So, if she didn’t know, she’s an idiot, I’m sorry to say that, but, you know, that’s my opinion and that’s kind of why I think I managed to make my path real smooth, because they knew that they didn’t want to have to—they didn’t have to walk on eggshells around me. If they wanted to tell a dirty joke, I could care less, tell a dirty joke. Don’t touch me, but tell a dirty joke, I don’t care, you know. I think it’s that type of attitude that they were just like “Oh, okay, well—” you know, I don’t want to say “one of the guys”, but that’s really how they end up looking at you after a while. As long as you’re capable of doing the work. You know, if you’re capable of doing the work you’re supposed to, then I—at that time, I think they would overlook, now is a different story, but I think then, I think—I don’t know, I was treated a lot better in the ‘80s as a woman in the military than I was by the time I got out.

TS: And you mean recently?

HB: Yes, in '08.

TS: Oh, really?

HB: Yes.

TS: How would you say the difference was?

HB: Now granted, in the '80s I didn't have the job opportunities that I had when I got out, but I think with—I think the women in the '80s who started, and before even, who started taking some of these roles on, we worked just as hard, if not harder, than the men doing that same job. And I think we got more respect for that, whereas I think the girls coming in now, they expect everything to be handed to them. They expect to be able to use femininity to get out of doing stuff, they—I think that, you know, they're so busy doing what they're not supposed to be doing that the guys don't have any respect for them.

TS: Do you have any examples that you remember?

HB: Well, I had a soldier that—[pause] yes, I've had soldiers who feel it's okay to do whatever. If they go out and party with a group of guys one night, and in the morning they wake up and go "Oh crap, what have I just done," and then they turn around and go "Oh, you know what," in their brains they're thinking "That was a really bad situation, I shouldn't have done that. Oh, captain—" or lieutenant or whatever—"I need to talk to you because I was raped last night," you know. Stuff like that. Stuff—hair and nails, they drive me absolutely insane. And at the time, my hair was, you know, almost down to my butt, and I do have nails, but there's regulations in place, you know. And if you can't keep those things in place, then go, you know, you need to get out. And it's [in a feminine voice] "Oh, I can't do this, I don't want to break a nail!", you know.

"Well, lift your rucksack and get on the bus, because we're going," you know. "If you can't lift your rucksack, then you need go to." That—I mean, I think there's a lot of—I think there's a lot of that that goes on.

TS: Why do you think—you think that there's like a cultural change, almost, in some sense?

HB: I do, yes, and I think not only is there a cultural change, I think there's been a mentality change. I think that the people going in the military—both men and women, both of them—I think there's a sense of entitlement that they—that they have now. And I—That's just a cultural thing, it's not just because they're going in the military they feel that. You know—

TS: The whole generation?

HB: The whole generation. They feel that they're entitled to have a cell phone, they're entitled to their weekends off, they're entitled to, you know, having a computer, they're entitled to not working past, you know, 16:30 or something like that. And you just want to shake them and go "You know what? You're in the military, you know? This is what we do!" They're—I just think they're on stimulation overload with Blackberries and the cell phones and the computers and the video games and all of this. They're just so over stimulated that I don't think they—I think they have issues with true reality.

TS: It's interesting that you're saying this, because I'm sitting here knowing that you have three daughters, two of them [both chuckle] that have been in the military, right? So, how do they—how do you think they fit into that?

HB: Well, I had my youngest one—my youngest one, when she was in A-School, she called me up and she said "Mom, thank you for the way you raised us."

I said "You're welcome, why?" You know, because this was an unusual telephone call. And she said that her roommate, you know, of course there's a barracks rule that's been in place forever; there's no candles, nothing that could have an open flame in the barracks rooms. Well, apparently her roommate had a candle, had never burned it; it had never been burned, she just had it for the smell. They had a room inspection, and the first class, the E-6 that was coming through doing their room inspection, failed them because there was this unburned candle. And he told these two girls, he said "Throw it away, stand at your door, I'll come back and you'll pass your room inspection."

My daughter's roommate argued with him. Now, this is a little E-2 arguing with the E-6. She starts arguing with him about how she never burned it and she's just—and my daughter was just totally mortified. Of course, she's raised by a senior NCO [non-commissioned officer], so she knows that this is way wrong. So, she—after all of this she's telling her roommate "Just throw the candle away and we'll pass," because they were going to lose their weekend passes if they would have failed their room inspection, and my daughter's all about her time off. So, she called me up and said "I'm so thankful you and Daddy raised us like that," she said, "because I was mortified that she even argued."

And I said "I'm mortified that the E-6 argued with her," you know, so that's—that's how she views things. I have one that views things completely in the opposite manner, you know. One is just—it's—"Life is a party and whatever happens, happens, and I don't really care," you know. I mean, I have them on different spectrums.

TS: Right.

HB: From the same household, and you kind of go "How'd this work?" [laughter]

TS: There's seven siblings in my family, none are alike.

HB: And you've probably got at least two of you that have none of the same memories growing up, you're going—

TS: [chuckling] Absolutely. That's absolutely true. That's so true. So, you're—let's go back a little bit to your time in the navy and you're at Whidbey Island. Now, you—can you tell me a little bit more about your job, like specifically what you did on your job?

HB: Yes, I maintained the electronics for what's called a TC4C airplane, and it was a dual-prop job airplane. And the airplane was actually a trainer for the bombardier navigators, for the A6 Intruder. So we would fly—have a BN student up there and they would, you know, work on their simulator up there, and then we'd bring them back down. That was technically what I was supposed to do, which is what I did on a day-to-day basis. But, because of where our shop was and with what we did, I learned how to change propellers, I learned how to fuel, I learned how to do all that other stuff. Just like my mechanics, they knew how to do electronic work and my electricians knew how to change prop jobs, you know, we kind of all melded and worked on the planes together.

TS: You did cross-training?

HB: A lot of it, yes, and there was thirteen of us; twelve or thirteen of us in the shop that took care of three airplanes. So—which I found out, one of my friends called me just about six months ago and said “You're never going to believe what's at the—” because I used to live by the Pima Air Museum in Tucson. Said “You're never going to believe what's in the Pima Air Museum.”

And I said “No, what's there?” Because I hadn't been there for a while.

And they said “A53 is there.”

And I said “You're kidding me.” That was the bird I worked on every single day. So, I got a couple photos I'd actually like to take them, of that bird in flight, that they took; we took some photos in flight. We went there and I was like “Well, yeah, that's my bird. Now I feel old.” [laughs]

TS: Well, now, when you were saying that when you first went there, you—you had a mentor that kind of threw you into—like, “Here's your flight suit and you can do this.” You want to talk about him at all?

HB: Yes. Oh, Master Chief Bastable[?]. He was an old crusty guy, but the man knew more about aviation than—and more about how to handle sailors than anybody I've ever met, you know. On the surface, he was crusty, crusty, crusty, but when the outsiders would leave and it was just us, the man was wonderful, he really was. I had him for about—probably about a year before I retired—I mean before he retired. And during this time I met my husband and I ended up getting pregnant, and as soon as I found out I was pregnant, boy, he really—it all changed, you know. I was no longer allowed around the airplanes, because he didn't want anything to happen and, you know, he all of a sudden became more than a mentor, but an actual, like, father-figure almost, you know. The navy lost a really good master chief when he retired.

TS: Yes?

HB: He was this old crusty dude. [laughs] I still could—he could probably walk past me today and his face is—I don’t even think I have any photos of him, but his face is just ingrained in the back of my brain, you know. I had two chiefs, one master chief, one chief, and they are just stuck back here, you know? Just a riot. I think about him quite a bit. I think he retired to Spokane [Washington]. Yes, I think that’s where he went.

TS: Did you—I didn’t actually get to ask you, when you told me when you joined, what did—what did your mom think about that?

HB: You know, I was having so many problems with my parents at that time, I think at that point they were just like “Go.” But I’ve talked to her since—

TS: And your dad, too, right?

HB: Yes, and I’ve talked to her since, and she said, you know, she felt good because in her mind, I was going on my own, but yet I wasn’t going on my own because I was still going to have people there that made sure I was doing the right thing. I was going to get a paycheck. I had a place to live. With her father being retired navy, she knew I had chow halls to eat in, she knew I had barracks to live in, so she didn’t worry about me as much as you would if your eighteen year old just said “I’m outta here” and they leave, with no home, no job, no nothing.

TS: There’s a sense of stability.

HB: Yes, and she—you know, she knew that the navy was a good career, like I say, her dad was—with her dad being—you know, she grew up navy her entire life. And so she knew it was a good place for me to go, so she—she was pretty good about letting me go.

TS: How about your dad?

HB: I think he was pretty good about letting me go at that time, and I think for about the same reasons.

TS: Because they would have—one of them would have had to sign for you, right? If you were seventeen.

HB: Yes, yes, and I don’t remember—I think my mom did, but I don’t remember. Pretty sure it was my mom that did. And then of course they, you know—yes, I think they were—of course, now looking back at it, now they’re really glad I did because I wouldn’t have met my husband and, you know, things wouldn’t have progressed how they did.

TS: Right.

HB: And I certainly wouldn’t be where I’m at now had I not gone.

TS: Exactly. How about your friends, like your social group that you hung around with in high school and stuff, what did they think about your choice?

HB: Well, you know, I talk to them—and I guess that's one of the joys about Facebook is I talk to them quite a bit, and a lot of them have never left. A lot of them have never—Maybe they might have gone to Chicago to go to school or they might have gone down to Champaign to go to school, but the majority of them have never left. I asked—you know, I mean, we've lived all over the world. My children had a chance to live in Europe, you know, and I asked one of my friends who—we went to high school together, he went off to school to Champaign, came back and married the girl that he dated in high school. And he's never left since, you know. And I said "Do you ever imagine what your life—or do you ever feel like you missed anything by staying there?"

And he said "No," he said, "I couldn't imagine not being here."

And I said "That's funny, because I couldn't imagine staying there," you know.

So, I—and he's like "I never thought about it that way," you know, but. I don't know, I just—the people that I grew up with are still very single-minded, they're still very—they're—and I fall on the conservative spectrum, actually I think I fall more liberal—not liberal, but independent, you know, kind of sit that middle of the road. I kind of judge on a piece by piece matter, where they're almost still one hundred percent very Christian conservative, and "I don't want to think anything else other than what's right here," you know, and I think even a lot of that just has to do with—well, I've worked with everybody and their brother, and I've worked in so many places, you know, and it—you get to finding out that, okay, let's not take a person because of a group, let's take them by person. And they don't—I don't think they have that yet there.

TS: You think the military adds that layer of having worked with a lot of different ethnic groups, you know, men and women of different ages and from all over the country and all over the world, sometimes, too?

HB: Oh, sure.

TS: So, you think that gives—that people who serve in the military have, I guess, an opportunity to see people in a different perspective?

HB: Oh, most definitely. Most definitely. And I'll tell you, when I first met my husband, my husband was raised in a family that—his father is not bad now, but when my husband and I first met, very—if you're not white, he didn't care, he didn't want to talk to you. And of course, he raised his children like that. So, my husband was like that, right when we first got married, and he is nowhere near that now. But he was also active duty navy for a lot of years, and so he learned how to work with other people and learned that "Oh wow, you know, this isn't—okay, it's really not bad," you know what I mean? Whereas I don't think he would have had that had he not almost been forced to work with people of different races and different backgrounds and stuff. I think, really, when you're forced to

and you have to make it work, you know, if you don't make it work then something's going to fall apart, somebody's going to lose rank or something.

TS: What do you mean by "you have to make it work" in the military, what does that mean to you? How is that different, maybe, with the civilian world?

HB: Well, if I don't—like right now, I'm a contractor. If I don't like my job, I am more than welcome to go find another one and go move where I want to. You know, when you're in the military, you've signed a contract for four, five, six, seven years, whatever it might be. You're not going to just get up and walk away to another job. You either need to figure out how to make it work, or—like I say, somebody—somebody ends up in trouble, you know, because there's certain—because we still have our own—of course, we have our local state, federal laws, yada yada, but we also have the military laws, also, which a lot of times are more stringent than civilian laws. So, chances are, if something's not working right, something's going to fall under that UCMJ [Uniform Code of Military Justice] and somebody's—you know, it's just easier to make it work. [laughter]

TS: There you go. Well, so, okay, how about your—you're in the military, you're in Whidbey Island, what kind of stuff did you do socially at that time?

HB: We had a big social group of friends. Whidbey Island, at the time, didn't have a whole lot on it. They had—there is a huge state park there, up north of the post a little bit, so a lot of times we went out there, and we'd do a lot of camping, a lot of fishing, a lot of outdoorsy type of stuff. That's how a lot of the weekends were spent, just being outside, you know. My mom's family, at the time lived in Tacoma still, so every once in a while I'd just hop in the car and drive down there, see how—you know, go visit them for a while and then drive back up to—back up to the island. I mean, that's really—I thought it was quite boring then, but I guess really it wasn't. You know, I mean, we did a lot of hiking and I really learned those trails. We'd rent boats from the MWR [Morale, Welfare, and Recreation], you know, from on post or something and take the boats out and stuff.

TS: Did you—did you live on post or off?

HB: Lived in the barracks.

TS: In the barracks?

HB: Yes.

TS: How was that?

HB: Well, we actually had very—it wasn't bad. We actually had very advanced barracks for that time. I don't think too many people in the military had them. A lot of people were still living in bays or in rooms with four, five people. You'd walk into ours—you'd walk into—our barracks were a great big square, with a courtyard in the middle. And in the

courtyard is where our staff duty—you know, there was a building, and our staff duty was there and our laundry facilities and our vending machines and stuff. So, then you'd walk into the rooms and when you first walked in it was a—it was like a common area, living room type deal with a television and a couple couches there. Then you'd have four rooms off of that room, and then that's where our individual bedrooms were. So we might have a roommate, we might not, but we had our own bathrooms and, you know, our cooking facility was actually in the main—center court building, where the staff duty was at. They didn't want you burning the barracks down, I guess. So, we were very lucky, I mean, we had this center court area here, and then the—you know, our own individual rooms and bathrooms, so—four '86, '87 time frame, that was—that was pretty high tech, you know, it wasn't four, five, six—forty people living in the same room, you know.

TS: Right, right. It was kind of like a quad, then?

HB: Yes, yeah, it really was. It really was.

TS: You had your own room, huh?

HB: I did, because I never had a roommate in there. It was marvelous.

TS: That's cool. Now, how long were you at Whidbey Island? This is where you met your husband?

HB: It is. I left Whidbey Island in September—October of '87.

TS: Okay.

HB: So, I was there for about a year and a half or so. I got there about February of '86. My navy time was—active duty time was quite short. I—after I met my husband and I got pregnant, I—he was on his way down to San Diego, to North Island, and my detailer said there was no billets available for me down there, which I didn't believe, because Miramar was still open, San Diego was open, there was something down there, you know. So, I said, whatever, my husband was headed for sea—or, I'm sorry, he was headed for shore duty. I was headed towards sea duty, and then I found out we were having a set of twins, and that's when I decided to take the pregnancy option to get out. And I knew—my husband and I talked about it, and I knew that when I got out, I was going to come back in eventually, I just didn't know when. And it was just a short term, stay home with the girls until they're ready for both parents to be at work.

TS: Right.

HB: Because my husband and I, we both very firmly believe that if you can avoid being a dual military family, you should, especially when your children are small. Especially now, with both parents deploying off and never know if one or both are going to come home.



We just don't think that's fair for children. So, I went ahead and took that option and I got out, and I stayed out for ten years. Well, stayed in the reserves for a while.

TS: What'd you do in the reserves?

HB: Same thing. Same thing I did in the active duty, I just did it at San Diego and I did it on the Constellation.

TS: You got to keep flying, then?

HB: I did, yes, it was nice, it was really nice. It was the one thing I missed, I missed—I love aircraft carriers, so.

TS: What do you love about them?

HB: I just love the whole—just the whole—I mean, you look at the size of them, you wonder, how do they really float, you know? You look at the size of them, you look at what they carry, how many people they carry, just the total—the total package of a carrier, the whole magnitude of it is just—it's breathtaking to me, you know. Then when you're on there for a while—my husband might tell you different, because he spent a lot more time on there than I did, but [laughs] when you're—just everything that they do, you know, is just—to me, it's just amazing. And it's—whoever thought of that, I don't know, definitely people smarter than me.

TS: They say it's like a whole city unto itself.

HB: It really is, because I mean, you see—I want to say you see eleven—when you look at them at water level, I want to say you see eleven stories up, between the levels inside the carrier, excuse me, the flight deck, and then the different layers of the air boss area and all that stuff. But what you don't see is underneath. You know, you've got like another thirteen stories underneath the ground, you know, underneath the water level, that you just don't see and it's just—they're huge.

In fact, when my daughter, when she left for the Nimitz [Nimitz class aircraft carrier], my husband told her “When you get to your berthing, write down your compartment number down where you're at, because you're going to find once you're in there, everything looks exactly the same,” you know?

And she ended up writing it—I think she wrote it like on her hand, right here in the palm of her hand or on her arm, something like this, and then she called her daddy shortly after. She said “Thank you for giving me that hint, I would have been—I never would have found my bed!” [laughter]

TS: That's funny. Now, so you did like weekend duty?

HB: Yes, I did that and I did that once a month and then two weeks a year. I did that for a couple of years, and then in '92, my husband opted to completely get out and we moved

from—we moved back to Phoenix and I ended up completely stopping at that point, because it was costly to get to San Diego from Phoenix.

TS: Yes.

HB: You know, when you've got three small children and, it was—

TS: Did you have any sort of—you and your husband, did you have any sort of transition from the military world to the civilian world at this time?

HB: Not really. We just kind of went, “Here we are,” you know? And it was—it was quite a shocker, actually, to—because we are our own community, really, whether you live on post or you're off post, just being a part of the military, you are your own community. You are your own family, and I've always said that you'll find that your best family are the people you met in the military. You know, they are always—your real family might not be jumping real fast for you, but your military family—boom, they're always right there, because they know the struggles, they know what it's like. You know, and so they're always the first ones to lend a hand or do whatever it is you need done.

TS: Did you miss that at all?

HB: Yes, I did actually. I still do, I still do. So, obviously I went back in and had it and then got out again. These last two years, it's actually been very rough for me.

TS: Yes. And is your husband still in, or—

HB: He's a reservist now.

TS: He's a reservist, okay.

HB: Yes, he's a reservist now, so—but he's deployed just as much as any active duty person.

TS: Yes, I was thinking about that when you said you joined the reserves in San Diego, what years was that? That was—

HB: Oh, I got there in '87.

TS: Eight-seven to '92, so you were in the reserves at the time of the Gulf War. Did you have any connection to that?

HB: Did not. I have managed to go from Gulf War, OEF [Operation Enduring Freedom in Afghanistan], OIF [Operation Iraqi Freedom], and never be deployed.

TS: No?

HB: Nope, I was never deployed.

TS: Panama happened in there too.

HB: Didn't go to Panama.

TS: Let's see—

HB: I was actually one of the very fortunate people. I can say I went an entire career and never missed a major event in my family's life.

TS: Really?

HB: Yes.

TS: Yes, that would be—

HB: Most people can't say that.

TS: No, that's true.

HB: I never missed a major event. I don't think I missed—let me think. I don't think I missed any birthdays, didn't miss—I have now missed anniversaries, between my husband and I, the last three—three out of the last four anniversaries, we've been in different parts of the world due to the military. [chuckles] Once, I was in Korea, then he was in Iraq, then we were home and then this last one I was in Germany. So, you know, I don't know if it really counts because I'm not active duty anymore, but I was on contract for the government over there, so.

TS: Right.

HB: I managed to miss another one.

TS: Well, talk a little bit about how, then, you decided to go back into the military.

HB: The girls—when I say the girls I always mean the twins. They must have been—were about ten at the time, and my husband and I talked about it, and we said, well, maybe it's time for me to go back in. And I talked to the—talked to navy recruiters. Navy recruiters at the time said “No, we're not taking any prior service at all.” Of course, this was '96, and they hadn't had—you know, nobody had had an incident anywhere, really, you know, since '92 and that was a short time and then with the downsizing of the military that happened in the '90s and all that. So, navy said, “Well, we're not taking prior service.” Air force said, “We're not taking prior service.” Marines weren't even taking prior service. The only people that were was the army. So, I talked to my husband and we

debated for a while, you know. And I decided, might as well, you know. I ended up going into the army at that point.

TS: What was it that made you want to go back in? Had you been working at all?

HB: I worked kind of off and on, and I always worked at night so my husband could be there with the girls, you know, for the whole childcare situation. And a lot of it was, we had a child that had medical expenses, and quite a bit of them, and the jobs that we were holding just weren't cutting that, you know, for that need. And I knew that—like I said before, I knew that when I got out the first time, I was going to eventually come back in. It just was a matter of when, and at that point it just seemed like the right time. The girls were ready for me to go back to work, their dad was ready to be a stay-home—because we decided, well, he might just be the stay-home dad depending upon where we end up at, you know. And it was just—for our family, it was just the right time for me to go back. And off I went to basic training.

TS: And so how was that the second time in the [unclear] service?

HB: That was rough.

TS: Tell me about that, then.

HB: Because I turned thirty during basic training, the second time, and army basic training is not like navy basic training. It is a lot more physical, and of course by this time, I'm not, you know, ninety-eight pounds anymore, now I'm more like a hundred and forty pounds, and I'm not as in shape as I was before. Of course, army is a lot more physical than—but then I also had the mental to deal with, because, you know, my girls being nine and ten years old, I went to work, they didn't know when—why haven't I come home from work yet? We're four weeks, and still I haven't come home from work yet and they can't figure this out. So, you know, I went through that whole emotional roller coaster knowing, in the back of my brain that it's only nine weeks and then I'm going to be at home and it's going to be fine, they're not going to die, kids are pretty resilient. They're going to last, you know.

But yes, army? Whoo. Between the ruck marches and—oh my goodness. I loved to run, I wasn't sure I loved to run anymore after basic training in the army. [both chuckle] Between all that business, that was—that was a rough time, and of course on my birthday, you know, I got these wonderful drill sergeants who make me wear this little sign around my neck that says "I'm thirty today, make me do thirty push-ups", you know, so every drill sergeant on Fort Leonard Wood, I swear, made me do push-ups that day.

TS: Not the birthday you want to remember?

HB: No, it's one of the ones that stick out, though. It was good, and it was a good opportunity for me to tell these eighteen, nineteen year old kids, you know, I've played this game before and I've won this game. If you do what I tell you to do, you're going to win this

game, you know? Some listened, some did not. [chuckles] Some made it real hard on themselves.

TS: Yes.

HB: So.

TS: When you got out of basic, what kind of job did you have lined up for you?

HB: I went to—I went to AIT [advanced individual training] at that point to be a personnel specialist, so I was doing a lot of typing, doing all the personnel administrations for pay and finance and, you know, what the army commonly calls a PAC [Personnel Administration Center] clerk or S1 person. I ended up at Fort Lewis [Joint Base Lewis-McChord], doing that for personnel services battalion, which was very good for me because thirty years old as an E-2, you know. I wasn't your typical E-2, because I wasn't eighteen, but yet I wasn't an E-5 or an E-6 either. You know, I was kind of stuck in that zone.

TS: Right.

HB: I should have the rank of this, but I don't. And of course, my mentor that I had then, she actually just got her retirement orders, so she's actually retiring out of the Netherlands here real soon. And you know, she was wonderful. She'd say, "You know, I fully get it. You're just an E-2 so nobody's going to pay attention to you, however, you're older and you're not dumb, and you've got enough life experiences to fill this room," so she pretty much gave me—she gave me the opportunity to do what I do naturally, and that's lead. Even though I was just an E-2 and then an E-3 and eventually an E-4 at that time, she just gave me—she's like "You know, just do what you need to do to get it done, and I'm going to support you as long as you're right," you know, "and if you're wrong but you think you were right, well, tell me you thought you were right and we'll go with it." So that was a good deal, and I—she really gave me a good opportunity to do that. She wasn't but I don't know, twenty-four, twenty-five years old, not even that, I don't think at the time. She was like "You're older than me and you know what you're doing, just go," you know.

TS: So, she didn't feel threatened by that at all.

HB: Oh no, not at all. Not at all. In fact, she's the one that told me—and I ended up using this motto for several—until my career ended. She said "I always train the people that come in to do my job. You know, I want you to take my job, so I'm going to train you to do it, because eventually—the only way is if you take my job, means I'm moving up, so then I'll move up, and then you come up and I'll train you to take my job again and then I'll move up again, you know." That was the philosophy she had.

TS: It's helping each other, supporting each other to get to a higher level.

HB: Exactly. Exactly, you know, and it worked. I mean, it was a—as long as you don't feel threatened by the person coming in—I mean, seriously, the army says “You're going to have this many people working in this office and they're going to be this MOS,” why do I have to worry about somebody taking my job? The army says we're all going to be here, regardless, you know? So. [laughs]

TS: True. Well now, how else did you find, except for the basic training, the army culture different from the navy culture that you had experienced, you know, ten years earlier?

HB: Oh wow. It was—well, it was an integrated basic training this time, whereas my navy basic training was not. So, I'm fortunate enough to have gone through an all-women basic and an integrated basic, and I wasn't so thrilled with that integrated basic, to be honest with you, I just—I think that a lot of people, a lot of the women expected the men to carry their share of the load, and some of them were so busy being cutesy-cutesy that they weren't doing what needed to be done for the group, let alone for themselves, you know? And then of course you always got your—in the integration like that, you always got some people that—some guys that were just like, “Well, let me check out this hot chick and see what I can get done,” when that's not what we're there for.

I just feel that—I don't know, my perspective is that the separated basic training was a lot more productive than the integrated stuff. I just saw, there was some—maybe it was my age, you know, maybe it was my age. I felt bad, because in our floor that we were on—we had this great big floor and down at the end were three and four person rooms and that's where the women were, and the guys were still in forty-man bays down on the same floor, and it's like, why are they living like this and we're living with two or three people in a room, you know, four people tops. To me, it makes no sense. No wonder why they're upset with us. We're living like this, and they're living wide open, you know. I don't know, I—yes, it was interesting.

TS: Should have been all the same, then?

HB: Yes, I think so, and I think if you're going to start treating different—if you're going to integrate and then treat different, don't wonder where resentment comes in at, then. Because that resentment starts from the get-go, you know. Just like if you're going to—if you're going to integrate, then fully integrate. I know after I got out and I was up at Fort Lewis, we'd go to the field, we might have a tent, you know, my personality is that you don't have to put up a second tent for me just because I'm a woman. I can live in this corner right here, and if I need to change clothes, I'm going to tell you, “I'm going to change clothes.” Either turn around, leave, watch, I don't care, you know. You may wish you never would have watched after—you might really want to leave, you know, but that was just [chuckles] my philosophy. And if I really don't want you in here, I can hang up a poncho or something from the tent, but there's really no need to separate, you know. That's my—that's how I saw things, and unfortunately not everybody sees things like that, and I think that sometimes causes problems. I'm not saying all men are perfect, either. Please don't—because I know there's a lot of incidents that happen that never

should happen, you know. And there's also incidents that are claimed to happen that never happened, so—I don't know, I think that's the nature of integration. I still believe that there's jobs in the military women should not hold. And should never hold.

TS: Which ones?

HB: I don't believe that they should be 11-series in the army.

TS: What's that?

HB: Eleven-series are your ground-pounder grunts.

TS: Like infantry?

HB: Infantry-type, yes, and there's a lot of reasons for that. If there are jobs—like my husband was a jet mechanic. It made me nervous every time there was a woman jet mechanic there, not that she couldn't do the work, but they dealt with the drop tanks a lot, and the drop tanks could weigh four hundred pounds. Well, if a drop tank falls, she's not going to pick that up and get it operating, it's going to require more people than just two or three, you know, so—I don't know, I just—there's just some that I just don't—and a lot of people get upset with me for saying that, but I say, leave some things alone, you know. Leave it how it is, and I don't think our country is ever going to be ready to say “Okay, Mrs. Smith, you know what, you are now infantry.” I don't think—I don't think our country ever will be ready for that.

TS: Well, with your history of your family being in submariners, what do you think about women being allowed to go on the submarines?

HB: I'm having some issues with that. I really am. I'm really having issues with that. They're close quarters; they're very close quarters. Now granted, they don't go—they don't go as long as carriers do or the smaller ships go, but they do go for three months at a time, and—hygienically, there are just things that women need that men don't need and you don't have a lot of space, there's not the places to keep those, and then there's the whole trash issue to deal with, and there's a supply issue to deal with, on top of everything else that you're just—I think you're just opening stuff up, too. You know, you're just opening problems. I think the navy has seen a lot of that when they integrated carriers, you know, a lot of those problems that people said were going to happen have happened. I don't know what the—I don't know what the average number is, but I'm sure they're sending probably, on a six-month cruise of five thousand people, I bet they're sending an average of upwards ten, twelve, fourteen women home because they're pregnant on these cruises, that weren't pregnant when they went out there, you know. You're going to have those type of—of issues. Who do they end up hurting? Well, usually—it usually—this sounds crazy—usually ends up hurting the men and their career, because what happens is that these women now have to hold shore billets, because they can't go out to sea, which means that because—let's say I'm holding a shore billet, that means this guy now can't

come back and has to stay out at sea or has to stay on deployment, maybe they have to stay over in Iraq or Afghanistan, because this billet here is filled with this person, because they can't leave—medically, they can't leave that situation now. That's not fair, either, for either side, I don't think. I just—I know I see things kind of different than most women see things, you know. [laughs]

TS: It's hard to say, you know, what most women don't—you know, it's interesting to get the voices of the women on these interviews, because they're not always what you expect. So it's good to hear, you know, what you think about it and what you feel about it. Especially it's interesting, to me, that you were in these two different cultures and these two different—you know, a lot of things changed in the military from '86 to '96, and—

HB: Yes, it did.

TS: And expectations for women were different, you know, during that time frame too.

HB: Yes, very much so, you know. I don't—I think, when I first started my career, I think that I was expected to do more work than by the time I got out. I mean, I—I had moved up in rank and of course was dealing at—almost at a management level, by that time, but yet I still was training soldiers, you know, and I—what I saw was that if I was out there and I was crawling around in the mud—because I worked in a very male-dominated—when I re-classed to electronics in the army, very, very male-dominated MOS. So, when I was down there, it was very easy for me to have fourteen soldiers and I'm the only woman and I'm the boss, you know. And a lot of times it got—especially the younger guys would be like “Oh, great, she doesn't know what she's doing, this and that.”

But as soon as I was down there crawling around in the dirt with them and I'm hands-in, actually fixing something with them, or, you know, we're rucking and I'm right there with them, telling them “Let's go, let's go, let's go,” their attitude changed. Their attitudes changed drastically, and the way I was treated was also very drastic. And I saw that didn't always happen with some people, you know. And there are some that are just like—I actually had a captain one time counsel me when I was in Germany. Counsel me; told me he did not want women in the army and he definitely didn't want any in his headquarters company.

I said “How do you put this in writing?” You know, especially when you're trying to get into the chaplaincy corps. How do you do this, you know? I don't understand this. [laughs] And that's—I mean, I realize there are people that are always going to feel like that. And they're entitled to that opinion, provided that they don't act upon it when they're at work. I don't—you know, think that way, think that way. I could care less, you know.

TS: Well, when you said that—you know, when you first went in and your first experience at Whidbey Island, you were kind of like a sister figure, right?

HB: Yes.



TS: Now, when you're in the army and you're, you know, older, did you see yourself as a different type of figure for the people that you served with?

HB: Yes, I did, actually, after—not right at first, though. After a certain point, I did. When I had—[chuckles] I had a soldier, every chance he got he'd tell me "Sergeant Brott, you know you're three years older than my mom." [Therese chuckles] And that's it, just push. Push till I'm tired, just keep going. So, as my soldiers—of course, my friends were—even my friends who were the same rank as me, were still younger—considerably younger than I was. But my soldiers were now younger than my children, you know, so.

TS: When you say "my soldiers", what do you mean by that?

HB: The ones I was directly responsible for.

TS: Okay.

HB: When I was on the DMZ, I had three of them that I lived with twenty-four/seven, and then I ran a few shops where I would have anywhere between fourteen and twenty soldiers that I was directly responsible for their training, their health, their welfare, all that kind of good stuff. And so, like I said, a lot of them were younger than my children, so. And of course it was some good—it was some good ribbing, you know, they'd make fun of that, and I'd find a way to make fun of that, you know, but it all came—you know, when the soldiers had problems, they—they knew it was okay to come talk to me, because they were going—because they knew if they were wrong, they were going to know. They were going to be told, "Idiot, what were you thinking?" [chuckles] That type of deal. And they knew that if they needed some assistance and they needed some NCO to stand in front of them, in front of the sergeant major or somebody and say "Leave my soldiers alone", I was right there. And because of my age, it worked out a lot that—because the sergeant majors, they were all my age. So, when I stood in front of them as an E-6, it was different than the twenty-four year old E-6 standing in front of them, because, you know, in their minds they knew, okay, I'm just an E-6, but if I'm standing in front of them, something probably really needs to be done. Because not only am I older, I'm of the '80s mentality, the '80s military mentality, which is different than the mentality now, you know.

TS: How do you think it's different?

HB: I think that soldiers now are wimpy. I do, I think that they're little pansies, and if they don't want to do something, they cry to their congressman. You know, if they get a little tiny sprain, "Oh, I can't do PT for a year," you know. "If I get fat, well, that's ok, I'm going to find some excuse and you can't kick me out." Or you know, they just—they're always whining about something, and you're like "Just shut up," you know? And so I think the mentality—I don't—I think that people of the '70s and '80s are more disciplined than they are now, and I think it goes right back to that sense of entitlement. Seventies and '80s military people, we earned what we got.

When I was first coming up, if somebody were to say, “Private Brott, take the trash out,” I didn’t say “Why?”, I said “Moving!”, took the trash, took it out. Now they say, “Why do you want me to do that? Why am I taking the trash out?” you know? It’s like, who are you? [both chuckle] And it’s just that type of difference and it’s—there are times when I’m very, very—I see some soldiers today and I’m like “Oh, thank god I’m out.” But then there’s—most days, I’m like, well, I wish I was still in. I had a few more good years left in me.

TS: Yes.

HB: Yes.

TS: Well, do you want to take a little break and then we can come back?

HB: Yes, we can.

TS: Okay. [recording paused] [extraneous comments redacted] I’m back with Heather and we took a little break there. But one thing I wanted to ask you about was the time that—so, when you went back into the army, what was your husband doing?

HB: He was driving a truck.

TS: Okay.

HB: He was a truck driver.

TS: So, did—when you—you moved to—you were in Arizona and then did you have to move?

HB: No, we were actually in Illinois.

TS: Oh, Illinois.

HB: He had taken a job with this company in Illinois and that’s when we decided to—he had recently—he had lost his job just prior to that, so that’s when we decided this might be the best time to do this. So, he—when I came back in, I took station of choice as an option, so I knew what post I was going to go to when I finished basic training and AIT [Advanced Individual Training]. So, when I was in basic training, he moved to Fort Lewis, because he knew that’s where my follow-on[?] was going to go. He took the children and, because of the school year starting and all that, he went ahead and left and moved up there and waited for me to finish basic and AIT and then come there. He set up household while I was doing all that stuff.

TS: Did he find that he had any difficulty as a military spouse, now?

HB: Yes. And he is the first one—you know, because he was the army husband, and I think now the army's starting to gear things—they're starting to—more people are recognizing that there are army husbands also, whereas they didn't before. It was always everything was geared toward the army wife, the army wife. I did have a company commander, though, that gave all the army wives these army sister plaques, and she gave Jim one and said that he was their sister too, so. [laughs]

TS: Does he still have that?

HB: Actually, we do, in our house in Arizona, we do still have it. But you know, he was always the first one that, if somebody was—if a husband was deployed and the wife needed something, they all knew that they could call him and he'd come straight, you know, straightaway, would come and help them out. But the army recognizing husbands was almost completely unheard of. I mean, even now, you go in the PX and you can buy army wife shirts or "Army Wife: Toughest Job in the Army", you know, stickers and stuff. And you're not going to find army husband. They work just as hard, I mean, when I was gone, it's the same as if a wife—or a husband was gone, you know, you now have to do it all on your own, and chances are, for the husband it's actually worse, because they usually hold an outside job, where a lot of the army wives don't hold an outside job. So, their day just continues to go on as it was, without your extra help, you know. Whereas army husband, they're still going to work, but yet they're still coming home and taking care of children or they're having to arrange more childcare or whatever the case might be. Sometimes I think it's harder on them.

TS: Now did—so you were about twelve years in the army. In this whole time, did you guys have to move very often?

HB: You know, I was very fortunate. We went from Fort Lewis—we were on Fort Lewis for nine months, which is the minimum time, and the army came and said "You're going to move to Germany," so we actually welcomed that because our children were at the right age where, you know—kind of scary, because it's a new country, but yet the girls were—I think they were nine and ten? And so we were like wow, okay, we're scared because we've never—you know, neither one of us had ever lived outside of the U.S. before, and—but at the same time we were like, wow, we could see all these places and the girls are not old enough—they're old enough to appreciate what they're seeing, but they're not old enough to want to do everything on their own yet, like high school type age. So, for us, I think it was a perfect time for us to go. We went to Germany, spent three years there. By the time—we actually thought about staying longer, you know, because as a family we loved it there. The twins were getting ready to start high school; they wanted to go to high school in the [United] States.

So, my husband's family is all in Phoenix, I said "Where can we get the closest?" I talked to my retention [unclear] counselor, said "Where's the closest we can get?"

And they said "We can get you to Fort Huachuca [Arizona]."

And I said “Okay, let’s go there,” so that we could come back and the girls could go to school in the [United] States. And then after that in ’07, I went to Korea, but the rest of the family stayed in our house in Arizona, and I just went to Korea.

TS: How long was your tour there?

HB: I was in—Korea was a year. And during that time, I actually—our family separation was a little bit longer, because during that time, Jim, as a reservist, was mobilized, and he was actually sent to Iraq while I was still in Korea. [chuckles] So, he was at—he was mobilized and had to go to Port Hueneme where all the Seabees [members of the United States Navy construction battalions] are at, in California, and then he came out and saw me in Korea before he went to Hueneme, and then I was able to go see him before he actually shipped out to Iraq. So, we were actually separated a little bit longer than most. And then of course, we were—I was out of the army by the time he came back from Iraq. So, that’s hard.

TS: Where were the girls, then?

HB: Ashley was already—she was at Project Challenge, she wasn’t in the army yet, but she was on her way. She was—she had sent to Project Challenge, which is a military academy, and then the other two girls were at home. By this time, they’re both of age, so we didn’t have to worry about who was going to take care of the children.

TS: Oh, I see, okay.

HB: They knew that I paid all the bills online, except for—and the ones I couldn’t pay—because, you know, Bank of America’s great, they had their accounts, I could just transfer money into their account and make them go pay the water bill, you know.

TS: I see.

HB: They didn’t worry about anything; they had the cars to drive, you know.

TS: A little freedom from the parents.

HB: They did, but our youngest one—our youngest one had a really hard time. She did not like both of us being gone. She really had a hard time with that. And Ashley went off to basic training, and I ended up coming home and my daughter, she’ll tell you all was right in the world at that time. [laughs]

TS: I’ll have to find out. Well, I wanted to ask you about when you did go to Germany, then, when you moved to Germany as a family, then what’d Jim do? Like, did he have trouble finding a job, or anything like that, or—

HB: No, we thought he was going to. He started working as a—Ponds is a company over there that does the contracting for the gate guards. He did that for a while, then he managed to get a job with the AAFES [Army and Air Force Exchange Service] driving the distribution loads from the different PXs, you know, delivering to there. He ended up doing that for the majority of his time we were there.

TS: The three years that you were there?

HB: Yes, and it was a good deal. It was when we came home that was difficult.

TS: Back to Arizona?

HB: Yes, because as a truck driver, these companies report to Department of Transportation, and some—I don't know their ins and outs, some computer system that they report to on their drivers, but, three years he was never reported as driving.

TS: He didn't have the—it didn't show on this particular, like, database or something?

HB: Yes, so Department of Transportation said "No, we're considering you an inexperienced driver," even though at that time, he'd had, you know, seven, eight years of driving experience. That hurt, you know. But then he finally got a job and all was right in the world.

TS: Tell me a little bit about the jobs that you did when you, I guess, were moving to Germany. What kind of job you did there.

HB: I—for that one I did a lot of—I was still a 71, a personnel sergeant, at that time. And I had gone from specialist to sergeant at that time. So, I did—I worked in a group; I worked with the 66<sup>th</sup> MI [military intelligence][?] group, and I worked in their S1, which for the army, the S1 is the personnel office. And I did a lot—a lot of personnel finance work, promotions, any personnel actions. Then I ended up moving to the company, down to the company level, which was so cool. I had—I worked with another—all the people in my company, they were all 97 Bravos, 97 Echos. So they were all the interrogators and the counter-intel[ligence]people, that's what I had. I made some very, very good friends when I was working there, and there was only—one, two, three, four—there was six of us actually in Darmstadt, in the company. All the rest of the company was spread out throughout Europe. We had them all the way from the Venilux[?], SHAPE[Supreme Headquarters Allied Powers Europe?], Belgium, all the way down to Vincenza, Italy and everywhere in between. So, on occasion I'd have to go to—darn that bad luck, I'd have to go travel to these different places and go check on them, you know.

And—I did all the paperwork for them, you know, and my philosophy at that time was, okay, these are the guys—and of course, this was pre-9/11, so my philosophy was, okay, these are the guys that, should something happen, ever, if I make sure that I'm doing my job properly, they can do theirs because they don't have to worry about their families, they don't have to worry about if they're going to be getting paid, if they're

going to get their promotion, you know, if their bills are going to get paid by their allotments or whatnot. Because if I tell them I'm going to do it, they know I'm going to do it, you know. That was my philosophy on that one, and so that's what I did for them, and it was—it was a good deal, and then the army decided to change how that MOS was done, and I said "It's time for me to go and get a new MOS. [laughs] It's time for me to go back to electronics."

TS: How was that switch for you?

HB: It wasn't bad. That switch actually happened after I came back to the States.

TS: Okay, then before we go back there—

HB: Okay.

TS: —I want to ask you a couple more things about being in Europe with your kids and your family.

HB: Okay.

TS: What—did you live on base housing or off-base?

HB: We lived—we lived in base housing, but they're actually off the base, and it was open to anybody to come and visit. In fact, like I said earlier, they've now closed it, and I was actually just there last week and it was very interesting. I thought normally—you know, they were big apartment—big apartment-style living, which is how the Germans live, and the army had spent a lot of money renovating a lot of these apartments, and I thought for sure when I went back, that the—I would have found that they would have been given back to the Germans, but they weren't. They were just—they'd just been fenced off. After 9/11, they did put a fence around our housing that was never there before. They actually gated it up and completely are just—everything's just overgrowing there now, but the actual base itself, everything's just overgrowing there, you can't even get close to it anymore, and it's—it was kind of sad, actually.

TS: It's not actually being used as a base?

HB: No, it's not being used as anything.

TS: Not—so nobody—oh, okay, it's not like at [unclear] where it's an airport now?

HB: No, it's completely—it's gated up and I don't know if they—

TS: If it's U.S. property and they're just not using it, or. Interesting.

HB: I—it was very—and like I said, it was kind of sad, too, because you know, we did a lot of—I think, I mean, and you’d have to talk to my girls, but I think my girls have a lot of really good memories from that area, too, you know.

TS: What kind of things did you do for your social life there?

HB: Oh, we traveled. We traveled. Darmstadt was a perfect location. We were a six hour drive to Paris, we were four hour drive to Switzerland, we were an hour and a half to Luxembourg, you know, and that was one of our favorite—we’d pack up the van and the dog and the girls with the camping gear and go to Luxembourg for a weekend, you know, and go camping, because European camping is different. It’s so much different, it’s—you know, your fresh bread truck and egg truck comes every morning, you know, and they’re super clean, they’ve got full bathroom facilities for showering and stuff there, and it’s just—it’s not like camping here. You’re in a tent, but it’s not rugged-ized out there, really, you know. So, you set up your little camp stove and every morning here comes the egg and bread man with the fresh-made bread, you know. You’d pick them up, make your eggs. [chuckles] They probably just got those eggs from the chicken this morning.

It was nice, and so we did a lot of traveling, you know, we saw—we were fortunate enough to see all those things that Americans will spend an entire life saving for. We were able—it became so—the traveling and—it just became so—I’m not sure what word I’m looking for. We just became so used to it that my youngest daughter was—let’s see, she was twelve at the time, eleven or twelve, I think she was at the time, and we were getting ready—we were actually going to be coming back in about six months or so. My husband and I decided to take the girls to Paris, we were going to go to Paris, go to Disneyland Paris.

And my youngest daughter’s friend’s birthday was the same weekend, and we said “Samantha, are you going to go with us, we’re going to go to Paris, go to Disneyland.”

She was thirteen, because she tells me “I’ve been to Disneyland Paris so many times, I don’t even want to go again.”

And I said, how many thirteen American—how many American thirteen year old girls just like—they’re just like “I’ve been there so many times, I don’t want to go again.” You know, that just—we just—the traveling just became—we just did it, that’s just what we did on the weekends, you know. Because we always had three and four day weekends, we could—pre 9/11. But we could just take off and go do things, you know, so. It was fun. And I came home with so many Birkenstocks that I didn’t even know what to do with. I probably had thirty pair.

TS: Did you go on any of the Volksmarches or anything like that? [Volksmarching is a European non-competitive fitness activity, generally a walk of about 10 kilometers that is also a social event. As mentioned below, collectible items are awarded.]

HB: We did Volksmarches every weekend. In fact, it got to the point where we’d find the ones that we wanted to do, and I would actually—because of my running, I would actually go run a 10K on Saturday and then if it was a good Volksmarch, we’d walk the same one as

a family on Sunday, and if it wasn't a good one, then we'd go find another one to go walk as a family, you know. Take the dog out and—we did that every single weekend.

TS: What'd you guys collect as your—your plates, or the medals, or—

HB: Well, I've got that—well, that clock, I need new batteries for it, right there, but actually the eyes on that clock go back and forth and his tail will go. We collected—

TS: It's like an owl clock or something.

HB: Yes, it's an owl clock. We collected a lot of steins. The funniest thing is in my Halloween box, and he's actually a yodeling wizard, you press his hand and he yodels. [laughing] I mean, we have—

TS: That's a little different.

HB: Yes, I mean, we have all kinds of things, you know, everything from wine glasses to steins and plates and, just whatever. And we racked up—we had to have racked up probably over two hundred miles, easy. You know, easy, because this one we did—it was a great family—great family afternoon, and then have a brot[wurst][?] or something afterwards. You know, of course, the dog was just like “Ooh, we love this,” and it was actually a good way to train the dog to be around people, because we got her over there as a puppy, and she was pretty unruly, so we had to train her and that was a great way to do it.

TS: And how were Europeans—how did you feel like you were treated in all your traveling as a military family?

HB: I found that—I started to learn German right after I got there, and I found that if we at least attempted their language, the reception was a whole lot better than if you just went in there as arrogant Americans and the real boisterous and real, you know, typical, stereotypical American, of what they feel about us. As long as you attempted it, even if it was just ordering a beer in German, then it was so much better than just saying, “Give me a beer,” you know. And then—and they were very—they were much more open. And a lot of places that we went were the small villages, and not so much the large cities, and so—the small villages, they really want to know more about—because they might not have a lot of experiences with foreigners, and especially Americans, so, you know, that was—it was fun, it really was.

TS: Good experience all around, then.

HB: It was, yes.

TS: Was there any negative side to—



HB: I think our biggest negative was actually when we came back.

TS: Okay, well let's talk about that move, then. So, you said you have a couple things going on; you're coming back, the kids want to go to high school, and you are changing your career.

HB: I'm changing my career at the same time, yes. Well, when we came back, we had auto insurance with an American company over there, however, when we came back, they said "Well, that's our European branch, so we don't recognize you as having insurance for three years." So of course, our premiums went sky-high and Jim couldn't get a job right away because of the whole driving issue, and we're trying to get the girls in school, and, you know, it was—it was such a nightmare. I came back and, you know, when you first get to Germany, you got to get a [UCERA?] license, you know, and do all that business, and I came back to Arizona and I—Jim was still up in Phoenix with the girls at the time and I was at Fort Huachuca and I'd just signed for our housing and was moving all in, and I do the right thing and I go to the DMV and I change my address and all of a sudden I get a letter in the mail stating that my license had been suspended and there was a warrant out for my arrest, and I was like—I was devastated. I called my husband up, I'm crying, I'm just all kinds of upset. And before I went to Germany, I'd gotten a speeding ticket in California, and I paid it, but they never made note of that payment. So, they suspended my license and then when I didn't show up, they put a warrant out for my arrest and—it was a nightmare. We paid that, got that all cleared up, then he—you know, because I'm like "I can't even drive now," and I was just terrible upset. So, when we got them all in school and—coming back was almost a nightmare. It really was, because now we're changing cultures again, also, and after—you wouldn't think that three years of being in a different culture would make much difference, but it—

TS: Especially coming back to the United States.

HB: It really does, yes, it really does, and it's hard on a marriage, it's hard on a family, and it takes a little bit of adjustment, even when it's the whole family that, you know, everybody says one spouse deploys and comes back, it's an adjustment, but it's also an adjustment when the whole family goes and comes back, just based on what's around them. You know, so. We had—it's probably a good six months worth of adjustment, we had when we came back. But—

TS: So what year would that have been, approximately.

HB: We came back—I came back in—it was the first weekend in July—the first fourth of July weekend of '02.

TS: Two thousand two.

HB: Yes, because it was—I remember we were, getting ready to come back and of course it was right after—the first major American thing after 9/11, and so, of course, the airlines were all on alert for fourth of July weekend, and all that kind of stuff.

TS: Right. Well, let's go back to 9/11, then. You were in Germany during 9/11?

HB: I was living in Germany, yes.

TS: Okay.

HB: I was in Switzerland on 9/11.

TS: How'd you end up in Switzerland?

HB: We were taking—my sergeant major and I were taking a little more than half a million dollars worth of top secret equipment down to our Det[?] in Vicenza. We had our career[?] cards, we were—you know, we were all set. We asked if we had our country clearance; we were told we did, you know. And then—and in Switzerland, if you don't have a country clearance, if you even have one pair of boot socks, they can confiscate everything you have. So, we were told, "Yup, you've got your country clearance, you're good to go." We're in a military van, got all this equipment, and my husband tries to call on the phone.

And I'm driving, I'm like "I don't know what he wants, I can't talk, I'm driving, I'm driving." So, finally, after he called a couple more times, I said "Sergeant Major, please tell him that I'm driving, I can't talk."

The sergeant major talks to him, the sergeant major hangs up the phone. Sergeant major says "You need to drive as fast as you possibly can."

And I'm like "Why?"

And the sergeant major tells me what has just happened in New York, and I was like "Oh my gosh." And we had about thirty minutes till we got to our detachment in Vicenza. By the time we got there, captain[?] already had locked it down. We couldn't hardly get on post, we couldn't—we weren't sure if we were going to have a hotel room. We ended up having to share a two-bedroom apartment because nobody was allowed off post, so our rooms weren't available because they weren't able to check out, you know.

And of course, like I said, I worked with all the counter-intel guys, so they're all jumping, and they need this equipment that we have, you know. So, it was—it was a crazy day. We just sat back, sergeant major and I said, "Okay, they're doing their job, we're going to do our job, we're going to go sit in the movie theatre," and we watched Tomb Raiders [*Lara Croft: Tomb Raider*] because all the rest of the guys were doing their thing, so there was like seven of us in the whole theatre, watching this Angelina Jolie movie, just because we didn't want to get in their way. So, we were just like "We'll just go to the movies, then." [laughs] That was—that was our 9/11. My one day trip turned into a three day trip because we had a military-plated vehicle, so the general—the CTAP[?] general had to actually approve for us to leave the installation to go back up to Germany. So, we hung out for a few extra days down there.

TS: Did you see a change in the military mentality and culture or anything after 9/11, in Europe?

HB: You know, right at first, I think there was a little bit. It didn't take them long for our housing, that was right in the middle of town before, you know, in the middle of Darmstadt. It had never had a fence around it, it didn't take them long for the fence to get up; the guards were out there all the time. I felt really bad, because right in the middle of our complex we had this one building that at one time was a bakery, a German bakery, and the bakery had long since closed, and now there was a German family living right smack-dab in the middle of our housing. So, now every time they've got to come and go, they have to come through our checkpoints, you know. Well, that made me feel really secure at that point, I don't know, but it had to have been a hassle. And you know, the gates went up, they were more conscious on the—

TS: Physical security.

HB: Very much so, yes, very much so. Then it started to fade off.

TS: In what way?

HB: I think everybody started getting complacent again. I think that's—

TS: How long do you think that took?

HB: Well, by the time I left in July, it was already starting, I think. And then of course, every time Homeland Security knocks and says, "Oh, we're going to heighten the awareness levels", then it kind of goes away, then it comes back, but you know, I mean, there's more drills now, there's more—we pretend we're at Threatcon Delta [official designation that a terrorist attack has occurred or is likely to occur] now, or Forcecon [force reconnaissance], depending on how you call it.

So, we do more drills like that; I think we have more first responders now. I do think that has changed a lot. And I did notice this time when I was back—now, I wasn't back as military this last month, but I was back as an American, and I was watching German news. The Germans don't hold us in real high regard, for where we are as far as Iraq and Afghanistan right now. They're not real thrilled with us. It was just—that was kind of amazing to watch their news from their perspective about us, you know. That was—I did find, a couple of times in a couple of the cities I was in, that there was kind of an attitude, even—well, I was down in Bavaria most of the time I was there, and I speak German, not Bavarian, and it's two different languages, so I had a hard time. But even when I could speak to them, there was—I think a little bit more attitude. [sneezes] Excuse me. I think there was a little bit more attitude than before.

TS: How did—what did you feel about that?

HB: [pause] I think I can understand it, you know. I really—I don't—personally, I don't think we're anywhere closer now than we were eight years ago.

TS: Closer—in what way do you mean that?

HB: Well, I don't think we're any closer to doing whatever it is our government wants to accomplish, you know. I'm not sure they know what they want to accomplish. I just don't. Now, my husband and my daughter may tell you there's a difference, I didn't deploy. They may tell you there's a difference in attitude, and I know we're doing a lot of good work over there, you know, we are. That, I do know, I know that—you know, especially kids that were three, four, five years old now, when we first went over there, are now teenagers and they're starting to come up and they're going to start making decisions. They have a different outlook on us now, because they've probably been assisted by the Americans. They probably have things now that they would not have had before, because of the Americans. So, I mean, that's a time thing, and I know we are making changes there, but haven't caught any more bad guys. You know, are we any closer? I don't know, you know, I don't know. And I think that's where the Germans see us, too. But they're still—Germans are still sending soldiers down there, also, so that's a good thing. [chuckles]

TS: That's true. So, then—so you came back—you came back about like almost a year, I guess, after 9/11, back to Arizona, you have a little bit of culture shock, when you get back into—

HB: Yes.

TS: How—then—so what kind of job—you changed jobs?

HB: Right.

TS: Okay, tell me about that.

HB: Well, when I changed, the school, the AIT that I went to was actually at Fort Huachuca in Arizona, so we didn't have to move, which was a good thing because that school's a year long. And then once I finished the school, I actually was assigned right to Fort Huachuca, so I didn't leave—I didn't leave the post, you know, I just went to another unit where I was responsible for doing special repair of things, so we were doing a lot of—like circuit card repair from computers and from different intelligence systems, we were doing computer repair, some—we were just finishing up our radar stuff, we were just finishing that up. We did all the component-level stuff, you know—if you had to solder it under a forty-time microscope, we were the ones that got it, you know, that's just how we fixed it. I worked on some really cool equipment that's no longer in the army's inventory, you know, tilkey[?] 17 and—that was actually pretty fun.

Then, a lot of computer—a lot of network, I was actually moved over to a network administrator position, where I was responsible for eighty-nine computers and a

hundred users, so I had that opportunity to do that, and that's when I had—that's when I had some of my best soldiers, in there—in that section. I just had a group of young guys that were just jokesters. Got the job done, needed to do—you know, did what needed to be done, but when they were done—because of course, now, these are all—we're doing computer network administration, these are all guys that are nineteen, twenty years old, that have—that know nothing other than computers. So, they could get the job done real fast, you know. Computer wizards, so they'd finish their job and then they were off joking—in jokester land, you know.

TS: Right.

HB: So, they were—

TS: That's a question that I should ask you about. Sometimes military humor is [pause] different.

HB: It's warped. [chuckles]

TS: Okay, warped. Can you give any examples of some experiences you've had with military humor?

HB: Probably not. [laughs]

TS: Not that you want to talk about?

HB: Not that I probably want to get my friend in trouble. I'm just—no, I mean, I had—I had friends—one of my best friends, who happens to be a guy, it is to the point—it was actually to the point where, if he called my house my husband would say, "Hey, your boyfriend's on the line," or if I called his house, his wife would say, "Hey, your girlfriend's on the line," you know.

Then, when he went to warrant officer school and I was still at Huachuca, everybody was like oh—even my first timers[?], it was like "When did you have surgery to get medically—surgically separated from each other?!" [both chuckle] But he would do crazy things like, you know, he would come home—come back from the chow hall after we'd had breakfast, and he'd put fruit in the shape of a face on my chair, and he'd put, like, a note on there that says "Gonzo says sit down"; things like that, you know, because we're quite interesting. But we had—oh, and of course I have idiot friends.

TS: You have what friends?

HB: Idiot friends.

TS: Oh, okay. [chuckles]

HB: You know, that, they would say, “Hey, let’s see if this’ll burn.” You know, we’re talking hand sanitizer gel.

And I’m like, “Of course it’s going to burn, it’s like a hundred percent alcohol. So, one of my friends shook a—a whole bunch on my desk. On my desk! Just this whole pile of it, and he lights it up, and it—poof! And it goes up in flames.

Sergeant major sees the smoke from the other side of the shop, he’s like “What are you guys doing back here?”

And he’s—my friend’s like, “Nothing!” Smoke’s going all over the place; there’s black smoke everywhere.

We’re like, “Nothing, nothing sergeant major, no, go!” [both chuckle] You know, we caused things like that all the time. He actually was the same guy who caught his hand on fire because he wanted to see if it was flammable; put hand gel on his hands and then lit them, we’re like “Yes, dummy, it’s flammable.”

TS: Oh, geez.

HB: You know, but—my second MOS, my—as a 33, have a tendency to have extremely intelligent people in this MOS, because of what we do, but very few of them have common sense, you know. They’re idiots, they really are. But they’re fun idiots, you know.

TS: Now, you had started to tell me a little bit about when you went over to Korea and you were on the DMZ [Korean Demilitarized Zone], do you want to talk about that? Whatever you can mention about that, I guess?

HB: Yes, I can do that. I actually—my barracks room in my unit was actually located at Camp Humphreys, which is in Pyeongtaek, just south of Osan Air Base. However, after being there for a couple of months, I actually moved. I was actually moved up to the DMZ and I lived on an island called Ganghwa, called Ganghwa Island. It’s actually off the peninsula of Korea. Very close to North Korea, lived on a mountaintop, it was me and my three soldiers. We had our own cook up there, and we had a very small Korean guard force for our perimeter. Down at the base of our mountain, we had South Korean marines; was a South Korean marine compound. I had—there’s a few dets [detachments]—we call them dets. There’s a few dets like that on North Korea, and our—we had an intelligence systems up there, in what we call skiff [slang for SCIF or Sensitive Compartmented Information Facility], and our sole purpose up there was to make sure that that equipment stayed running and to defend the skiff, you know, should anything happen. That was—that was our sole purpose for living up there, and the four of us lived up there twenty-four/seven and that’s what we did, and in fact, when my husband came over to visit, we were actually driving up there and we were coming across the bridge that brings us onto the island, and it—it was like one of the very few clear days in Korea, and we could see about twenty-five miles.

And I said, “You see those antennas up on top of that mountain?”

And he goes, “Yes.”

And I said, “That’s where we’re going.”

He says, "Holy cow, you do live on a mountaintop."

I said, "I told you I did." Because usually when I'd say "mountain" they'd say, you know, okay, maybe trees around or something. We had antennas up there, so they had to be, you know, open. I had the worst cook on all the three decks; I had the worst one. He was terrible. But that's all right, I lost weight up there. We had our own little gym. Ours was unique in the fact that we had another building inside of my perimeter that actually had fourteen South Koreans that lived in there, soldiers, and a sergeant major who also—they kind of quasi fell under my charge, and their building was actually built while I was there, their new building. They had an old building that was torn down and the new building went up. They were actually the South Korean equivalent of NSA [National Security Agency]. They were DSA [Defense Security Agency] and they—that's what they did. I know they had a lot of equipment in there and I know they had a lot of operators in there. What they did do, I have no idea.

And I was like "I've got enough to worry about with my own, I don't care what you guys are doing," you know. And it took them a while to get used to me because the—culturally, the Koreans are not used to having women in charge, and so for me to be in charge of something of that magnitude was—once they got used to me, we—of course we always had to—we could leave the mountain as long as we had one person that stayed up there in case equipment broke. So, that gave us an opportunity to really train and do things with our South Korean counterparts at the bottom of the mountain, so we did as much as we could with them; we did a lot of training. Once they saw that, you know what, when I was out there training with them, you know, we're out there playing with mortars and we're out there running around in the woods and we're out there—and I'm right there with them and I'm beating them on the back of the Kevlar because they're running too slow, you know, then I was okay; it was okay with them. But the younger ones, now, the older men, they never did get used to that. They never did, but I'd say maybe twenty-five and below, they did. Not so much for the older ones, and that was fine, I understood, you know, that's—that's their culture.

TS: Just generationally—

HB: Yes, that's their generational thing, and I noticed that when I would drive through town—sometimes I would drive the Humvee, sometimes I would let one of my soldiers drive. Now, in Korea, especially in their military, the boss always sits in the front passenger seat, with usually the lowest ranking driving. So, when I would sit—it was quite strange. You never see a woman driving a man in Korea, either, I never—the whole time I was there, ever saw that. But I was going down the hill, and I was in the Humvee in the passenger seat, I would get one look. If I was driving the Humvee, I'd get two different looks. The older people would look at me like, "Wow, she's driving."

The younger people, especially the girls, would look at me like, "Wow, she's driving, maybe someday I can do that." You know, I would get that look. So, I would get different—we were on very good terms with the mayor of Ganghwa, and that's where all of the ginseng—all of the South Korean ginseng comes from that island. So, we were—I mean, they all knew us, they all knew where we lived, they watched us—they watched as we did evacuation drills, and we always did a daytime and a nighttime one. But one time

we decided to do three of them. We never did more than two in a day, but one time we decided to do three in a day. And that third one, those people—those residents of that island actually thought something was wrong, because we never do three.

TS: Right.

HB: And we did three that day, you know, and we're like "No, there's nothing wrong, it's okay." [chuckles]

TS: Changed the patterns.

HB: Yes, we changed it, and I didn't realize how close they actually do watch us until—until that day. And I was like, wow. And that was—that was a good time, I mean, I got to—it was a good thing I had good soldiers, because you know, when you're living with soldiers twenty-four/seven and you're looking at them all the time, you know, you're just like [makes tired noise], you know. Did PT with them up there, you know, we did everything. And I do a lot of knitting and crocheting, and I was doing a lot of knitting and I—especially when I was stressed, I'd pick up my knitting needles and I'd start knitting, and they told me, they were like "Sergeant Brott, you just calm down so much when you start doing that."

Well, I made one a hat. And—well, I made a hat, and one of my soldiers said, "Oh, Sergeant, I want one of those."

I said, "You want one, you got to make it." So, next thing I know, I've got three of these young soldiers sitting here knitting and crocheting hats for themselves. [laughs]

TS: That's pretty funny.

HB: It was—I'm so glad none of my superiors walked in and saw that, because they probably just would have been like, "What in the world?" But they were all relaxed, you know, and it was a very calm place to work, we didn't—it was very good. Because it's sort of hard; interaction with them twenty-four/seven. Are you their boss, or are you their friend because you live with them, you know? You don't want to be their boss too hard, because you do live with them, but you don't want to be their friend, because you are their boss. That's a hard call.

TS: Well, did you—if you're—since you're on the DMZ, and this would have been in two thousand and—

HB: Seven.

TS: Seven, okay. So, was there a lot of tension going on? I mean, as far as politically and militarily?



HB: Not really, it was pretty calm. South Korea was getting ready to have their elections in December of that year. The North Koreans watched us, we knew they watched us, just as we watched them, you know.

TS: You weren't afraid at all?

HB: No, no, never. Never was afraid. I don't know why. It was absolutely gorgeous up there, too, I don't know, maybe that had something to do with it. Because I was surrounded by the Yellow Sea, it was absolutely gorgeous, but—no. Now, one of the other dets, I might have thought a little bit different, but not ours.

TS: No?

HB: No. It was—now, about six—six or seven months after I left, I actually called their boss over there, you know, because that's when some of the shenanigans started going on over there, and I—so I called my boss and I'm like, "Hey, what's going on, did you guys evacuate the dets yet?"

And they're like, "No, not yet." So, you know. And they won't; they won't evacuate. In fact, I told my husband since he's been up there with me, these—these war games that we're playing last week—

TS: Right.

HB: --in the carrier that they were going to put, and I said, "You know, if you were standing where I lived and you looked off to about eight o'clock, that's about where that carrier was going to go, and that's how close it was going to be. Still in international waters, but it would have been close."

And he's like, "Whoa, that's war games."

Like, well, that's why they moved it. [chuckles]

[This is in reference to joint U.S.-Korea naval exercises conducted in July 2010.]

TS: Yes, that's true. Well, let me ask you, then, so you—it's not much longer that you're in, then, right?

HB: No, I came back from Korea in December of '07 and I was out by May.

TS: So, how did you—why was it that you got out?

HB: I was diagnosed with a condition called—the older doctors call it RSD, which is reflexive sympathetic disorder, the younger doctors call it complex regional pain syndrome, which is CRPS. My husband calls it craps. And it has affected my foot; it's nerve damage. I got to a point where I couldn't wear boots anymore, I couldn't—I couldn't hardly get dressed anymore. I couldn't run, I couldn't do a lot of things anymore, and I was actually—it was debilitating. I was wearing a Fentanyl patch, which—Fentanyl is stronger than morphine, it's pretty—it's pretty rough stuff. I was taking a lot of pills just to control pain so I could

live normally, so I came back to the States and I was medically—I went through medical board and separated in May of '08. And that—

TS: Was that something that you wanted to do?

HB: I was kind of tossed. I knew I still has some more good years left. The army kept telling me I wasn't fixable and I didn't quite buy that, and I knew I had good years left, but on the other hand I couldn't be one hundred percent of a leader that I had been, and I couldn't lead at a hundred percent. So, if I couldn't lead at a hundred percent, I didn't want to lead at all. Because it wasn't—I always lived by the philosophy, I would never ask my soldiers to do something either I hadn't done or wasn't willing to do myself, and I usually tried to be right next to them doing it, and I was at a point where I couldn't; physically could not do it. And so that was a hard fence—that was a hard fence for me to straddle, it really was, you know. Better for the army that I didn't stay in at that point, but I wasn't ready to give up, at the same time. That's where I ended up at, so.

TS: How's it been since you got out?

HB: Well, they told me I wasn't fixable and I'd never run again, and I've been having injections in my spine of blocks—nerve blocks in my spine. I'm running again. I was supposed to actually run a 10K, but I had to go to Germany. I'd like to do a half marathon at the end of the year. I still have pain, but as long as I keep up on those injections every few months, then I don't have the pain, so. I could have—I could have finished it out. But that's all right, you know, hindsight is always 20-20.

TS: Right.

HB: It really is, and I can't fault the folks that said, "You're done." We have people coming back from Iraq and Afghanistan in a lot worse shape than I am, so—and getting treated a lot worse than I did, so I can't—I can't fault the people that made that decision.

TS: Yes. Well, there's a couple questions that I wanted to ask you that we kind of—we talked about a little bit, but I want to ask you a little bit more directly. At what point—so, when you say you wanted to stay in, did you—what point did you think about, when you went back in, did you think about making it a career then, or?

HB: Yes, I think when I came back in the second time, I knew—I knew I was going to stay in, at that point. I was kind of counting the years off, going, "Wow, I went through this many years here and it didn't seem like very long," you know, and then of course you go to one duty station, and you're like, "Well, let me just finish this duty station out."  
And then the army comes and says, "You're going to go to Germany,"  
And we're like, "Shoot, we can't give up the chance to go to Germany" so you know, by this time, you're going over ten years and you're going "Might as well just stay in now," you know. [laughs]

TS: Right, that ten year mark seems to be a—

HB: Sure.

TS: --demarcation line for a lot of people.

HB: That's right. So, you know, and at that point, you're like, "Well, you know, I've got pay, I know I'm going to have a place to live, I know my kids are going to have, you know, medical insurance, so might as well stay. It's not killing me, you know."

TS: You had said at the beginning—almost at the very beginning, how you were—you were pretty independent because of the way—your background and how you grew up and things like that.

HB: Yes.

TS: Do you think that the military made you more independent or, you know, changed—how do you think it affected you, being in the military?

HB: Well, having been raised as an only child, only children don't share well, at all. I share a little bit better now. [laughing]

TS: A little better?

HB: Not the best, but a little bit.

TS: Yes.

HB: I think—it made me think of the greater good, when I would go to think things out, and—I just didn't think near-term. I now had to think of our long term, and see, okay, what are the true repercussions of, you know, okay, granted it might work now, but really, what's it going to look like three months down the road, is this going to work? I think I became a critical thinker in the—in the military. I think the army—the army taught me to be a critical thinker, I think.

TS: Interesting.

HB: Yes.

TS: The different eras that you were in, did you consider yourself a pioneer at all, in any of those eras?

HB: I think that, for my start in the navy, I don't know if I considered myself a pioneer. I know I was doing things that most women weren't doing, you know, most women were not flying every day, you know. Most women did not wear a flight suit. I would like to

think that because of my attitude towards my job and the way I interacted with the guys that I was working with, I would like to think I made them more receptive to working with women in the future. I don't know if I did or not, but I'd like to think I did, you know. I know—my husband's unit, I made—affected his unit, because you know, it was just right next door to mine, and I know I made a change in his, because he was in an all-men unit, and so I would go in there and—

TS: You had some influence on his unit?

HB: I think so, on his people, yes.

TS: We've talked about how, you know, two of your daughters—well, one of your daughters has been in and out of the army and then you have another daughter in the navy.

HB: In the navy.

TS: So, would you—did you—how did they come to decide to go in the military?

HB: Samantha, my youngest one, she always—she—this little girl was a funny little girl. Freshman year of high school, she joins the ROTC [JROTC]. She comes home about three weeks into freshman year, and she says, "I'm going to be the battalion commander when I'm a senior."

Well, you know, her daddy and I are like, "Yeah, right, this probably won't last a year." Sure enough, she was battalion commander her senior year of high school, you know. I think she's known early that that's what she wanted to do. I think maybe from nine or ten years old, I think she's known that that's what she was going to do. Ashley, I'm not sure, you know. She was at Project Challenge, and like I said, that's kind of a military academy, somewhat. And so she was—she had spent six months living in military environment and she knew that her daddy and I had both been military, of course I was still active duty at the time. So, I think she knew what good it could do, you know.

She ended up in—and my other one, she—she's actually a nursing student, who has said, "Military is not really for me, but might be able to make it work as a navy nurse."

And you know, of course her daddy and I are like, "It's not for everybody, it's not—and if it's not for you," Which, we don't think it is for her at all, you know, that's just not her. So, we're like, "If it's not for you, don't go that route," you know. So.

TS: Yes.

HB: But my youngest one, she'll probably die in the navy. Probably be a hundred and some in the navy.

TS: [chuckles] Well, let me ask you what you think, with everything that we have going on—like I say, you've touched on a few of these things. But what—we're in the Iraq war,

in Afghanistan, and so when you hear—because patriotism is something that's kind of bandied about. What does patriotism mean to you?

HB: Patriotism, to me. Man. I think it is doing—I think it is doing what is the best, not just for your country, but for your local community. If you live in a—if you live in a small town, what is the best to keep that small town afloat? What can you do to make that a better place, instead of letting it get run down? I don't think—I don't think patriotism has to be on a national level, I think you can show your patriotism in just very, very minor ways that effect other people. Whether it be even just, I don't know, making blankets for the homeless people, even, or finding a way to help out the sick babies or your neighbor that maybe—maybe you've got a handicapped neighbor you need to go to the store for because they can't go themselves. You know, anything you can do to make even your local community a better place, which, if your local community is better, it gets better on the state level, it gets better on the federal level. That's how I see it.

TS: Now, do you think that your time in the military has, like, changed your life at all?

HB: I think it—yes, I couldn't imagine half the things that I've done. I couldn't imagine doing them, had I not been in the military. I really couldn't. And I think it's made me more open-minded, it's made me think more. I think it's assisted—this might sound kind of crazy, but I think it's helped me raise better children, even.

TS: Why do you think that?

HB: A lot of—it gave me an extra sense of direction. And so, in me having that sense of direction, I'm able to show my children that sense of direction, also. And I think that had a lot to do with it. You know, it kind of all fits together real funky, but—[chuckles] in my twisted little mind, it really works.

TS: Well, we talked about quite a lot. Is there anything that we haven't talked about that you wanted to mention? An experience or something.

HB: No, I don't—no, because unfortunately, all my good experiences, I have to keep to myself. Even my family doesn't know them. [laughs]

TS: Because of their classified nature and you can't—

HB: That's right.

TS: Okay. Well, thank you very much.

HB: You're welcome!

TS: It's been a pleasure talking with you.

HB: Well, thank you.

TS: I think we're going to talk to Ashley, here, in a little bit.

HB: Okay.

TS: So, okay. Well, I'll shut it off, then.

[End of Interview]