

## **WOMEN VETERANS HISTORICAL PROJECT**

### **ORAL HISTORY COLLECTION**

INTERVIEWEE: Tavia India Gilmore Brightwell

INTERVIEWER: Therese Strohmer

DATE: October 31, 2012

[Begin Interview]

TS: Today is October 31, 2012; it's Halloween. My name is Therese Strohmer and I'm at the University of North Carolina in Greensboro to conduct an oral history interview for the Women Veterans Historical Collection at the University of North Carolina of Greensboro. Tavia, could you state your name the way you would like it to be on your collection?

TIGB: Yes, my name is Tavia India Gilmore Brightwell.

TS: Okay. Well, Tavia, why don't we start off by having you tell me when and where you were born?

TIGB: Okay. I was born here in Winston-Salem, North Carolina on December 21, 1985.

TS: Nineteen eighty-five. And—Now, do you have a—any siblings?

TIGB: I do. I have one younger brother. His name is Adrian Thompson.

TS: Okay, and how about your folks?

TIGB: It's just my mom, pretty much.

TS: Just your mom.

TIGB: Yes, her name is Priscilla.

TS: Okay.

TIGB: And we're all from Winston-Salem.

TS: Is that right?

TIGB: Yes.

TS: So, what was it like growing up in Winston-Salem?

TIGB: It was interesting, I guess. I don't know. We moved to California for a year when I was ten, so I guess that's the only thing, really, I could use to contrast, or compare it to, but I mean, Winston is home and that's—that's really what I know. It was nice. It was quiet. We didn't have, you know, like, a big lavish lifestyle or anything like that, but we also weren't in the slums; we were definitely middle class. We had some times where, of course, life was hard. We moved back home from California in '95 or '96, and we actually ended up living in a shelter for a couple months because we had nowhere else to go, and you know, family that you think you can call on all of sudden isn't there and all that, so went through that. Then my mom, of course, she didn't let us really feel the effects of that so she carried a lot on her back, and we picked up from there and trotted on along.

TS: What did your mom do for a living?

TIGB: For a living? Well, when we came back she had just gotten her certification as a CNA [certified nursing assistant].

TS: Oh, okay.

TIGB: Yes. So, she was a certified nurse's assistant, and before that she pretty much worked in, like, day cares and stuff like that.

TS: Now, did—where in California did you guys—

TIGB: We lived in Lakewood, California.

TS: Where's that, about?

TIGB: It's, maybe, twenty minutes away from Long Beach.

TS: Oh, okay. And then, when—growing up in Winston-Salem did you live, like, in the city, in the suburbs, rural area?

TIGB: We lived in the city.

TS: In the city?

TIGB: Pretty much, yes. We lived—for the majority of my life we lived in the Country Club area—Country Club Road area, and then we moved out towards, like, University Parkway area. But the majority of my time was spent over on the western side, I guess, of Winston; Jamestown, Country Club.

TS: What did you do for fun?

TIGB: [chuckles] Played outside with friends. I don't know, it was before video games were really cool.

TS: Right.

TIGB: I was, kind of, a tomboy, I guess you could say. Most of my friends were guys, so I didn't really get a chance to play, like, make-up and Barbie doll and all that kind of stuff. And then when my brother was coming up it was the two of us all the time and we would play, like, mad scientist games and—

TS: How do you do that? How do you play a mad scientist game?

TIGB: Well, there were, like, actual games. My mom bought us this—like a—like a viewer thingy where you could go and view, like, specimens, and stuff, underneath the glass, you know.

TS: Like a microscope?

TIGB: Underneath the lens—Sorry, a microscope, thank you. [chuckles] She bought us one of those and we would be weird and kill bugs and put it on slides and put it underneath light, and do stuff like that. And I was into the Creepy Crawler games and—you never heard of Creepy Crawlers?

TS: No.

TIGB: It's—you know what the Easy-Bake Oven is?

TS: Yes, I do know what that is. [chuckles]

TIGB: Okay. I had an Easy-Bake Oven which was very, very rarely used. Instead I would play with my brother's toys and Creepy Crawlers was kind of the same thing as an Easy-Bake Oven except they were Creepy Crawlers and you make these gel-looking bugs, but you couldn't eat them.

TS: Okay.

TIGB: They were just bugs that you baked in the little—

TS: Make-believe bugs?

TIGB: Yes.

TS: Okay.

TIGB: And you baked them the same way you did in the Easy-Bake Oven. [chuckles]

TS: No, I never heard of that. That sounds, kind of, fun. All right, so did you—how did you like school?

TIGB: I loved school.

TS: Yes?

TIGB: Absolutely loved school.

TS: Where did you go to school at?

TIGB: Elementary school, I went to South Fork Elementary [School]. Middle school, I went to Hanes Academic Academy. I guess I should back up because in fifth grade is when we moved out to California, and I went to Palms Elementary School out there in Lakewood, and then when we came back—I don't know, The school systems were on two different times, you know?

TS: Oh, between California and North Carolina? Okay.

TIGB: Right. Right. And so, when I came back here I had already finished fifth grade out there. When I came back here they said it didn't trans—credits or whatever didn't transfer, or however that works, so I had to finish out fifth grade again back at South Fork.

So, anyway, left from there, went to Hanes Academic Academy, graduated from there and went to [Richard J.] Reynolds High School [now the Richard J. Reynolds Magnet School for the Visual and Performing Arts].

TS: Okay. And so, did you have, like, a favorite teacher, favorite subject; anything like that?

TIGB: In high school?

TS: Either; elementary or high school.

TIGB: Elementary school, my favorite teacher was my fourth grade teacher, Mrs. Freeman. She—she was just awesome, I don't know. I just remember her.

TS: What was so awesome about her?

TIGB: I don't know. She, just, was very motherly but stern at the same time, and I don't know, like, where there were a lot of other teachers who—you could tell they were, kind of, being run over by their—you know, the kids in their class, and then you had the other teachers who were just really, really mean, you know, acting, and she was kind of in the middle. So, it was really great.

But my absolute favorite teacher—there's two, in high school, and they were two English teachers; my eleventh grade teacher, Mrs. Powers, and my senior teacher, Mrs. Oakley. The two of them, I look up to a lot. Just their morals and their teaching, the way they teach and their ethics and stuff is just—and just as people, I don't know. They accept everybody, they never showed any sense of a bias or hate or discontent toward any group of individuals, you know. I just really, really liked their teaching style, especially my senior teacher; she was awesome. Hers—and it may be because it was senior year—

TS: Which one was this?

TIGB: Mrs. Oakley.

TS: Okay.

TIGB: The way she taught; she would put things on, like, on a real life level. So, she would always try to incorporate real life situations into her teaching English. And I loved that because it wasn't just like, "Oh, God, here we go. Another day in a classroom. Okay, turn to this page," blah blah blah. She would talk to us like normal human beings, you know what I mean? And she would put us—she treated us like adults, you know. In high school she treated us like adults. She tried to, I guess, shape us for getting ready for being out of—being out of high school; possibly being on our own.

TS: Well, so now—I mean, now—we talked before I turned the tape on and you said you're majoring in English.

TIGB: Yes.

TS: Did they have—did these two teachers have any influence on that?

TIGB: Yes, definitely. I knew that I wanted to do something where I was helping people, and when I came here the first time in 2004 I was pre-med and I wanted to be a cardiac surgeon. And then after I joined the military, right before I got out everybody's like, "So, what are you going to go back to school for?"

And I kept thinking about the, you know, pre-med thing and then I said, "No, I don't think that's where I—what I want to do. It's not the path I'm supposed to go down." Then I realized I wanted to teach.

They're like, "What are you going to teach?"

And I thought, "I love English." Like, I love reading; I love novels; I love analyzing texts, and stuff like that, and finding deeper meanings and stuff, and then I thought about Mrs. Oakley. I'm like, "I want to be like her." [chuckles]

TS: So, do you, kind of, see them as role models—

TIGB: Yes.

TS: —to how you would shape your own way of teaching.

TIGB: Yes, absolutely; absolutely. And I mean, you know, there were other really great teachers as well, but those—the two of them, Mrs. Powers and Mrs. Oakley, they definitely stick out all the time in my mind.

TS: Do they know you're in this program here?

TIGB: Yes, they do. I talk to Mrs. Oakley not as much as I should [chuckles] or I would like to, but we are in communication, you know, some.

TS: That's great. That's great. So, you really liked school, then?

TIGB: Yes, I loved school.

TS: Especially English.

TIGB: Especially English.

TS: Did you participate in any kind of extracurricular activities?

TIGB: In school?

TS: Yes.

TIGB: I did. Nothing that was, like, literature based. I actually don't remember if we had anything that was like that. We had German club and different academic teams and stuff. I don't remember anything that was primarily literature based.

I did RGC, which is the Reynolds Girls' Club; it's a service club. I was in Crosby Scholars [a college access program designed to prepare students academically and financially for college]. I was in the marching band. My ninth grade year—

TS: What did you play in the band?

TIGB: I played the clarinet. My ninth grade year I actually played my instrument, and then tenth through twelfth grade I was on the flag team; I was in color guard; good times. I did a lot of stuff. [chuckles] I did jazz band for a little bit. I did orchestra for—a couple times; a couple performances after school. I was in chorus and dance. I did all the musicals every year I was there.

TS: "Did" as in played in them or acted in them?

TIGB: No, as in acted in them.

TS: Oh, yes?

TIGB: Yes.

TS: What was your favorite one?

TIGB: Probably *Cinderella*.

TS: Yes? What part did you have?

TIGB: I wasn't actually, like, a spoken word character. I was chorus, I guess you could say.

TS: Okay.

TIGB: So, I was a dancer, typically, in all them.

TS: Neat.

TIGB: Yes, that was awesome just because of the costumes, and it was just so lively, and it was—it was great, great, great show; loved that one.

TS: Do you still do stuff like that?

TIGB: Yes, I do. Not so much musicals but I actually do some—I do some extras acting on the side now. I've been doing that for a little over a year. I like it a lot.

TS: Where do you it at? Just different places or a civic center or something like that?

TIGB: Well, no, I have an agent, and so she finds different jobs—

TS: Oh, really? Cool.

TIGB: —yes, and then I find stuff online on my own. I've been on *Homeland* a couple times for the second season, and then there's a new show coming out called *Banshee*.

TS: Okay.

TIGB: It's coming out in January next year. I've been on—I was—I've done that a couple times. I've done a few student films here at UNCG [University of North Carolina at Greensboro]. I actually have another one this Sunday.



TS: Neat!

TIGB: Filming this Sunday, yes.

TS: That's pretty cool.

TIGB: Yay!

TS: That's pretty cool. Well—So, as you're growing up—

TIGB: Yes.

TS: —and as you're going to school and—are you thinking about, like, what possibilities you had for your future?

TIGB: Yes, I thought about joining the army at one point in time. I thought about joining the navy. I thought about just getting out of high school and working and—you know, for a couple years. I knew for a fact I wanted to be a doctor. Since I was seven I'd always said I wanted to be a doctor.

TS: Why?

TIGB: Because I really liked helping people. Like, that's when—I'm sorry—that's when my brother was born; was when I was seven years old. And so, I used to help my mom all the time with him, and I don't—I don't know why I [chuckles], I just—I was like, [high child-like voice] “I want to be a doctor.” And I stuck with that, so every time my mom would get sick I would try to come up with something, you know, to help make her feel better. “Here's the medicine. Here, let me go make you something.” It would be like some kind of weird looking mud pie. [both chuckle] I totally wanted to be a doctor. And then, of course, you know, things change, ideas change, and you get introduced to so many other things in life and you're like, “Hmm, maybe I could be good at that. Maybe I'd like to do that instead, or this instead; that and that.”

I worked at the movie theater for a really long time; for, like, six years. Being there, I guess I fell more in love with movies and I was like, “Oh, maybe I should be an actress.”

And then everybody's like, “Oh, you should do something that's more realistic,” and all this and that. So, like I said, I came here to UNCG in 2004, pre-med. I didn't stay, obviously. I left after, like, a month or two. I just—I wasn't ready; I was prepared.

TS: Wasn't ready for school?

TIGB: I wasn't ready for school.

TS: Okay.

TIGB: I just felt completely overwhelmed. I wasn't, you know—And so, I left and I said I was going to take a semester to a year off just so I could figure out what it was I wanted to do, whether pre-med was me or not, because I wasn't—I was acing lab classes but I wasn't doing very well in the lecture portions. So, then I had to go back and reassess and think whether that was the path I was really supposed to be on or not. A semester turned into a year; a year turned into another year.

TS: What were you doing in the meantime?

TIGB: In the meantime I attempted to go to Forsyth—Forsyth Tech Community College and that—I don't want to say anything to blemish the school [chuckles] but it was not a good experience, so I did not stay. And instead I started working full time at the movies, and then I had a second job. I worked at Lowe's Hardware for a long time and I stopped working there and was back at the movies full time. And then I—excuse me—I picked up another job at Lowes Foods. Apparently I have something for Lowe's. [chuckles]

Started working at Lowe's Foods and around that time that's when my then-boyfriend was thinking about joining the Marine Corps. So, I would go with him to talk to his recruiter and go through all that stuff, and the recruiter asked me what I was doing with my life. At the time I was actually admitted into Appalachian State [University].

TS: Okay.

TIGB: I had already gone to the registration stuff, the orientation stuff, I was registering for my classes and all that. I literally had one week before I had to leave for band camp and Shane's[?] recruiter approached me and he's like, "Hey, let me talk to you for a minute."

And I'm like, "No, no, no. I'm not interested, really. I'm going to school," you know, "This is what I want to do."

And he's like, "What are you going to school for?" I told him, at the time it was still pre-med, and he's like, "Why are you leaving so soon? I heard you—I heard you tell Shane you were leaving next week," dah dah dah.

I said, "Well, I'm going to band camp."

He goes, "Oh, you're in the marching band?"

I said, “Well, I do play, and yes, I’m going to be in their marching band.” So anyway, he starts telling me about how the Marine Corps has a marching band and how I could get this and I could do that, and I could travel here and travel there, and blah blah blah. And I’m like, “Yes, that sounds really good but I don’t think that’s what I want to do. Shane is the one who wants to join. I don’t want to join.”

So, then he started with the whole, “Aren’t you guys getting married?”

And I said, “Well, yes, we are.” At the time we were engaged. I said, “Yes, we are getting married.”

He goes, “Well, what if he gets stationed, you know, on the East Coast of North Carolina and you’re in school all the way on the other side of North Carolina up in the mountains?”

I thought, “Well, man, that does, kind of, suck.”

He goes, “Or, they might not even care and they could send him all the way to Hawaii or they could send him all the way the Japan and you’re still stuck here in North Carolina. Then what?”

And I’m like, “Oh my God.” So, now I’m starting to, you know, get scared. I’m like, “Oh my God. What should I do?” I went ahead and decided to meet with a marching band recruiter. I got flaked on twice.

TS: What do you mean?

TIGB: Like, I had an audition appointment set up twice and both times he just, kind of, flaked on me; didn’t show up.

TS: Didn’t show up?

TIGB: Right, he didn’t show up and the other time he’s like, “Oh, we need to reschedule.”

I’m like, “Okay.”

So, go to reschedule and he’s like, “I’ll give you a call back;” never called me back.

So, I’m like, “I’m done with this. This is totally a sign I’m not supposed to do this.”

And the recruiter’s like, “No, no, no. I’m sure there’s something we can find for you that you’ll like.” [chuckles] And it started from there.

He sits me down in the office and we start going through the notebook—

TS: Right.

TIGB: —of all the different MOSs [military occupational specialty] and I told him that I didn't want to be doing anything that was, like, super crazy intense, just because I wasn't, like, the military person. I didn't feel like, at the time, that I was the military person, you know. I was the book—the book kid, and—

TS: So did you have, like, some preconceived notion of what a military person would be like in the Marine Corps?

TIGB: Yes, yes. I had a—

TS: What was that, like, view that you had?

TIGB: The view that I had was, just, this hardcore, like, super macho person, like, ready to bite your head off, you know. And then I honestly never really—like seriously, looking back now, I've always seen females in the navy, the army, and, you know, the air force. I honest to God had never seen a female marine. I'm pretty sure I'd never seen a female marine before.

TS: Up to that point?

TIGB: Up to that point, yes. So, I never really had a—an idea of what a female marine would look like or be like, but I just didn't figure it would be me. [both chuckle]

TS: Well, let me ask you real quickly. You had said before you had thought about the service.

TIGB: Yes, and it was the army.

TS: The army?

TIGB: Yes, it was army; it was never the Marine Corps. The Marine Corps never once crossed my mind.

TS: Was the navy a consideration?

TIGB: I think maybe I looked at their website, but I was definitely, totally, into the army.

TS: Not the air force?

TIGB: No, not the air force.

TS: So, why didn't you join at that time when you were thinking about it?

TIGB: Well, because I talked to my mom about it and she cried and begged me not to do it.

TS: Okay.

TIGB: So, I didn't look any more into that. And I told her the only reason I was doing it was because they had a medical, you know, side and that's—at the time, like I said, I was doing pre-med so I was trying to advance myself there and all that. So, she's like, "Please, please don't do that. I'm sure you can find some other way," blah blah blah.

So then coming back to 2006, you know, push came to shove. I look at the book and we're looking at aviation stuff and I'm like, "Hmm, I think I could do that, that looks kind of interesting. I don't know." I'm still—I don't know, I don't know, and seriously, I, like, have a week before I leave for band camp.

He's like, "Well, how about this? You don't have to make any commitments right now." He's like, "Let's just go down to Charlotte and take the ASVAB [Armed Services Vocational Aptitude Battery]. Let's see how you do on the ASVAB," et cetera, et cetera.

Go down to Charlotte, take the ASVAB. I got a really—I got a decent score; high enough to do aviation—or be an aviation component. He's like, "See? Now you can do this, you can do that," blah blah bah. He goes, "Now you just need to pick from this list here."

So, I got my first choice, which was logs and records. I had no idea what the hell [chuckling] that really was going to be but it didn't sound too hard. So, that's what I got and, and then a couple months later I was being shipped off to Parris Island [South Carolina]. And I felt really bad because when I joined the DEP program, the delayed entry program, it—that wasn't necessarily, like, signing, saying, "Yes, I was going to go." That was just me being in the delayed entry program and I still—I was a candidate at the time.

So, they give you this little certificate, you know, and I took it and I laid it on my mom's bed and I went to work. I came back and she was sitting there boo-hooing and crying. She's like, "Please, why are you doing this? Why are you doing this?"

And I said, "Well, mom, it's too late now." I'm sorry, I'm going to cry.

TS: Aw.

TIGB: [crying] She's like, "Why are you doing this? I can't believe it. I thought you were going to go to school," and all this and that.

I'm like—whew—I'm like, "Well, I do want to go to school but I think this would be good too. I think this would be, you know, better and I can help with x, y, and z." Because then, of course, the recruiter starts talking money and all that, and the benefits; saying I would have been dual military; you know, being married and both in the military and all that. I just saw dollar signs and how I could help my mom out back at home, you know, because she was having some hard times, so that was a selling point for me, I guess, was how I could send money back home.

Anyways, so like I said, then I was getting ready to leave and found out my date and I actually asked her not to be there when I left. I went to Shane's mom's house because nobody was there, and I was like, "Come pick me up from this address, and we can go from—from there." I'd talked to my mom, of course, the whole way and told her—I said, "Please don't cry. I'm really sorry." I felt so guilty. I'm like, "I'm really sorry."

She's like, "It's okay. I know you'll be fine. I'm so proud of you," blah blah blah. She's like, "I'm just so scared."

TS: Was she worried about the war?

TIGB: Yes, she was worried about everything. [chuckles]

TS: Yes. Had you ever been away from home before?

TIGB: I had been on, like, trips and stuff, you know. My friend and I, we would take random trips to New York, or we'd go to Florida or something like that, but never anywhere outside the country, you know, where she couldn't readily come and get me or know what's going on at all times.

TS: So, how old were you when you—you signed up?

TIGB: When I joined I was twenty.

TS: Okay.

TIGB: Yes, I was twenty years old. I actually turned twenty-one in boot camp. That was—that was interesting. And they found out—the drill instructors found out it was my birthday. We were at the rifle range, and they always found ways to mess with you and do extra things, so when one of the recruits was like, "Hey, it's Sergeant Gilmore's birthday!"—it sucks to say luckily, but luckily I was on crutches at the time, because there was another girl that celebrated her birthday there and they were like—they pretty much made her go

outside in the sand pit for a really long time [chuckles] and make, what did they call them, like, powder cookies.

TS: What is that?

TIGB: That's where—you know, you're out there in the sandpit and you start sweating really hard and then they make you roll around in the sand so it sticks to you and now you're a powdered cookie—or sugar cookie. And yes, that's—that's—yes. [both laugh]

TS: So, you're in.

TIGB: I'm in.

TS: And was basic training—so, you went to Parris Island.

TIGB: Yes.

TS: Was basic training what you expected? Was it, like, hard emotionally or physically or anything like that?

TIGB: All of the above.

TS: It was hard?

TIGB: It was very hard. I watched the video that the recruiter, you know, gives you to see. I forget what it's called, but, you know, you're watching everybody roll up on the bus and there's, like, twenty-plus people on the bus and they're being yelled at to get on the yellow footsteps—or, yellow footprints and all that. Well, I didn't luck out with a bus of fifteen to twenty; there was a van of two; [chuckles] it was me and a male recruit. Oh, goodness.

TS: So, they gave you a lot more attention?

TIGB: Yes, exactly. And I—honest, I had no idea what I was thinking when I did this. I just—I guess it still hadn't dawned on me where I was, but it was pitch black dark; I don't even remember what time it was. As you know, when you're pulling up onto the island they make you put your head down so you can't see where you are; can't see what's around you.

TS: I didn't know that.

TIGB: Oh, yes, they make you put your head down. So, we pull up, we feel the van stop, and the door opens. Well, we hear that it's a drill instructor; it was a female. And so, she speaks really nicely to the driver and his wife, and she's like, "Thanks you guys. All right, you all have a good night," blah blah blah. And then she starts yelling at us to put our heads up. She's like, "Put your head up right now!"

And we look up at her and I can—oh my God, I'm so embarrassed. I laugh at it now because I can and I'm not afraid somebody's going to come in here and start screaming, but I looked up at her and I smiled and I said, "Hello." [laughs] I was like, "Hello," like that; like she was really going to extend her hand and be like, "Hi, welcome to Parris Island," like, yeah right. Oh my God, I did that and that was the worst idea ever. She just started barking and yelling at me, and then I started crying. And then she's like, "Get on my yellow footprints right now!" So, I got on the footprints, and the other guy is next me, and I guess maybe it was a nervous habit but I kept, like, licking my lips and doing this number; you know, where I was pulling my lips in my mouth. And she like, "If you lick your lips one more time," she goes, "you will regret it for the rest of your life." She's like, "Say, 'Ay, Ma'am'!"

And I'm like, "Ay, Ma'am!" you know? I'm, like, freaking out. So, like I said, there was just two of us, so more attention, like you said. And then we get a thousand and one different instructions, and all this stuff's just running through my head now and I'm like, "Oh my God. I'm really here. This is seriously happening. Oh my God. What—She just told me to do something ten seconds ago. Now I'm ten seconds late on it. Oh my God." She's yelling at me. She's in my face. She's spitting on me." Like, just through talking and yelling.

TS: Right.

TIGB: Like, oh my God. So, just total freak out mode. And we're there and, of course, you know, once we get inside to processing—excuse me—we still aren't called recruits. Well, I wasn't called a recruit; I was just called female. And there were, I don't know, ten, fifteen other individuals in there, and they had us separated on different sides; one side was females, the other side was males. We get in there and they have you fill out some paperwork and they make you put your head down.

So, there are no clocks anywhere. You have no idea what in the world's going on; where you are. We're sitting in there and they start yelling, "Hey female, come here!" And I'm, like, totally afraid to pick my head up, and they're like, "You; just got in here! Pick you're freaking head up right now!" Of course, they didn't say "freaking," but—so I decided to look up. "Get over here right now!" So, I go take off running and run over



there, and they make me fill up, like, these tiny little Gatorade bottles with water, but, of course, they were all full of Gatorade. So, I had to pour all the Gatorade out and then fill them up with water, and then I took it to them and they're like, "That's not good enough! Do it again!"

So, I had to go dump them all out, fill them back up again, and I'm like holding back tears thinking, "What have I just done?" Like, "Can I please go home? I don't want to do this anymore."

TS: As in, "What did I sign up for?"

TIGB: Yes, yes.

TS: Okay.

TIGB: And just absolute shock, you know? So then, once more people showed up then we started, kind of, getting a move on things. They let you make that first—it's like a jail, make your one phone call, you know, and it's sucked because you couldn't say anything other than what was posted on the inside of the little phone door. They have, like, a script that you to say, and you say, "Hello Sir," or "Hello Mom," whatever. "This is recruit such-and-such. I have made it to Parrish Island successfully—or safely. Please do not send me blah blah blah. I will contact you—" I don't remember the exact verbage but something along those lines.

TS: And so, you called your mom?

TIGB: Yes, of course. And I only told her—

TS: What was she saying on the other end?

TIGB: She's like, "Baby, I love you so much. I love you. I know you'll be fine. I love you," and I'm talking. And I'd already told—thankfully, Shane had already gone before me so he, kind of, gave me a heads up on what to, kind of, maybe, expect. So, I knew about the phone call and I told her about that, and so she's crying in the background which then made me start crying after I had finally gotten myself together.

And so, the drill instructors are walking—pacing back and forth making sure you're saying what you're supposed to say. They're like, "All right! Get off the phone! Get off! You're done! You're done! Get off the phone!"

I'm like, "Mom, I love you," you know, and hang up the phone. So, we go on from there and finish the processing and get our camis. You strip down from all your

civilian stuff and you put it in this brown paper bag that's then taped up and you don't see it anymore until the end of boot camp. Once you get to, like—I think it's—it's either a week or a couple of days before graduation and you finally get your brown bag back, and you go through and you're like, "Oh my gosh," you know, because you don't know any—you don't know regular tennis shoes or jeans for three whole months, so it was kind of like Christmas, [chuckles] and getting all your stuff back, yes. So, that was definitely a ride, and actually I'm in communication with a bunch of my platoon sisters, I guess you could say.

TS: Now, was it all females that went through together?

TIGB: Yes, they definitely keep the males and females separated. On Parris Island the females pretty much have their own side of the island and males are not allowed over there at all, period.

TS: But there's male drill instructors?

TIGB: Yes, there are male drill instructors, and they only come over if it's absolutely necessary, and they talk to the other drill instructors. And then—but there are never usually any recruit—like, male recruits; they don't have a reason to be over there. Yes, and—what do you want to know about that process?

TS: Well, so how—so, emotionally you were a wreck at first.

TIGB: Yes.

TS: But you said you got it together.

TIGB: Yes.

TS: And how about—how was the—how were the other women? You're, like, twenty.

TIGB: Yes.

TS: So, some women are probably a little older, some a little younger.

TIGB: [clears throat] Excuse me. Yes. I think the youngest one—or excuse me, the oldest one in my platoon was, like, thirty-one; she was in her thirties definitely. And it was interesting to see the—like, the range of ages and how everybody took it, because the youngest one

was eighteen; she had just turned eighteen when she joined. So, you have from eighteen to twenty to thirty-something, and seeing how we all coped with this shock of our new reality, you know, and seeing how we cope with that together was definitely very, very interesting. And, I don't know, sometimes I cried but most times I was just too afraid to cry, and I was more about, like, looking around and seeing—you know, just scoping out what I could, and I think it made me feel a little more at ease knowing that I wasn't going through that alone.

TS: Right.

TIGB: Because in the beginning, like I said, there were only two of us.

TS: Right.

TIGB: That was a completely different experience than being yelled at once our main drill instructors came in after, like, two days of the initial, like, boot—start of boot camp. When they came in the two situations were completely different; you know, from being yelled at and getting more attention from one, vice[?], the one yelling at thirty other people—or twenty-nine other people, you know.

TS: Right.

TIGB: So, yes. [chuckles]

TS: Now, how did you end up on crutches?

TIGB: I ended up on crutches—just all the extensive PT [physical training], you know, and—

TS: So that's something you're not used to doing?

TIGB: Right, I mean, because I did dance pretty much my whole life and marching band and I wasn't really a track and field person. I liked being active but I never really did it to that extent, you know. We were always running, every day; pretty much every day, or you know, just all kinds of physical training and different things I'd never done before. Then you start doing the obstacle courses, and all that, you know, and I think that's what did it. There's this one part where you have to jump over, like—like, a pull-up bar; you have to chicken wing yourself over it and flip and do some other crazy stuff, and somehow I, like—I don't know, I maneuvered my leg in a way that made my hip twist up in a very wrong fashion.

TS: Okay.

TIGB: Very incorrect fashion, and from that point on anytime we did humps with our packs on, or any kind of PT that required us to, like, wear boots, just the constant impact of, like, the boots to the ground would send up that shock to my hip and it just became really, really painful to walk. So, they sent me to medical finally and they said I had—I don't know, it was something with my leg, like, hip flexors, or something or other up there, and it's still ongoing now.

TS: Even today?

TIGB: Yes, they sent me—oh God, that was—it felt like—it felt like the most awesome fieldtrip ever when they let me go off base to go get an MRI [magnetic resonance imaging] done at, like, the actual hospital. It was a horrible reason to have to leave base but I was like, “Oh my God, I'm leaving base. Freedom,” you know, [chuckles] and I was, like, halfway through. But I'm really, really glad though that—I don't know, I wasn't totally recovered, but I faked it just so I wouldn't be dropped to, like, the rehabilitation platoon—

TS: Setback.

TIGB: Yes, and then have to start over, so that's probably why I'm still broken. [chuckles]

TS: Well, now, you just ran a marathon a couple days ago, right.

TIGB: Yes, right, and that's why I'm still broken. [both chuckle] I have no cartilage in my knees, and yes.

TS: What was that you were saying about marines being hardcore, when you were describing— [both laugh]

TIGB: Yes, and there I am faking being okay just so I can keep going, yes. You learn—you learn to suck it up and just keep on going. I mean, it's either that or remain on crutches for x-amount of time, you get dropped back to the rehabilitation platoon and you're there with all the other broken recruits for however long, and then if they decide you've missed too much training you have to start over. And at that point I'd already been there for, like, a month and a half, two months, you know, like, “Oh my God, are you serious? Repeating a month and a half or two months of what I'd already gone through?” No, that's just—

TS: Well, what—do you remember when you put on the uniform for the first time?

TIGB: For the very—yes, I do and it—I would love to say that it was one of those moments where there was a beacon of light that shone down and, [singing] “Ah, marine uniform.” Like, no, it wasn’t like that at all because they’re yelling at you, and they’re like, “You have five seconds! Right now! Button up your—button up your trousers right now!” And you’re like, “Oh my God. I can’t put my leg in the pants,” you know, and—

TS: So, you’re under pressure to get dressed into it?

TIGB: Yes, exactly, so—but you know what? Luckily, I was already pretty good at putting clothes on quickly and/or in the dark, because my brother and I shared a room for a long time and there were a few times where I would be running late and I’d just have to hurry up and get dressed super superfast, or I’d have practice or something like that for band and we’d have to get changed over really, really quickly. And then sometimes I just don’t like turning on the lights because I hate—anyways—and I, kind of, got accustomed to dressing in the dark and dressing quickly, but it’s completely different when you’re rushing yourself and then you have somebody else that’s, like, counting you down. And they trick you up because they’re like, “You have sixty, fifty-nine, fifty-eight,” and then all of a sudden they jump to twenty, and you’re like, “What?”

TS: You lost twenty seconds.

TIGB: Yes, exactly, you know, and you still don’t even have your pants pulled all the way up but you’re supposed to be fully clothed. So, you learn little tricks, like, maybe getting up—you ask the fire watch to come and wake you up a few minutes before reveille is sounded, so that way you can go ahead and slip on your socks, you can go ahead and slip on your green PT shorts and your t-shirt or whatever else, you know, and you can go ahead and get up and put your hair up in a bun and have your teeth brushed, because if you don’t they don’t say, “Okay, you have,” you know, “thirty seconds to go brush your teeth.” No, like, you’re on their time, you’re on their schedule. You’re up, you’re dressed, you march to chow, you come back, start doing your stuff throughout the day, you know. So, there are many days I know many females did not get a chance to brush their teeth [laughs] and hygiene and stuff because, you know, in that first week we didn’t know that we were supposed to wake up before the drill instructors come out, you know what I mean?

TS: Right.

TIGB: Because during the receiving portion there was that receiving drill instructor for, like, a day or two, and she did allow us to get up and go brush our teeth and go fix our hair and go do this—so we're like, "Okay, this isn't that bad, all right." Yes, we had no idea that she was the—[chuckles] just the receiving, you know, playing nice drill instructor, to, kind of, knock us off our—you know what I mean? You, kind of, start putting your guard down, and then after that two day period, oh lordy, you know, you get introduced to your actual drill instructor that's—all hell just broke loose. And we—it's funny when we sit back and talk together—or to each other about our experience in boot camp, and we compare our drill instructors to, like—sounds really bad, but to, like, hungry, hungry dogs who are being held back by this leash and they're just ready to break it—you know, break away from this leash, and once the senior drill instructor says, "You got them," yes, they had us [chuckles] and it was scary.

TS: Did you have anything that was really memorable in a good way that happened at basic training?

TIGB: There were a lot of good moments. The best moments were when even the meanest drill instructors would sit down and have that, like, drill instructor time. You know, after chow and after the day of training was pretty much done, they would sit down and talk to us about, you know, core values and give us classes and stuff like that; the times when they weren't yelling at us and they were actually talking to us like human beings and we saw a different side of them, you know what I mean?

TS: Yes.

TIGB: And senior drill instructor nights were the best because she would allow us to ask her questions, we could get up and go to the bathroom if we needed to [chuckling]; other times you were holding it for hours and hours and hours. So, those were—to me, those were the best times; when we were actually getting knowledge instilled in us and we were being—like, I told you about Ms. Oakley and she would talk to us, you know, like—like adults, you know, and she was trying to shape us, and those were the moments with the drill instructors that I loved the most. Those were the moments that were the most memorable to me; definitely the good times, yes. Everything else was just constant yelling, yelling, yelling, yelling, yelling. Looking back on it now I can laugh and say, "Oh, that wasn't too bad," but oh my God, you know.

TS: At the time.

TIGB: Yes.

TS: So, where'd you go after Parris Island?

TIGB: After Parris?

TS: When did you finish that up; around Christmas?

TIGB: That was in January.

TS: Oh, so did you spend Christmas in Parris Island?

TIGB: Yep. I was at Parris Island for Halloween night, my mom's birthday—which was two days after I got there, by the way.

TS: Your birthday.

TIGB: Yes—Thanksgiving, my birthday, Christmas, New Year's [chuckles]; I was there for every major holiday. Yes, and I graduated January 26, 2007, and got married January 27, 2007; the day after, yes, in Gatlinburg, Tennessee.

TS: Is that right?

TIGB: Yes, but again, it was—we definitely wanted to wait because we'd only been engaged for three months, you know, but he was being told that he was going to deploy in, I think it was, like, May or June, and I still had training that I had to go through for another couple months so we didn't want to, you know, miss that—that chance; that window or whatever.

TS: So, he would be gone and you wouldn't be able to be married; it that what you were worried about?

TIGB: Yes.

TS: Okay.

TIGB: And then we were worried—after I got of boot camp—got out of boot camp—excuse me—you get two weeks of—it's like recruiting duty, I guess you could say.

TS: Okay.

TIGB: It's not called recruiting duty, but it's two weeks where you just, kind of, get off and you go home and do whatever you got to do for two weeks, and you can go help your recruiter and all that.

So, during that two weeks the recruiter told us that if we didn't get married before he deployed, and before I got to my duty station, there would be no guarantee that we could be stationed together because he would already—he's already stationed in Jacksonville [North Carolina]. If we're not married by the time I get out of my MOS school—

TS: He'd already have his orders?

TIGB: Well, that, and then they could send me anywhere.

TS: Okay.

TIGB: You know? So, we're like, "Crap, okay, we need to do this," you know, especially before I went to my—or got out of my MOS school, which was in Mississippi. So you asked me about what happened after Parris Island. From there, after the two weeks of being out and being back home, I had orders to go to MCT [Marine Combat Training] in Jacksonville, North Carolina at Camp Geiger, and that's three weeks of training; like, in the field training; you do grenade stuff and learning how to dig holes and learning how to do, like, basic combat things; operations and stuff, you know, that kind of training. That's three weeks and then from there everybody splits and they go to their respective MOS schools.

TS: In the—in the place that you said you did the MCT—

TIGB: MCT.

TS: —training? Is that also integrated, gender-wise or is it male-female separated—segregated?

TIGB: We're still sep—we're all there together but we don't train together.

TS: Okay.

TIGB: I'm trying to think. I mean, I'm pretty—no, we trained, like, alongside each other. Like, our barracks are right next to the guys barracks, whereas on Parris Island—



TS: But still, you're in separate classes?

TIGB: Right, exactly, yes.

TS: So, you're still—even though you're physically closer you're still training separately.

TIGB: Yes, yes, exactly.

TS: Okay.

TIGB: But the thing that was different about MCT was that we had male instructors, you know, whereas at Parris Island it was only female drill instructors for the females. The only time we really had male instructors at Parris Island was if we had a class that had to be led by a male, or if we had, like, MCMAP [Marine Corps Martial Arts Program] like, martial arts belt training—

TS: Okay.

TIGB: —and that was led by a male sometimes, or when we did our swim qualifications, or when we were at the rifle range; there were males there then.

TS: Okay.

TIGB: And there were many times that our platoon got in trouble because some of the females forgot that they were still recruits and that the—the males at the rifle range were still—like, they were actual marines and—you know what I mean? And so, we weren't allowed to talk to males, period, and they thought the drill instructors weren't watching because they were back at—underneath one of the little awning thingies watching, and they had no idea. Oh my God, what a bad, bad day for those—for those girls. [chuckles]

TS: What happened to them?

TIGB: Oh man, they were pretty much run to the ground, you know, for talking to the males, and they were trying to quote unquote “fresh”—they were trying to be “fresh” with the male marines because they didn't know that the—our drill instructors were back in the back watching.

TS: You stayed out of that?

TIGB: Heck yes.

TS: Okay. [both laugh] You just wanted to get through it?

TIGB: I knew—I knew better, yes. I knew better than that. I did what I was supposed to do, yes. One day after the other; get me out of here. So, anyways—so, MCT, Camp Geiger.

TS: Okay.

TIGB: We trained separately. Then I got to MOS school down in Meridian, Mississippi, down at the naval air station, and we had to wait to be classed up, which is we're, like, waiting on rotation for spots to open up for your class—excuse me—and—

TS: So, what did you do during that time?

TIGB: While we're waiting to be classed up?

TS: Yes.

TIGB: We were in, like, a platoon—like, duty platoon, so you go around and move furniture around the barracks. They—of course, this happened when I—when we got there: happened to get a whole load of brand new furniture for all the barracks. So, we're moving old stuff out, moving new stuff in up three floors, [chuckles] cleaning everything; all that. And luckily I didn't have to—we didn't have to wait that long to be classed up. It was only, like, two weeks maybe.

TS: How long was your training there?

TIGB: I was there for two months. Yes, it was—I think it was another two months I was there, and we work alongside—we worked alongside the navy; they were our instructors. There were a few marines who were there. And then that was the first time we actually got to train, like, with the males.

TS: Okay.

TIGB: Yes. So, we were no longer separated, and that was just a great big crazy thing be—

TS: Why?

TIGB: Well, it wasn't crazy for me and, like, my roommates because we were all either engaged, married, or in a serious—some kind of serious relationship, but a lot of the other younger girls—and we were older, too, by the way—and a lot of the younger marines were, I guess, not used to being away from home; not used to being in that situation where they're surrounded by guys; and we had liberty on—like, after six o'clock on the weekends. We had a PX [post exchange] that was right behind our barracks so they would go and buy all this make-up and, like, do their hair all up. We couldn't go off base anywhere, so they would always go to the bowling alley [chuckles] and be all, like, do-daddied up, you know, and it's like, "Oh my God." So, that was just—that was a trip. Anyways—so, that was the first time we really got to train alongside the males. That was two months; got out of there and went to my first duty station which was in Jacksonville.

TS: Jacksonville?

TIGB: Yes.

TS: What was the name of the—

TIGB: MCAS [Marine Corps Air Station] New River—

TS: Okay.

TIGB: —in Jacksonville, North Carolina.

TS: So, what was that like?

TIGB: Loved it.

TS: Why?

TIGB: Absolutely loved it. I guess because—well, I was terrified going in because they're like, "Once you get into the fleet it's going to be like this, and it's going to be like that," and blah blah blah, and this it while you're at school and they're trying to tell you what the fleet's like.

And I'm like, "Oh my God," you know. So, you think of starting—well, pretty much it's like you think of going from graduating high school to being put into this role where you work, I don't know, alongside, like, the President or something, right. It's like

you're way up there. You're doing something so extreme now, you know. You're not just in a classroom taking notes anymore. Now you're, like—you're the big dog. That's, kind of, the pressure, you know, that was put on us and, I don't know, it scared me up a little bit.

So, I was really nervous to be out into the fleet. I had just gotten out of school and I'm like, "Oh my God. What if they make me do all this stuff by myself, and you know, I have to go flipping through notes, and I don't know how to do it? What am I going to be doing working with these aircraft?" you know. So, I got in there and I absolutely love it because I had a chance to work with some of the best marines I've ever known, and like I said, we were the "original crew"; [chuckles] quote unquote.

TS: What does that mean?

TIGB: What; original crew?

TS: Yes.

TIGB: Well, because before I—right before I'd gotten there, there was, like, a big change in personnel and a lot of people had come from different units, and all that, and they were all broken up to different places now. So, when I had gotten there the unit had just stood up like a—like a little while prior to that—to me coming in, and—

TS: What does that mean by "stood up"?

TIGB: Like, a new unit. And—what was I going to say? Oh, right, sorry. So, I had gotten there and we just—I don't know, it was just instant family. They just welcomed me, and it was really strange because I was so ready to get yelled; like, I was bracing myself for getting yelled at. The first person—one of the first people I met was my gunnery sergeant; this tall bald-headed white man with this super serious face, like, "You better not say anything stupid. You better not walk the wrong way. You—"

And I'm like, "Oh my—" like, I was so terrified going in there. You know, everybody's introducing themselves and he was the only one that sat back there in his corner, and he just kept eyeballing me. And I was like, "Okay, don't look at him. Don't look at him." And he ended up being the one that taught me, pretty much, everything, and that's Gunny Acres[?] the one who's picture I showed you. In that picture you saw, I was getting ready to deploy and he wasn't in uniform because at the time he had transferred to another unit but he came to see me off, you know, and he—he was like the office dad. He was the shop father, I guess you could say. There were two of them; there was him and

there was Gunny Kanakis[?], and Gunny Kanakis was amazing as well. He was like the other dad; the one we went to if the first dad said, “No.” [both chuckle]

TS: Were they like mentors for you?

TIGB: Yes, absolutely, in both military life and real life; or outside, you know—in civilian life, I guess you could say.

TS: Did you expect that?

TIGB: I did not expect that. What I expected was, you get in there, you’re a marine, you do your job, you know, you leave and that’s it. That’s what I expected, but it was not like that at all. Instead we had shop functions all the time, we had shop get-togethers, like—they’re like, “Hey—” Or one of the two gunnies is like, “Hey, I’m having a cookout this weekend,” you know, “bring your husband; everybody’s coming,” blah blah blah.

And I’m like, “Are you serious?” Like, “Oh my God,” because at the time I was just a PFC [private first class], you know—excuse me—I was an E2 and they’re E7s inviting me and my husband to a cookout and I’m like, “Oh my God. This is really happening.” Like, “What is this? Is this a trick?” And then they, kind of, had a—and I wasn’t the only new one, thank God. It was me and one other guy who had just gotten out of boot camp as well—or finished all his training around the same time. So, it felt good to know that I wasn’t in there by myself starting out, and they pull—and this other guy’s name is Infante[?]. They pulled us out and sat us down and had a little—had a little pow-wow and talked to us about how it is. They let us know it’s nothing at all like boot camp; you know, we can calm down; we can let the guards down; now we’re in a working environment, and you know, now we’re actually dealing with log books and people’s lives.

TS: Right.

TIGB: You know? Now it’s, like, time for the real stuff. We’re no longer dealing with modules and dealing with [pause]—simulated situations. Now this is like real time; air craft are spinning; you need to make sure your numbers are right, you know. If a part has overflowed its hours that could be somebody’s life, you know, so they gave us that big sit-down talk.

TS: Tell me a little bit, then, about your job. So, what are you responsible for; for someone who doesn’t know your MOS?

TIGB: Right, I was aviation maintenance logs and records. I worked with the MV-22 Ospreys. Logs and records consists of keeping up with, like, flight times and flight hours for all the pilots, but mostly for the aircrafts themselves, and their parts; from the blades to the engines to the tiny little pins, and all that. You're keeping up with everything; the lifetime of everything.

And you have to—like, we would have to go through and screen everything. Depending on what it was it could have been once a week, once a month, every six months we were—or every three months—we were screening different—different things in our log books, and pretty much every two weeks we would go through and scrub our books to make sure they matched the times—the lifetimes with a program that we used called OOMA—O-O-M-A[Optimized Organizational Maintenance Activity]—and it was a now-[unclear] optimized system that the navy put together and—that's pretty much used fleet-wide—Marine Corps-wide, on the aviation side to keep up with, like, flight times, flight hours, for parts; aircrafts themselves; airframes for pilots; for everything.

So, we would have to go through and scrub times. We would have to go through and get ready for inspections and make sure, pretty much, histories were kept up with. So, like how you guys keep the archives; we pretty much kept archives as well, but we had to keep them all in log books, and they were—what—six ring binders, and luckily we didn't have, like, Moses aircraft [chuckles], so—

TS: You mean, like, older ones?

TIGB: Yes, like, super, super old.

TS: Okay. [chuckles]

TIGB: Some of the other units that we chalked [“chalk” is military slang for a specific aircraft load, often corresponding with a platoon] with on my second deployment, they had aircraft from back in, like, the fifties and further, you know, so they had stacks and stacks and stacks of really, really thin papers of history they had to keep up with. And so, when they were going through and counting up inspection hours if anything did not match correctly, and it could have been because somebody simply did math incorrectly from three years prior, but now you've got to go back three years prior and count down that time and make sure your stuff is correct; try to figure out where the hole came from; figure out where the discrepancy is.

There were quite a few times—well, I'm not going to say quite a few, but there were some times when we found discrepancies that really had—we had no answers for, and situations like that, we would have to call up higher, you know, and they would have to send down an inspection team which meant that now the aircraft is grounded for

whatever reason, because now we don't know why this engine is missing, you know, X amount of time; why we can't figure out the last time it actually had an inspection done on it, you know.

TS: Right; okay.

TIGB: And come to found out it really was a discrepancy from, like, years prior, but—

TS: Nobody caught it?

TIGB: —nobody caught it, or maybe they did catch it and they just didn't want to say anything because they didn't want to put the work into it.

TS: I see.

TIGB: [chuckles] So, you know, that's what we were responsible for, and it seemed—sometimes, at the time, it would suck having that gunny that's like, “We need to make sure all this stuff is right. If it's five years back we're going to figure out where it came from.”

I'm like, “Oh my God. We're going to be here forever working on this one aircraft.” But I seriously respect so much that he did instill that in us. I don't know why I'm so emotional right now—but just that ethic and just knowing that you have people's lives in your hands. [sounding emotional in this section]

TS: Well, you did.

TIGB: And I think I'm upset right now because I'm thinking about a story he told us once before about an aircraft going down, and it was because—not even of a malfunction, but because something has overflowed its time and nobody caught it.

TS: Okay. So, it hadn't had the inspection time?

TIGB: Right. And so, it's just really—I don't know—like, humbling isn't even the word to use but—

TS: You have a lot of accountability—

TIGB: Right.

TS: —and pressure to get it right.

TIGB: Right, absolutely.

TS: And how old are you and how new are you to your job?

TIGB: Right, exactly; exactly. And just all that pressure of knowing, like, “Oh my God, if I miss a number—”

TS: Well, you know, Tavia, the common thing I’ve heard from a lot of women that I’ve talked to is that a lot of times they’re put into a job that they feel totally unqualified for, that they feel is way over their head, and whoever is supervising them is like, “No, you can do it,” and then they come out of that feeling like, “Yes, I could do it.”

TIGB: Yes.

TS: Did you have experiences like that?

TIGB: I did, mostly because I knew nothing about aircraft. I knew nothing about cars, which meant I knew nothing about parts, [chuckles] and things that went under the hood. I knew nothing about, like, keeping records of—mass amounts of things, and being accountable, like you said, for people’s lives and all that.

So, of course, I went in and I was twenty-one and I’m like, “I don’t know what I’m doing,” you know. I just really didn’t feel like any amount of training that I had gotten in the last couple months, or that my mentors are trying to instill into me, would account or make up for the years and years and years of knowledge that they had. And now, here they are trusting me with these books, you know, and sometimes I would get over—really overwhelmed, but then—and I wouldn’t say anything; I would just keep trucking. But then it made me feel really proud to know that I really could do the same things that they were doing. It might not be as quickly, you know, or as shiny, the finished product, but I was able to do it. And so, that made me feel really, really good and much more empowered.

TS: Right; empowered is a good word. I think that the—in many ways with these stories it seems like that’s what’s instilled in you; is that you’re empowered to do your job, and that even at times when you’re not sure what to do, there’s somebody there—

TIGB: Right.



TS: —willing to come help.

TIGB: Yes, absolutely, and—

TS: Did you feel that?

TIGB: Yes. Like I said, the two—the two gunnies were—and I talk about them more than I talk about the sergeants who were in the shop, just because—I don't know, just the gunnies were like the dads, you know. It's like I didn't want to talk to the brothers or the cousins; I wanted to go talk to my dad, you know? [laughs]

TS: Sure. Well, did you have any “sisters” or were they all—

TIGB: I was the only female.

TS: In your unit?

TIGB: In—Not in my unit but in my shop.

TS: In your shop? So, how many people were in your shop?

TIGB: In my shop, at the time—let me see. Two gunnies, two sergeants—seven.

TS: Okay. And so you were the only—

TIGB: There were two gunnies, two sergeants, a lance corp—was there another corporal—I think there was another corporal, but then he left not too long after, I believe. Yes, Corporal [unclear]; he was there. And Lance Corporal—or PFC Enfante[?], and then myself, and I was the only female for a very long time.

TS: How did that feel as a female?

TIGB: It felt kind of scary, you know, just because I felt like I had to work harder to prove myself; to prove that I belonged, not only in the shop, but in the Marine Corps, because there was that—there's always one, right? Got to have that one individual who's like, “You're a chick. Here, give me this.” Yes, seriously. I'm like—would just straight up, come out and say it, “Oh, females.”

You know? And it's like, “I'm new to this, number one. I'm brand new to your shop. I'm brand new to this job,” you know, “and it's like—you can't just be, like, ‘Uh,

females.' It has nothing at all to do with females. It has everything to do with the fact that you've been in here doing this for six years."

TS: Experience.

TIGB: Exactly; "And I've been here for two months."

But then on the other hand I—sometimes I liked being the only female, excuse me, just because I felt like I was in a room of brothers, and seriously, like, that was the environment that we had. That was our little community, that was our little shop, and that was home, you know. They were all my brothers, and then I had my two dads. [chuckles]

TS: So, they all had your back?

TIGB: Exactly; exactly.

TS: Yes.

TIGB: And like I said, growing up most of my friends were guys, so I just—I felt right at home, you know. I didn't—after that initial period of being like, "Okay. I'm a chick. I'm in this shop surrounded by dudes. I got to show—I got to prove myself." After that initial period I just—I was like one of the guys, you know?

TS: What did your husband think about that?

TIGB: Excuse me—he was—he was fine with it.

TS: Yes?

TIGB: Simply because during that first cookout I made sure I introduced him to everybody, [chuckles] and everybody talked to him and treated him like he was one of us in the shop, you know, and the wives were treated likewise, you know—or the girlfriends were treated likewise; like we were just one huge family.

And that's what I loved the most because, I don't know, I've heard of other units where the cohesiveness is not like that at all. They are—like I said how I thought it was going to be; you go in; you do your job; you go home; you're done. You don't talk to each other until you're back in the shop. But it was nothing like that at all with this—I just think it was the unit in general because everybody in that whole unit, hundreds of us, we were just all super close.

TS: Do you think it had to do with the leadership of the unit?

TIGB: Yes, it always comes from the top down; always. And our CO and the sergeant major, they would always try to put on different things—excuse me—have different competitions; have different family days; stuff like that, because you have to have that unit cohesiveness, otherwise you're not that family; you're not that band of brothers and sisters. You know what I'm saying? It's just, like, people don't really realize the seriousness and severity of it; you know, of having that, like, when you're deployed. Because if you act like that at home, and the individuals who do, kind of, separate themselves, they know that they can go home and they have their wives or their husbands or whatever they can go home to. But when you're deployed, who are you going to go home to, you know? So, you have to have that connectedness there because you're going to lean on each other when you're gone for seven months to a year.

TS: Yes. Did you ever feel—so, you have a really good relationship with your gunnies, and there's maybe one person that at first isn't all that comfortable because you're a chick—

TIGB: Yes.

TS: —but did that finally wear off?

TIGB: It did—with that one individual. Is that who you're talking about?

TS: Yes.

TIGB: It did, and it wore off, I think, number one, because I didn't play—I didn't play the stereotypical girl card where I'm like, "Oh, I can't do this. Oh no," or act all—

TS: Did you see other women do that?

TIGB: I did, and what was interesting about that is that some of those women were the ones who actually had the "turning the wrench" jobs, you know. I was what they call a paper pusher, I guess.

But there were times when we had to move furniture around the shop, and I'd be right there ready to start moving some desks and they'd be like, "No, go—go ahead Brightwell; I got it."

I'm like, "Heck no, I'm going to move this desk;" like, "Let's go."

So, I never pulled the chick card, you know, and I think it wore off with that one sergeant because I did what I was supposed to do and I usually went above and beyond

what I was supposed to do. I would be the one staying late in the shop, not because I needed to prove myself so much but because that's just my work ethic and I didn't want to leave until it was done, mostly because I didn't want to have to keep on going with it the next day. I just wanted to be done and start with something fresh the next day, you know.

So yes, that did eventually wear off and he saw that I really was there to do my job and do it correctly and to the best of my ability.

TS: Yes.

TIGB: So, he finally laid off. [chuckles]

TS: Now, you—in your—the four years you were in—and we're going to talk about your deployments in a second—but did you feel like you were treated fairly, as far as promotions go; opportunities; thing like that, for training?

TIGB: Yes.

TS: Yes?

TIGB: Yes. I will say, seriously, I was very, very lucky to be in the unit that I was in; to be surrounded by the people I was surrounded by; mentored by the people I was mentored by; and lead by the people I was led by. They never ever, from what I saw—they never differentiated promotions and opportunities for deployments and opportunities for going and becoming instructors for, like, MCMAP or pistol qualifications or rifle. They never separated the females from the males. They said—they laid it out there and said, "Hey, if you're qualified, we're going to send you."

My gunny was one of those where he'd be like, "Hey Brightwell, I'm putting you up on this board." "Hey, I'm going to make you do this," you know.

He would make me do stuff and I'm like, "Oh my God."

And he's like, "No, because I—"

TS: He's pushing you?

TIGB: Yes, he was pushing me. Because he's like, "I know you can do it. I know you have it in you to do it."

I'm like, "Wow. Thanks. I really appreciate that."

So, no, I definitely don't feel like I was held back from anything, you know, because I was a female or anything like that. My unit—seriously, it was awesome. My unit was amazing.

TS: Did you ever earn any particular award that you're proud of, or decoration of any kind?

TIGB: I mean, I got my good conduct medal—or ribbon, and then the best one was during my second deployment and I got a NAM; Navy Accommodation[?] Medal, and that one was for being in control of the shop on that—on the ship that I told you about.

[NAM may refer to the Navy and Marine Corps Achievement Medal also known as the Navy Achievement Medal, or it may refer to the Navy and Marine Corps Commendation Medal]

TS: Right.

TIGB: And I did it by myself and I was in control of—

TS: Where it's just you and one other person, right?

TIGB: Yes.

TS: On the night shift?

TIGB: I'm sorry, me and one other person, and we were in control of seven helicopters and all those log books, and I personally had to run the network system by myself, and we had two of them. They were standalones. They weren't connected to a network; they were standalones, and every single time it crashed I had to go in there and be the IT [information technology] person. I wasn't trained for IT, [chuckles] but—

TS: You apparently learned a lot.

TIGB: Yes, exactly, I learned a lot; learned how to read some serious manuals, and trouble shooting, and learning how to do—God, I forget what it's called now but, like, coding and all that kind of stuff, and scripts and ugh—it was just so much but we did it. So I got a NAM for doing all that and holding many different billets. Because in the shop, like I said, there were two of us, so I served as the shop head, as the staff NCOIC [Non-Commissioned Officer in Charge], as the NCOIC. I had to serve as the OIC; the Officer in Charge, because I didn't have an officer there with me, like, from my

unit—excuse me, from my shop. Everybody was over on the [USS] *Nassau*, so we had to have an officer from a completely different shop serve as, like, my mock OIC for—[chuckles] for my shop.

TS: For your shop?

TIGB: Yes.

TS: Well, let's talk about your deployments a little bit.

TIGB: Okay.

TS: So, you were first deployed in 2008?

TIGB: Yes, that's correct; in March. It was March 2008. We went to Al Asad [Airbase], Iraq, and we were there for a little over six months. Everybody called it Camp Cupcake.

TS: Why?

TIGB: Because it's—it was an air station—or air base, number one, and number two, we weren't, like, right on the wire, you know, or even outside the wire. People used to come there—other marine soldiers would come there for R&R [rest and relaxation], and we—it was—it was a nice base; I'm not going to lie.

TS: It was a cushier job—or a cushier location—

TIGB: Right.

TS: —in Iraq than other places—

TIGB: Yes.

TS: —people were deployed to?

TIGB: Yes, definitely.

TS: So that's the cupcake part? Okay.

TIGB: Yes. My then husband, he was deployed at the same time I was. He had left a couple of months sooner and he—when we got there he was leaving within the month, and he was deployed to Al Taqaddum [Airbase] in Iraq and he said that base was pure crap, and once he got to Al Asad he's like, "Oh my God. This is like a vacation spot." Which, of course, we didn't think that but we also didn't know what it looked like outside the wire. I guess because we had the nice—we had, like, a rec[reation] center and we had a movie theater which was—you know, it was kind of like a gutted building that—and they had a proj—they put a projector up on the stage and put in chairs and all that, and people from the USO—and over the years they built it up to what it is now. And it's like at first I used to get really defensive because it was called Camp Cupcake, but then it's like, you know, why be upset that over the years, other individuals have built this place up? You know what I mean? To make it so you're not completely miserable for seven months or more.

TS: Right.

TIGB: So anyways—and then we had a Green Beans Coffee [Company], and they had a Pizza Hut and a Burger King, and all these different chain places around base. Not—I liked that, of course; I like the more cushiony thing, like you said, but at the same time—excuse me—I think that allowed for us to become a little more complacent. Because you're inside the wire, you have a Burger King that you can catch the bus to, and you can go watch movies on a Thursday night. You can go to the gym or go play indoor putt-putt at the rec center, and you kind of forget where you are.

And then we got told that they were going to amp up security because of something that had happened at another base down the way from us. And so now we were having to keep eyes on our security personnel who weren't, like, actual marines. They weren't United States military. They were, like, Ugandan police forces; they were Iraqi police forces, so now we were having to keep closer watch on them. I don't know exactly what happened so I'm not going to speculate or say anything. It could be completely false, but obviously it had something to do with another force.

TS: Right.

TIGB: Whatever it was that happened at the other base. And so, they started checking IDs heavier—or—yes, and every time we went somewhere—like, before, they would be much more lenient about checking IDs and—before you went to the chow hall. After this period of, like, increased security, you had to scan your ID card at the chow hall. You had to show your ID every single time you went into the PX, or you went into the rec center; whatever; you always had to show your ID. So—I don't know. And then they started—they made us—they started counting people's—like, their clothes and their

camis [camouflage] and making sure everybody still had all their stuff they were supposed to bring with them. Some—

TS: So they weren't selling it to somebody else—

TIGB: Exactly.

TS: —or giving it—

TIGB: Yes.

TS: Okay.

TIGB: So, putting two and two together I started coming up with my own ideas of—

TS: Right.

TIGB: Yes.

TS: Well, I mean, we have had incidents in Afghanistan where the people that they're training turn their guns on Americans.

TIGB: Yes. Yes. I don't know if that's what was happening then or not but—yes, so—just the complacency definitely had a chance to set in. And then we started noticing that a lot more of the infantry units were being shuffled in and off—or on and off the base, and from where we were on our side of the flight line, we could see their, like, Humvees and stuff coming in and out.

I remember this one night they were going out on a convoy mission and then all of a sudden we start seeing all these flares going off, and somebody said that we had gotten, like, mortar—mortar rounds coming in to our base, and it was just—it was crazy. They're like, "All right, everybody, start," you know, "making sure you have your—your weapons, and—accounted for. Make sure you have all your rounds accounted for."

And I'm like, "Oh my God." So then, of course, I started getting really nervous because for the first, you know, four or five months it had been nothing; no action; no nothing. And I'm like, "Oh my God. This is when it's really getting—getting real, " you know?

Didn't actually see anything; didn't have to actually pick up a rifle and point it at anybody or anything, but just the—the intel alone of knowing that that was going on right outside our base. And they cut off—they cut off our communication, which is called



“Going into River City.” And River City is where—if there’s been something compromised—like, intel’s been compromised, or if there’s been a death, or—whether it’s at our base or another base, they’ll put us in River City, so that way they can alert the families first before somebody jumps on the internet; you know, starts emailing back or calling back—

TS: You’re kind of on lock down?

TIGB: Exactly. And they only keep the SIPR Nets [Secret Internet Protocol Router Network] up, which is the secured—ultra secured lines up for communication; stuff like that. You have to be cleared to even use that stuff.

So, at that time when we started hearing about the mortar attacks and crap, they put us in River City. I’m like, “Oh my God. What’s going on? Okay, here we go.” You know? But shortly after, they took us back off of River City and everything was fine, but then, of course, they started to—we had to increase our alertness to our surroundings. That was—I guess that was one of the scarier moments. [chuckles]

TS: What were your living conditions like?

TIGB: We lived in what were called cans. Think of like a trailer, pretty much, but it’s not like a big furnished trailer. It’s maybe, like, half of this room here, and you walk into the—walk to the door—to get from the front door to the back wall you take, maybe, five or six steps.

TS: Okay.

TIGB: And that’s the back wall. To get from one side wall to the next side wall you take, maybe, eight to ten steps. So, it wasn’t huge, and you shared it with another person. You go in, you have one—one little bed, and you have one really tall skinny locker, and a lamp; and then the other person had the same stuff on their side. So, it kind of reminded me of, like, living in the dorms here. [chuckles]

TS: Right.

TIGB: Really small. Then you had this tiny little stand with a TV, and you had an AC [air conditioning] unit, and if you were lucky it worked. We were there in the dead middle of summer. Our hottest day was like a hundred and thirty-something degrees. I couldn’t imagine it now; like, I just—I really can’t imagine that kind of heat on my body now, but

being over—over there at the time—when we first got there in March it was starting to climb so we had gotten, you know, accli—

TS: A little acclimated?

TIGB: Exactly, and we got used to it. So, yes, like I said, on good days your AC worked. But then it sucked, because the cycling unit—like, how it worked—it would just pull in dirt. You know, there's nothing but dirt over there; just dirt and sand. It would just pull in dirt into the room so you're constantly having to dust.

And then you had to walk to another trailer to go use the showers. They always made sure we paid attention to, like, not getting the water in our mouths; not drinking the water from the sink; using bottled water to brush your teeth with.

They tried really hard to do the separation thing; the guys and the girls.

TS: Did that work out?

TIGB: Yes, it worked out pretty well. There were only a couple instances where guys were caught trying to come over into the female block, but they weren't from our unit. They were guys from some other unit who would come down to our—our side of the air—of the—the flight line.

TS: Were there any problems like that with—I mean, because you hear about, on deployments—what's the big thing in the news? The sexual relations and women are getting pregnant, and—

TIGB: Yes.

TS: —that's disrupting the units.

TIGB: Yes.

TS: Did you have anything like that?

TIGB: No. I'm pretty positive not. We had a total of—there were at least ten females and most of us were married. Some of them were officers so they were pilots and they were married, so they were—no, we all stayed together. All the females, we usually stuck together, you know. We usually worked the same shifts, like, on purpose; they would make us work the same shifts on purpose so we were always together. You always had to have a battle buddy; that's what we're called. [chuckles] You were never supposed to go

anywhere alone, ever. They would always come around and make sure we locked our doors at night, because apparently somewhere else on the base there was some stuff going on with females being, you know—like, having issues, or whatever, with males down there.

And like I said, my unit was amazing, and they, seriously, looked out for all of us, especially the females; whether we were on a detachment doing a work up, or we were at home, or we were deployed. They made sure that we were fully accounted for. We had our guys who—we had some off—male officers who would look out for us and make sure that we were totally locked down; everything was good. So, we had eyes everywhere. We were [their sisters?].

TS: So, the deployment—

TIGB: Yes.

TS: —you had the same people that you were working with back in North Carolina here.

TIGB: Yes, that's correct.

TS: And so, you—that team atmosphere, kind of, just translated—transferred over to Iraq.

TIGB: Yes, absolutely; absolutely. And, if anything, we all got closer. You know, because for six or seven months we were all each other had; you know, to talk to about whatever; any issues; any—anything back home; we had each other.

TS: Did you ever get to see your husband?

TIGB: I did, and that's another reason why the unit was so awesome. Because you don't hear that often; like, there're two—husband and wife deployed at the same time getting to see each other, especially when they're on two completely separate bases.

So, what the situation was—they—his unit had a translator that they were supposed to come and pick up from Al Asad [Airbase]. His unit and my unit, they were in communication. The CO talked—my CO talked to his CO; they got it worked out where they were going to let him come and stay at the base for a week. He got to come and stay out there with me for a whole week, and the last day he had to leave with his—his translator and fly—and fly them back over there. And it was really cool because my unit was actually doing, like, fly-in operations and they, I guess—I don't know exactly everything that happened, but my guess was that they took that as an opportunity to get some flight—flight hours in. Went, picked them up, put them back over there, and

then flew them back over to TQ [Al Taqaddum?] when it was time for him to go. So, that was super, super cool, and they gave us a can to ourselves. Anyways. [chuckles]

TS: Did you get a lot of ribbing about that?

TIGB: People were pretty understanding, just because for the, you know, six months prior to that they were at home with their loved ones.

TS: Right.

TIGB: He was deployed—

TS: Okay.

TIGB: —and so I was at home by myself.

TS: I see.

TIGB: They were very understanding. Of course, some of the younger guys gave me crap. You know, “Oh, look at Brightwell,” blah, blah, blah; you know how guys do. I think he had a harder time leaving me there knowing—even though he knew most of the guys in my unit, I think he had a harder time leaving me there than he did with us being back at home. And that’s understandable completely, because being at home he knew I was going to be able to come home to him every day, you know, and I would be able to tell him anything and he could be right there and talking to whoever it was if there was an issue. But now we’re thousands and thousands of miles apart, so I don’t think he liked that too much. [chuckles] You know, knowing that I was in that environment and that situation.

Yes, we definitely got to see each other; we got to spend a week together. Then he went back home and I spent the next five months in the middle of the desert.

TS: Well, tell me about your other deployment. The other one was a little bit different. You weren’t—you were on a ship, right?

TIGB: Yes, yes. When we came back from the first deployment, that’s when things started to change and people from my shop started to transition to other units, or they were getting out of the Marine Corps, period. Not even just my—I’m sorry?

TS: No, go ahead.

TIGB: Not even just my shop, but the unit in general; people were transitioning everywhere.

TS: How many years had this been that—

TIGB: That happened in 2000 and—that's when we came back in 2008; people started leaving.

TS: Okay.

TIGB: And then in 2009 when—later in 2009, we started to do workups and stuff again there was more transitioning going on. Then we chopped—which meant there were a couple different units that came together to form one unit—before we deployed in 2010. That deployment was completely different. There was, kind of, the familial atmosphere but not really—

TS: Had you not really found a—formed a really strong bond before you deployed, maybe?

TIGB: Oh, we had plenty of time to do that, and we would try to do shop functions like we had done with all the marines prior. And it just—there was either no interest or everybody was busy or something; there was always something. Or nobody would have the initiative to try to come up with something for us to do.

TS: So, it was a different dynamic with this particular shop?

TIGB: Yes. And for whatever reason there was just—I don't know. There was much more animosity in the shop once all the new people started trickling in, and then when that happened, I wasn't the only female anymore. There was me and then another female sergeant, and at the time I was just a corporal. So, a female sergeant—she was super cool; she was like one of the guys as well, but—you asked me earlier about being a female and feeling like you have to prove yourself and all that, and I definitely think that some of the newer females that we got in were those ones; the ones who felt like they had to do so much more to prove themselves, even if it meant trumping everybody else, you know, and kind of using you as like a—a mat, almost.

TS: Using the other women?

TIGB: Yes. So, I was definitely caught in that situation because I was now the lower ranking female in the shop, and it was like—

TS: Well, that's interesting because sometimes there—there is, I guess, a perception that the women all stick together.

TIGB: Yes.

TS: And there's—it's not always that way where sometimes women see each other as competition.

TIGB: Yes.

TS: Even within the job. I mean, I don't mean for men—

TIGB: Right.

TS: —but I mean for a promotion—

TIGB: Yes.

TS: So, that—you saw a little bit more of that?

TIGB: I did see a little bit more of that, and—I don't know, it's just—it was weird, because I was excited to have another female in the shop. It's like, "Yes! Somebody I can talk to about girl stuff, and I don't have to talk about, like, stupid guy stuff all the time. You don't have to hear about football. Now we can talk about—we can talk about hot guys." I was so excited about that, and it eventually became that, but the first couple months just sucked, you know, because it was that whole, "I'm a female. I'm a sergeant. I'm going to show you up," and there was absolutely that competition.

I'm like, "Dude, I've—" not like—I didn't have the attitude of, "Okay, I've been doing this for years. I already know everything you're going to tell me." It wasn't like that, but I kind of had that thing of like, "What is your problem?" [chuckles] You know what I mean? "That's awesome that you're so great, and please, by all means, go show everybody how great you are, but don't try to—"

TS: "—undermine me while you're doing it."

TIGB: Exactly, exactly. I'm like, "Just leave me out of your—whatever it is you're trying to do." And—So, there was that, and I think this individual picked up on how I was feeling, and so it, kind of, started to come off a little bit; that the guard started to come down, and

I never ever, ever, like, pose myself as a threat to anybody. I'm open, I'll talk to you. I'll smile at everybody. I speak—

TS: You smiled at your drill instructor the first day.

TIGB: Right? [both chuckle] Right! I'll smile and speak and—and that actually reminds me. After everybody chopped and we started doing our workups, we had one where we went to Arizona; we had a workup there. And again, they sent me which was—you know, and I appreciate the fact that they sent me because—and they felt they trust me so much to do all this stuff on my own.

So, I was the only one from my shop that they sent, period, to handle all these other aircraft from these different units who weren't even chopped with us for our deployment. They were units from the West Coast who were there as well; it was, like, WTI [Weapons and Tactics Instructor Course] or something. We're doing that detachment and we—oh God, this is probably the worst time ever in my life in the Marine Corps, and I had this female staff sergeant who was over the shop. She—she was the female staff sergeant and I was the female corporal, and then there were, like, four or five other guys who were working in our shop.

Well, we were working alongside maintenance control in this one really big room and we just had a little corner. She made it known—like, literally, the words came out of her mouth that she could not stand female marines, and I'm thinking, "You are a female marine." But then as the training went on and people from her units, you know, communicated back to me that she was all about the competition, and it was not the kind of competition of work competition. It was, "Who are the guys looking at," competition.

I didn't care about that because, like I said, I just—well, at that time I don't think I was married; I think I was—I think I was separated at that time, but anyways, I didn't care about that. I was there with my guys. We were one big family still; the ones who I was out there with. They were from the old, you know, original group [chuckles] in the unit. And I don't—she did not like that they had my back as much as they did. Anytime they would leave to go to chow; anytime they were going to go do something on the weekend, they would make sure that I was taken care of.

They're like, "Hey, are you good to go? Do you want to go with us? We're going to go hang out."

And on that workup there were two females; it was myself and a girl from flight equipment. We were roommates and stuff while we were there. So, they would always make sure the two of us were totally good to go; invited us out everywhere.

She couldn't stand that, this staff sergeant, and she's like, "I don't know who you think you are, but this is why female marines have such a bad name now."

I'm like, "What? What are you talking about?" I didn't say that to her because she's was a staff sergeant.

And so, of course, I started telling my guys who I was with, and they were higher ups, and they're like, "Just don't even worry about it. Just go in there and do what you've got to do. Just leave. You can still come out with us."

Well, wouldn't you know, she decides to put me on a completely different shift, so now I couldn't go and hang out with the people from my unit. And then she started switching my shift up, like, every week. She would put me on a night crew, then she'd put me on a swing shift, then she'd put me back on day crew, and every time they would have—we would have a free weekend, like, where nobody was working—when we'd have one of those, she'd find some reason for me to have to come down to the shop. She'd find some duty to put me on.

And I'm like, "Why? I do everything I'm supposed to do," but it, literally, is because she did not like [that] those guys had my back. I won't expose the things that happened with her, but I will just say that karma sucks and it's not good to treat people badly because that stuff definitely comes back on you ten-fold, and not at my hand either; it was on her own account.

But anyways, that was probably one of the worst situations I've had to deal with as far as females in the military and being exposed to the rancid jealousy, you know, and just the craziness that can come because you can do it, because you have the power and the rank to do it. And that was just a total slap in the face to me because I wasn't used to that. You know what I mean?

TS: Because you had come from a unit where there was total respect between the ranks and everything.

TIGB: Exactly; exactly. And I did exactly like I was supposed to; you know, "Ay, Staff Sergeant. Yes, Staff Sergeant. No, ma'am," dah, dah, dah.

She took me outside one day and she lined us all up—all of us from the shop—and she was giving, like, counselings; we do counselings and all that stuff every month. She was giving me my counseling, and it was the whole shop. It was me and the other five or six other men. And she came down to me and she's like, "You! You are the reason I cannot stand female marines. You are the epitome of why men call us sluts, and blah, blah, blah." And I—and she—at the end she goes, "Do you have anything you want to say?"

And I said, "Actually yes, Staff Sergeant, I do."

She's goes, "Well, I don't want to f-ing hear it!" and she walked away. I had no reason at all to be called that.



TS: What did you do? Did you just not—

TIGB: I had to just suck it up. I couldn't say anything. She wouldn't let me have a rebuttal.

TS: Right.

TIGB: She wouldn't let me, like, say anything.

TS: Did she have to write any kind of evaluation report on you?

TIGB: She did, and—

TS: How did that go?

TIGB: It was all negative stuff.

TS: Right.

TIGB: All—It was: “I don't do my job correctly. I don't have good time management. I f-ed up all their books. I don't know how to do my job.” This, this, and that.

I'm like, “Seriously? But yet they set me out there, with your computer system by the way, and I'm running this entire thing for this entire attachment, but yet I don't know what I'm doing? And I'm not doing my job. Okay.”

So, of course, over the weeks I had been telling the higher-ups about it and they're like, “Just let it go. Just let it go.”

So after that happened—and she didn't take me aside to do this, she blasted me in front of everybody, and it was right after chow so everybody's like—[crying] Sorry.

TS: It's okay. I understand.

TIGB: So, everybody from all these different units were getting off the buses coming back into work from chow and they're, like, watching her slam me, so that was just totally embarrassing. My higher-ups saw and at that point that's when they decided to step in and they talked to her. And I don't know what exactly was said but she started to back off, but she still kept switching up my shifts. Finally the chief warrant officer, who had never said anything, he just sat back in his corner and let everybody else handle her or whatever; he finally stepped up and was like, “Look, this stops here.” He's like “I sit back here and I watch her at work and I know she's doing what she's supposed to do.” He goes, “I don't know what your problem is with her, dah, dah, dah, but it stops here.”

That was—that was nice to know that they still were watching out for me, but at the same time I didn't want them to because that was just adding more fuel to her fire, you know?

TS: Right. Really, she created a hostile work environment for you.

TIGB: Yes, absolutely. It sucked. I seriously dreaded that the entire time I was there. I was so ready to go home.

TS: How long were you out there?

TIGB: We were out there for—God, how long is WTI? It was like a month or so, but it was the longest period—I felt like that was longer than boot camp.

TS: Yes?

TIGB: It wasn't, but it felt like it.

TS: Right.

TIGB: And every single day I had something new to complain about, and they knew that something was wrong because I wasn't smiling anymore. I was miserable when I went to work.

Okay, so then we left that and, of course, then guys started making jokes. When we came back home they're like, "Hey, have you heard from your best friend?"

I'm like, "Oh my God, here we go."

So, when we got back and they're like, "Hey, you know we're chopping with different units, right, for this next deployment?"

I'm like, "Yes, I heard."

And they're like, "You know her unit's the one we're chopping with?"

I said, "No, I will transfer. [chuckles] I will—I will put in a freaking transfer to get the heck out of here." Anyway, they were just messing with me.

Then came the second deployment. We're getting ready to go on the USS *Mesa Verde* and the USS *Nassau*. The units were split so I got sent on the USS *Mesa Verde* with—God—I think it was—I can't remember the name—the names of the units.

TS: That's okay.

TIGB: But there were two units I was with and they had the Hueys [Bell UH-1 Iroquois military helicopter] and the [Bell AH-1] Cobras, and then the rest of my shop, they had, like, the [Sikorsky CH-] 53s and the [MV-22] Ospreys and the fighter jets and all these other crazy big aircraft, and we split up and the USS *Mesa Verde* made her maiden voyage, which I was on and it was amazing, while the USS *Nassau* lagged behind us and broke down quite a few times in the middle of the ocean. Do you want me to repeat the story I told you earlier about—

TS: You can sum it up, maybe, if you want, just to—because I—from my recollection you were in a very nice berthing and you had nice facilities on this new ship.

TIGB: Yes.

TS: And the [USS] *Nassau*, where most of your unit was—

TIGB: Yes.

TS: —did not have that time, and they spent some—they took their R&R on your ship?

TIGB: Yes, that's correct.

TS: But this is also where you—from your work on this—on the [USS] *Mesa Verde* you got the Navy Accommodation Medal.

TIGB: Right, absolutely.

TS: And how did you like this particular deployment?

TIGB: Well, it was very different in that, number one, we're on the ship; tiny, tiny space. Number two, we're working directly alongside the navy, which it was—it's always just been marines, marines, marines. Now we're working alongside the navy. And then—

TS: How was that? I mean, did you—was that okay?

TIGB: For me personally, yes. It was fine for me. I didn't mind. But of course there was that animosity there, you know, between the two service—the two branches.

TS: Competition wise?

TIGB: Competition wise, yes.

TS: “We’re better. You’re better.”?

TIGB: Exactly. I kind of lost my train of thought.

TS: You were talking about how you had very close quarters on it. How the ship—how this deployment was different from the other ones.

TIGB: Yes, thank you. Okay, so close quarters on a ship; by myself. Well, with one other junior marine who I really hadn’t gotten a chance to work with that much because he was from a completely different unit. He was from one of the units that had chopped over with ours.

So—Just—I don’t know. It was just—It was—I didn’t really like it. I liked where I was; I liked that I was on the [USS] *Mesa Verde* versus being on the [USS] *Nassau*, which was supposed to have been decommissioned before that deployment, so I’m not going to complain about the living space or the—you know, the ship itself, but the working environment was much harder. The environment, period, was harder because I wasn’t on there with anybody from my unit; maybe two other people, maybe. Of the hundred-plus from my unit there were maybe three of us from 162 on the [USS] *Mesa Verde* and all the rest were on the [USS] *Nassau*. So, I was on the ship with people I had never worked with before; a whole two units of individuals, you know?

It was different in that I had lost my family while they were all still in their respective families. You know what I’m saying?

TS: Right.

TIGB: They were all years and years of working together, being together, and all that. They were finally deployed together on a ship, and here I am, this person who just, kind of, comes in and infiltrates their little community.

TS: Right. Did you feel like an outsider?

TIGB: Absolutely.

TS: Yes?

TIGB: Totally, for a little while, because they were trying to learn me while I was trying to learn them. But it's much easier for a hundred people to learn one person than it is for one person to learn a hundred people.

TS: True.

TIGB: You know? And so, of course, throughout the first month—I'd say it only took a month—different guys from different shops; I was getting the same rounds of questions. You know, "Who are you? Where'd you come from? What your life story?" pretty much; got that whole rundown. That's when—to me, that's when being a female actually, kind of, mattered because now I was on a ship with people I didn't know, people I didn't—I didn't know who I could trust, you know? And you start wondering who's going to have your back if something does happen; whether it's something that happens with another marine or whether it's a sailor. Who's going to be there for me?

So, I ran into that and that was kind of scary, but then I started making friendships slowly and things were fine. And down in the berthing, like, for the air wing there were—there were three of us for the air wing; myself, who worked in the maintenance department; there was one female who worked upstairs in the intel department; and there was another—well, actually, those two females worked together up in the intel department so they were always together, and then there was me. [chuckles] So, it was really hard, I don't know, just trying to fit in somewhere. I was usually by myself, or it was usually me and my one junior marine who was also part of their unit, and he would try to help me and, like, help me fit into their little group. And after a while I guess they—they warmed up to me and I warmed up to them and everything was good. It was fine. It's just that initially period of—

TS: Getting to that point?

TIGB: Exactly.

TS: So, you felt kind of lonely up until—

TIGB: Yes.

TS: And isolated a little?

TIGB: Yes, a little bit.

TS: Did you—were you ever felt like you were harassed; sexually harassed or anything like that?

TIGB: Not by the marines. [extraneous comment redacted] Not by the marines but there was a period where there was harassment going on on the ship from the navy, and what's kind of weird about it is that it didn't come from the males; it came from navy females. And of course, I tried my hardest on my own to nip that in the bud but it only seemed to push it further and further and further and they just not leave me alone. Of course, it wasn't all of them, it was a few; maybe three of them. And I don't even know why. We would all usually keep to ourselves; you know, the marines would go do their thing; go eat their chow; not mess with anybody; the navy would do their thing. We were on two completely separate floors as far as berthings went. We didn't sleep near each other; nothing like that.

But then we would be walking through, like, the corridors, or whatever, on the ship and a couple times I would get bumped—like, shoulder bumped, and it wasn't because we hit a wave. [chuckles] We could be sitting idle and I would get shoulder bumped, and I would still turn around and say, "Oh, excuse me. I'm sorry about that." Although I clearly did not do anything.

TS: Right.

TIGB: They would turn around and look at me and snicker or laugh or roll their eyes. I'm like, "Come on man. What the crap?" You know?

So, a couple of the navy guys, they started talking to me just to befriend me; not trying to be fresh or not trying, you know, anything like that. And I would talk—I would speak to them, I would smile, I would wave; "Hey, how are you doing? See you later. Bye." nothing further than that. And these same girls would somehow always find a way to be near my work station. Now, mind you, some of them did work around that area, down in, like, the lower deck area, and so I guess, maybe, they had to be over there; I don't really know.

But there were a few times when I had to have somebody walk me back to my berthing at night, because they would turn off all the lights on the ship. They would only have those red—the dim red lights on. I'd have to have somebody walk me back to my berthing because twice—two separate occasions it happened, where one of these girls was waiting for me around the corner, and she got in my face and she was talking crap.

I'm like, "Please get out of face. Please leave me alone."

And she's like, "No, because you think you all this and you think you all that."

I'm like, "Excuse me? I, literally, walk to chow and walk to my birthing, or I walk to work, and that's it. I stay on my side. I don't mess with you guys."

So, yes—so, from that point on I had somebody, like, walking with me. It was just stupid and—

TS: What were they—What was it that they were—Were they trying to intimidate you about—What was it that they had a problem—

TIGB: I don't know.

TS: They didn't really say?

TIGB: They never said anything. They never told—they never said, "Oh, you're talking to this guy and that's my boy." They never said anything like that.

TS: Right, right. That's what I'm wondering.

TIGB: Yes.

TS: Well, I didn't know if it'd because they were thinking you were after their man, or if they're lesbians going after you, or what the deal—

TIGB: Two of them were.

TS: Two of them were what?

TIGB: Were lesbians.

TS: Okay.

TIGB: Two of them absolutely were, and one of my friends, she was a lesbian as well, and she befriended some of them and then found out that they were just hating on me just because. Like, there was no reason at all. They knew I hadn't done anything. They just didn't like me. They didn't even know me. [chuckles]

TS: So, they're just messing with you?

TIGB: Yes.

TS: Did you ever report them?

TIGB: I told my higher-ups and I don't know if they ever said anything to anybody navy side, but it stopped.

TS: It did after you said something?

TIGB: Yes. Yes. It pretty much stopped. They would still give me the evil eye and all that kind of stuff, but they never, like, physically touched me. Like I said how they came by and shoulder bumped me.

TS: Right.

TIGB: That never happened again. I was typically always with somebody else, and it sucked so much, man, you know, because I had gotten so used to being able to walk around by myself on this ship. I felt comfortable; I was fine. And then to know that it's, like, other females who are trying to bully you.

TS: Right.

TIGB: And it's, like, for what? You know? "I stay on my side. You stay on your side."

TS: Your friend who was a lesbian, did she act like an intermediary or anything, or is she—

TIGB: She—I know for a fact she said that she talked to them.

TS: But that didn't change anything?

TIGB: She talked to them and just—being in our birthing area; that stopped. Being, like, on top of our little ladder thing; that stopped after. I don't know what she said. I told her I didn't want to know; I didn't care. They would try to send messages to me through her. She's like, "Such-and-such told me to tell you—"

I'm like, "I don't want to hear it. I don't want to know."

TS: Right.

TIGB: "I don't want any bull—" Like, why? This, literally, no crap, started from—

TS: High school?

TIGB: Yes, and it started from nowhere. So, yes, there was just—



TS: Were there a lot of other female marines on the ship?

TIGB: Down in our berthing I think there was a total of ten, maybe eleven.

TS: And how many navy women were there?

TIGB: On the ship? I don't know, maybe thirty?

TS: Okay, so—I mean, the number—

TIGB: There were more than—

TS: But not, like, a hundred?

TIGB: No. No. No.

TS: Okay. That's interesting.

TIGB: Yes, and—I don't know, it was weird. And then their—I don't know. I think maybe it was a territorial thing where, I guess, they didn't want the marine girls talking to the navy guys, but we weren't talking to—well, I can't say “we.” I wasn't talking to the navy guys. There were a couple other females down in the berthing who—and I'm not even going to say it was like they were talking to them to try to be like, you know, flirty; they were just being friends. You know, everybody—you start to get comfortable with people. You have to know who you're on a ship with. Why not be friends—friendly, friends? And so, I think that territorial thing, kind of, came into play. I don't know how in depth you want me to get.

TS: Whatever you're comfortable sharing. It's just an interesting dynamic because you hear a lot in the news about, you know, how it's men harassing women.

TIGB: Yes.

TS: And here you have a case where it's women harassing women.

TIGB: Women harassing women, yes.

TS: Both heterosexual and homosexual.

TIGB: Yes.

TS: And like you said, bullying—

TIGB: Yes.

TS: —I think, is a really good description of it. It's a—I think it's something that's really important to have people understand that that goes on.

TIGB: Yes.

TS: Not just in the military.

TIGB: Right, absolutely, but it's crazy that it does go on in the military, and that it does—because you think, “This is—this is the military. This is the service. This is the armed services. These are adults,” you know? “These are people who are deployed.”

TS: Professionals?

TIGB: Exactly.

TS: And plus, you're on a ship where you can't really escape it.

TIGB: Right.

TS: Yes.

TIGB: And that, I think, is what blew my mind the most because I had nowhere to go.

TS: Right.

TIGB: And—Okay, so I'll tell you this part. Later into the deployment, maybe—we were on the ship for seven months, so maybe at month five one of the navy guys—we caught eyes, and at this time I was divorced already. We caught eyes and we started talking and started hanging out, you know, where we could, right, like up on the flight deck. We'd stand out there and talk and then whenever we would hit ports and stuff we would go around and tour places together whenever he didn't have duty or I didn't have duty.

So, there was this one female sailor—and I didn't know all this beforehand, and if I had, God knows, I never would have started talking to this dude, but she started giving me the nastiest stank eye ever; ever. She worked on the chow line and so anytime—and I didn't know why this girl was giving me stank eye. And then I later found out and it was like, "Oh."

Okay, so bottom line, she and this guy dated before and they were on ship together. So obviously that was weird. Then here I come and that just, kind of, upped this weird ante of—oh God, it was just—it was crazy. She just used to always see me, and anytime she would see me she would always roll her eyes at me. She would stare at me. I'm like, "What the crap?" So, I started getting really ticked off and I'd stare right back, you know. Because I'm like, "Dude, you're not going to freaking bully me. Who are you?"

So then, I'd asked him about it; the guy. He's like, "Yes, well, we used to date a while back."

I'm like, "Oh. That's fantastic."

Anyway, that, kind of—that subsided after a while and I just stopped paying her any attention. It's funny that we started taking about this and the whole bullying thing, because yesterday I was on Facebook.

TS: Yes?

TIGB: Of all things, and she and I are friends on Facebook. We don't talk, but we're just friends on Facebook. Somebody had—

TS: The woman who gave you the stink eye?

TIGB: The woman who gave me the stank eye.

TS: Okay.

TIGB: She—Somebody had posted something on her wall and was like, "I'm so happy we met. We're such good friends now." She goes, "I'm not going to lie. You super intimidated me when I first met you and I really didn't like you because you bullied me." [laughs]

I saw that and I just cracked up laughing. I was like, "Oh my God."

And underneath it, when she commented back she goes, "Oh, I love you too. That's so sweet."

I thought, "You aren't going to say, 'I didn't mean to bully you,' or 'I didn't mean to seem intimidating'?" Like, that obviously is her thing. She likes intimidating people. So anyway, I unfriended her.

TS: Interesting.

TIGB: Yes, not for that reason but I'd already planned on unfriending her and a bunch of other people. It was just funny that I saw that and then now we're sitting here talking about this and—

TS: Right. Right. That's interesting.

TIGB: Yes.

TS: Well, tell me a little bit about—so you—when you showed me some of your pictures—and I think I just saw it—from the [USS] *Mesa Verde*—

TIGB: Yes.

TS: USS *Mesa Verde*—

TIGB: Yes.

TS: You had—You went a couple places that were interesting to me, in that you went for the humanitarian relief of Haiti, but you said you didn't go—you didn't get to go off the ship.

TIGB: Right, I did not.

TS: But you did have somebody to take some—take a camera and take some pictures.

TIGB: Yes.

TS: Was that for the earthquake?

TIGB: Yes.

TS: Okay.

TIGB: That was—Excuse me—That was when that earthquake had hit; right after that earthquake had hit. There was Red Cross; there were other units and stuff that are out there, and we were—we just happened to have to go through—well, we didn't have to,

but we made it our mission to go through that part—or go through that area for our deployment; for the first stop in our deployment. We were there for, maybe, a week—

TS: Yes?

TIGB: —I'd say we were there. And we were flying food and stuff off the ship.

TS: Off the ship to the—

TIGB: Yes.

TS: I see.

TIGB: Off the ship to them; water off the ship to them. We took our LCACs [Landing Craft Air Cushion], which are, like, the landing aircrafts. The—like, the amphibious aircraft and then they can go on land as well. We took those out. A bunch of it—I could show you so many more pictures. A bunch of the kids were so excited because there's this big ship, there's this really cool, you know, thing that just came up out of the water and now it's on land and it's moving. But just to see the destruction—We could see it from the ship, you know, just—

TS: Oh, you could?

TIGB: Yes. We could see it from the ship. We were close enough, but not too, too close and it was—we could tell we were getting close because we started seeing articles of clothing and, like, baskets and flip-flops and tennis shoes and hats and just all this stuff floating past us and we're like, "Oh my God." I actually remember I started crying because I didn't—being at home, being in the United States, you watch it on the news and you're like, "Oh man, those poor people," you know? But then when you get close and you're there and you're like, "Oh my God, these poor people." Like, what can I seriously do to help?

And we saw—people took video as well, and I saw a video where, you know, women were crying out asking for help, and asking for food, and they have their babies who aren't clothed and all that, and just—it's so heart wrenching. And some of the pictures you saw, there were these areas where they just set up in an open field, and people made their homes out there in this open field and they had blankets, or sheets, down on the ground and that's what they slept on, and that became like a community, and the only thing that was separating them from another community was a sheet.

TS: Okay.

TIGB: And all their torn down churches—or broken down, excuse me, churches and statues and all that. So anyway, we did that for a week or so and then we left from there and went on to [Naval Station] Rota, Spain, or I think—we were just there for a refuel.

TS: Where was the pictures of the—of chasing pirates?

TIGB: That was when we were going through the Mediterranean [Sea], and I think that was after the Suez—after we had passed through the Suez Canal. That's where we started seeing people in their little—their boats. Not all of them were pirates. Some of them were just out there fishing, but a couple times the—the sailors had to get off on their little side boats and go out there and search their—the pirates' boats. [chuckles] I think they found some things a couple of times, but nothing to where we could detain anybody.

TS: Okay.

TIGB: But they did call for somebody else to come out to get those individuals, or to check their ship, you know, more, because we were on a mission to get to—

TS: Oh, I see, right.

TIGB: Yes.

TS: Hand them off to somebody else.

TIGB: Yes, exactly. Because we just stayed and circled them, and kept circling them, and kept circling them until the other ship came.

TS: I see; to keep them contained.

TIGB: Yes, exactly. Yeah, and then we went on to Kuwait. We were in Kuwait for three weeks doing training out there for our pilots, and then the grunts—or the ground-side guys, infantry guys, they got off and did their training for three weeks as well. There's the one picture where the last couple days we were there, like, the pilots were pretty much done with what they had to do and they allowed us, the maintenance workers—they allowed us to pilot a Cobra, so that was really sweet. I got to pilot a Cobra, you know.

TS: How was that?

TIGB: How many more times in my life am I going to be able to say that? It was—it was amaze—it was scary but it was amazing. I remember I was shaking, and of course, the actual pilot was sitting in the back seat as the copilot.

TS: Yeah. [extraneous dialogue redacted] Okay. This is Therese Strohmer. I'm with Tavia Brightwell. We had to take a short little break and detour. We were talking about life on the ship; the deployment on the [USS] *Mesa Verde*?

TIGB: Yes.

TS: Compared to when you had your deployment to—

TIGB: Al Assad?

TS: —to Al Assad in Iraq. And you were actually describing how it was more difficult in many ways on the—on the ship. One, because you're not with your—the unit.

TIGB: Yes.

TS: And then you're having experiences where you're being bullied by some women that, for some reason, picked on you. So—But then now you—you were off chasing pirates [both chuckle], and some of the places that you got to see—you had some beautiful pictures of Dubai [United Arab Emirates] that you showed me too.

TIGB: Yes.

TS: Tell me about some of the things you got to do in Dubai.

TIGB: Let's see. In Dubai we—while we were there we went to a water park [chuckles], so it was very interesting taking pictures and then posting them online or sending them back home. They're like, "What? I thought you were on deployment, not on vacation." But that's one of the perks of going on a meaux[?], or a shipboard deployment, and you go to different port stops. You don't always get to fun stuff, but usually they have excursions and different things that you can do to tour the country pretty much.

Yeah, so we went to one of the, like, hugest malls I've ever seen, out there in Dubai. It had three or four different levels and it was huge. And it was really interesting to go from, like, Qatar [pronounce like "CUT-ter"]—or some people say Qatar [pronounced like "Ka-TAR"] because of UAE [United Arab Emirates]—it was very

interesting to go from there and then go to Dubai. I had never personally heard of Dubai before I went on this deployment, but then after deployment I started hearing people saying, “Oh yeah, my family and I are going on vacation to Dubai.”

I’m like, “Oh my God,” you know. It’s like this—this huge, you know, destination now. And they’ve built it up, apparently, just from—I heard one of the guys say from rubble. So apparently it looked kind of like Qatar looks now. Qatar is—to me it seemed more historic, and kind of torn down in some areas. And then you get to Dubai where it’s like you’re in Beverly Hills or somewhere, you know. It’s just nice, and they have this huge resort—or a bunch of huge resorts with this really crazy nice water inlet, and you see all the chairs laid out by the pool with the palm trees and the this and that. It’s just like, “Am I seriously in the desert?” [chuckles] So, that was pretty fun.

TS: So, it’s like a resort destination.

TIGB: Yes.

TS: The other thing I think of when I think of Dubai is I remember once seeing a picture of Tiger Woods on the top of this building hitting a golf ball off—off of—off of this building.

TIGB: Oh. It was probably one of those hotels. I know the—the Burj Al Arab, I think is what it’s called, is this huge hotel. I think it’s the one that—it looks like a sail from a sailboat.

TS: Okay.

TIGB: It’s got this crazy curved shape and people were standing—like, that’s where the rooms where, on the very, very outside of this curve, and it’s—it goes so way up high. Actually, the latest *Mission: Impossible* movie, part of it was filmed out there using this huge hotel. Have you seen it?

TS: I think—I think I know about it when you say the movie, but no; otherwise no.

TIGB: Yeah, well they—excuse me, it wasn’t even the—yeah, there was a hotel and then there was this building that Tom Cruise had to scale up on the outside. [This refers to the Burj Khalifa, whereas the Burj Al Arab is referenced above as a sail-like construction.]

TS: Right.



TIGB: We actually passed by that building. I took pictures of it. I think I might have some in the photo album of it.

TS: Okay. We'll have to see.

TIGB: Huge, huge building. So, yeah, we went shopping and stuff. There's where I went ice skating in the mall.

TS: I love that you were ice skating in the desert. That's awesome.

TIGB: Yeah. [chuckles] Ice skating in the desert.

TS: Yeah, and you—now, so what—in the places you've been—

TIGB: Yes?

TS: —where would you say is one of the most—your favorite places that you've been to.

TIGB: My favorite place is definitely Dubai.

TS: Oh, it is? Okay.

TIGB: Yeah.

TS: I wasn't aware of that when you started out with it.

TIGB: No, it's okay. That—It's—Well, between Qatar and Dubai, of the places that we went, because I went swimming with a dolphin in Qatar for the first time, and then, of course, just the awesomeness of Dubai—oh no, and then there was Petra [Jordan]. I forgot all about Petra. Oh my gosh. We went to Jordan for—I think it was a two week period; two or three weeks we were in Jordan. We got to go on an excursion and we went to Petra, which is—I think it's, like, the hidden city or something. And everything there is built out of the rocks, and it's all—most of it is the original construction. I'm pretty sure they've had some facelifts, but it was really, really cool to go out there and see not just the natives out there, but there were actual Americans. I'd never even heard of Petra before the deployment and there were other Americans out there touring this area as well, and it was just really cool to see, I don't know, how you can just take a wall of rock and you have all these exquisite looking caves and there're monasteries and stuff—or, you know, religious houses that they had, and they were built way, way, way up.

TS: Practically carved into the—

TIGB: Yeah.

TS: —into the side of the hill, or whatever it was, right?

TIGB: Yes, and this one that we went to—I forget what the name of it is, but they actually used it in the latest *Transformers* movie, so that was kind of cool. And then I got to ride a camel for the first time.

TS: I saw you on a horse too. [chuckles]

TIGB: Yeah, [chuckles] and it's really silly that it took me to get all the way to Petra, Jordan for the first time—you know, me riding a horse. Let's see. That was—yeah, that—maybe Petra was my favorite.

TS: Yeah?

TIGB: Yeah, just because I was—I mean, you can go to a waterpark anywhere but—

TS: Because of the cultural aspect of it?

TIGB: Exactly, exactly.

TS: I see.

TIGB: And they told us stories about how, like—I don't know exactly how true it is because I don't know if these are the names from biblical times or whatever, but how part of the market squares where Jesus and the disciples came through and they would preach and all that stuff in there. So, that was really cool, and it's, like, the original cobblestone—they say it's the original cobblestone roads and all that, so that was really, really awesome to just have that history there.

And we went to—while we were in Jordan we went to the River Jordan and that was really nice. They took us to where Jesus was baptized, and of course, it's, like, closed off so you can't—you know, nobody can get down in there. That was really, really cool. And they had one of the original, like, synagogue places where he first taught. They did tell us though that it had been restructured because it had fallen; like, weathered, of course. So, that was really neat.

We got to go swim in the Dead Sea, so that was really cool to just lay there and float in extremely alkaline water. Took a mud bath for the first time; a cleansing mud bath, they called it.

TS: How was that?

TIGB: Interesting. [both laugh]

TS: Okay.

TIGB: Never—I'd never taken a mud bath before, but you literally just have this—like, this pit and it's like a community pit, and they had a couple of them, and you'd go over there and you mud each other up; like, total strangers just mudding each other up completely. Then you leave it on, you let it soak into your skin—or onto your skin, and it dries, and then you just go and swim in the Dead Sea and it washes you off, and no kidding, you feel, like, a thousand times smoother and cleaner—

TS: Really.

TIGB: Yeah, it was really weird, but yes, so that was really cool.

TS: Really neat.

TIGB: Yes.

TS: Was there any place that you went that you're like, "Well, this is not my favorite place"?

TIGB: Jordan.

TS: So, Jordan for the best and Jordan for the worst?

TIGB: [laughs] Because of the areas. We were in Petra, right; that was the awesome part. And then, like, down at the River Jordan which is—I think that's, like, Amman, I think it's called, or Ammam. I'm pretty sure it's Amman, Jordan; A-M-A-A-N[sic]. Yeah, that was—that was cool, but then where we were on the base, that's where it was gross. And I hate to say that but it really was nasty.

The part of town that we were in—which, by the way, on the way back from Petra we didn't—like, we didn't get to fly to anywhere into Petra; we had to take buses. So, on the way back we had to use their little highway system, and it's was kind of strange

because here, you know, you see signs for, like, I-40 and you get off—you take a right to go towards Raleigh or take a left to go towards Durham. There it was, you take a left to stay towards Amman or you take right to go to Iraq, [chuckling] and it was really interesting. It's like, "Wow, look at—look at this," you know.

TS: [chuckles]

TIGB: So, on the way back just—oh God, just driving through there and just seeing—like, when you are in—well, I'm from Winston[-Salem] so I don't really know too much about Greensboro, but when you're in Greensboro and you're downtown, there's a side of downtown where it's, kind of, upper class. You can see the divide, right? And you go on, clearly, just the other side of the street and you see the complete opposite end of that divide, right? So, it's kind of the same—

TS: Socioeconomic divide.

TIGB: Right. And so, over there it's the same thing. We were riding around Petra and there were people who have BMWs and they have Mercedes Benzes, and it's like—I hate to say it, but you—a bunch of us thought the same thing: "How do they have these cars?" you know, because it sucks, but you go in there with this thought of everybody riding a camel.

TS: [chuckles]

TIGB: I seriously—I personally did not think that the area was going to be as built up as it was, and there were going to be people driving around in Jaguars and—

TS: So, you didn't perceive the modernization that they had in the cities.

TIGB: Yes, right.

TS: Okay.

TIGB: Right. And so, as were leaving from Petra to go back to our base you start to see the divide slowly; the socioeconomic divide. And you go from seeing the Porsches and the Benzes to seeing people in, like, kind of, putt-putting cars; to seeing people walk along the sandy road with no shoes on. And that area is where our base was; it was this very, very run down part of town. I say that was the worst place because I'd never been in conditions—living conditions like that before.

Now, you're on deployment so, of course, you're not going to expect the Ritz, right? But you also don't expect to be welcomed by a black ground of flies. And like I said before, we got off the aircraft, we were walking to the hangar to go see our working space, and I saw some of the guys who were there who had gotten there before and they're sweeping up hangar space. I'm like, "Dang, this is crazy dirty." Like, you know, "Why is it black, though, and not brown?"

They're like, "It's because they're all dead flies." Complete—The ground completely black; completely, [chuckles] and they were all dead flies. So, for that two or three week period we were, literally, combating flies.

And we had fly traps every—and it's like, "Where do they keep coming from," you know?

It was hot, it was nasty, and I say it was gross because—thankfully we didn't have to live outside or anything, but the building where we were, we pretty much—it's like one big long building; there were guys and girls. You walk into the main door and there's two halls, and the hall to the right all guys, and there's, like, ten to twelve rooms on that hall, and there's maybe six bunk beds in each room. You go down to the—oh, and then in the middle section there's all the washer and dryers. You're lucky if one of them works. And then you go down to the left hand side, same thing. There's about twelve rooms; whatever; bunk beds, and then there's a sliding door, and that's it. Behind that sliding door there's three rooms, and those are the female rooms. That's all that was separating us from the guys right next to us; was a sliding door.

TS: A sliding door.

TIGB: Yeah. But luckily, we were with our own marines so we didn't have anything really to worry about. So, what made it gross—or just—I don't know, just something I wasn't exactly used to was the fact that, like, we went in and there was only one shower, there was no shower curtain, there were two toilet stalls but their toilets don't flush like our toilets do, and you have to either push a button or lift up on something and you're lucky if the water will run. I was just like, "Oh my God, this is insane," and other kinds of bugs and rodents and it's like—you know, you just don't—and then coming from, like, a spoiled ship to that and it's just, kind of, like a huge wake up call.

But it was interesting to note that that's how those people live, and we got to experience that, so it made me more aware of, you know, how other people live and it's not all sunshiney and you get clean water to shower in, because even there, we weren't allowed to drink the water. We had to use bottled water for everything, except showering, just don't get it in your mouth. And the crazy thing, you had to take a shower at night. That's the only way you got hot water, because they had the big wells—or the big water towers and the water would heat up during the day, and so that's how you had hot water

at night. And if you took a shower in the morning you were going taking an ice bath pretty much.

So, it was just—it was very, very interesting, and there weren't, like, shower heads. It was literally a hole in the wall with a hose sticking out of the—sticking out of the hole in the wall. And the drainage system wasn't good at all. Usually the water would start pooling up around your feet and—yuck.

TS: So, as a young woman from Winston-Salem, North Carolina, born and mostly raised, right?

TIGB: Yes.

TS: And you're traveling around the world. Did you ever expect to have these cultural experiences, and see the differences in different parts of the world that you saw?

TIGB: I hoped to be able to see the cultural differences, I just didn't expect to see such huge differences, maybe? Like I said before, Petra and Jordan and all that, I didn't—I didn't expect to see, like, huge lavish—lavishly built towns, you know? But I also didn't think that it would be like how it was on the base in Jordan where, you know, there are people with a hole in the wall with a—with a hose and that's how they showered. I didn't expect that. So, it was definitely—it was definitely an eye opener to see how people live in different parts of the world and all that.

TS: You were talking, too, about this one little kid that you wanted to take home once?

TIGB: Yeah. That's when we were at—in Petra. We were walking around seeing the different—seeing the different places around there—around the site, and there are these kids who come out there; you know, like we have pan handlers here. They were selling their goods. They're selling postcards; they're selling key chains. Selling anything they could to get a buck.

There's this one little boy and he was selling necklaces, and he just kept following me. Well, he was following our whole group, and he's like, "Ma'am! Ma'am, please! Ma'am, please!"

I said, "I'll come back," you know. "Before we leave I'll come back and buy one. I promise." And I really was going to buy one. He followed me all the way up to the top of this one little mountain area. We went to go look at the—the coliseum that they had there to go take pictures. And he followed me all the way up the mountain.

He's like, "Ma'am, please. Please, just buy one necklace. Please."

I said, “You know what? I’ll buy three.” So, I bought some of his necklaces and I was like, “You have to take a picture with me though.”

He’s like, “Okay!” And he stood there and he just smiled—he was so sweet and just so cute and I absolutely wanted to bring him back home with me. [chuckles]

TS: Aw.

TIGB: He was so freakin’ sweet. And he followed us for a longer period of time. Not trying to sell us anything; he was just walking around with us. That was really cool. I don’t know. It made me kind of sad, you know, like—

TS: How old do you think he was?

TIGB: He was at least seven; seven or eight; somewhere in there. It made me sad because I know, like, the differences, you know what I mean, from their living environment and then our living environment. But he doesn’t know that difference, so he maybe doesn’t need the pity or want the pity, or even understand that he is being pitied because he’s used to living in that environment, you know? And then it makes you think about the people who are back here in the United States who do live in those conditions. They might not be walking around in sandy, you know, areas, but they are definitely homeless and walking around with no shoes on trying to peddle things and get people to buy necklaces and stuff like that because they don’t have—so, I don’t know.

It’s just—deployments like that definitely helped you to see the world from a completely different lens, outside of the training, outside of the—you know, the situational awareness, and all that kind of stuff, you see it literally on all different kinds of levels; living situations, economics, money. You know, just the social divides; the racial divides, the class divides; it’s definitely an eye opener. So I appreciated it for that reason especially; you know, coming from the United States and then coming from North Carolina and then coming from Winston-Salem and coming from our little part of town, you know, where it might not be anywhere near as hard as what they’re experiencing over there—

TS: Right.

TIGB: —on their sandy shores.

TS: Well, let me take you to a—some other different—about this timeframe. We often ask who were your heroes and heroines.

TIGB: Like, in the military? Is that what you mean?

TS: Military, outside the military.

TIGB: And who was my hero or heroine?

TS: Yeah, anybody that you admired.

TIGB: I mean, of course, all those who'd gone before me. That's definitely an answer. I would definitely say my old gunnies. I talked about them before a lot. I definitely admired them a lot just because of the—the things that they instilled in me as a marine, and then as an adult as well. Being twenty-one and you're like, yeah, you're an adult but you still haven't really lived. At that point I still hadn't experienced a whole lot of real life stuff, and so they helped to shape me for that, and—yes, so they were definitely my—my heroes.

TS: What about—so you went in the Marine Corps in 2006, was it?

TIGB: Yes.

TS: And so, the war in Iraq was about three years old then. So, you had to [President George Walker] Bush administration.

TIGB: Yes.

TS: And then you were in then when President [Barack Hussein] Obama took over.

TIGB: Yes.

TS: Did you see any difference? Because sometimes people say, you know, the military is more conservative and there might have been a shift. Do you know of any—notice anything like that? I mean, you're in the most conservative service branch, too.

TIGB: Yes. I personally didn't notice a huge difference. I mean, I deployed under both administrations.

TS: Right.



TIGB: Well, I mean, I think if I had deployed to Iraq twice then maybe I'd be able to give a better answer and would have been able to see—you know what I mean, like, two completely different things—maybe, but one was a land deployment and the other was, you know, a shipboard deployment, and it was just a completely different atmosphere for both. I feel like they were two completely different missions for both, but—yes. But what was cool was President Obama came out and we got to fly him in one of our helicopters, so that was pretty sweet.

TS: When you were on the [USS] *Mesa Verde*?

TIGB: No, this was—actually it was before he was president, but yeah, he came out to Iraq and flew him—

TS: Oh, when you were in Iraq?

TIGB: Yes, on our helicopter; on one of ours. That was kind of cool.

TS: Did you get to meet him or anything?

TIGB: I did not get to meet him, but I heard about it. [both laugh]

TS: But it was from where you were at, right? Well, you had—Also, while you're in—2010 or 2011? Well, the “Don't Ask, Don't Tell” was implemented when you were in. What—Do you have any thoughts about that; around repeal of it that just happened recently?

TIGB: No, not really. I just—We really aren't supposed to talk about, like, openly, you know, the administrative things like that; political—because they're political and all that, and my voice could be considered the voice of all the Marine Corps.

TS: Oh, you mean, like, because you're still in the [United States Marine Corps] Reserves?

TIGB: Exactly.

TS: Okay. All right. I won't ask you about these, because the next one on here is about how you feel about women in combat positions, but that can fall under that.

TIGB: Yes. Well, I think I could talk about that. Females in combat positions—why not? You know? I think if a female can show that she, you know, is capable of carrying the same

loads as the males and it doesn't become a thing where it's—like me, for instance, I would not put myself up for that. Not because it's like, "Oh my God, it's combat," but because I know my physical limitations. And I know some of the things that, like, Shane used to have to do. He was a machine gunner. He would tell me about, like, the hundred pound pack that he would have and all the extra weapons and all the tripods and all this. I could not do that. I personally couldn't, but if there's a female out there who's like, rough-tough, can't get enough, like, go ahead, please, by all means. But I don't think that women should be outcasts, I guess, because simply, we're women. I don't think that's very fair. If that were the case then they never would have opened the military up in general for women to serve, you know, outside of that paperwork role.

TS: Right.

TIGB: There are women already who are on the frontlines, but they—at the time it had just not been, like, a specific MOS that was, like, combat MOS for a female. There are Lionesses; have you ever heard of those?

TS: Yes, but you can explain it for the—

TIGB: Okay. The Lionesses—like, when we're forward deployed they go out on convoy missions with the groundside or whoever, and they go out in these convoys and patrols, and they are the ones who are in charge of serving female Iraqis or female—you know, females in general, because the males aren't allowed to touch the females over there. And so, I mean, they're already in those roles. They're already outside the wire, you know, on the front line. They're just not considered "combat", [chuckles] you know, MOS—positions or whatever. So, I definitely think that females should be allowed to have combat—combat jobs if they want to.

TS: What about women on submarines?

TIGB: I agree that if they want to do it then they should, but [pause]—this is like—I don't like these things, because it's like I want to say, "Yes, absolutely, please go do it," but then you know there's that chance for other things to happen, like rape and abuses and all that kind of stuff. And it's not fair to say that a woman should not be allowed to go on a submarine because a man cannot control his advances, or maybe it's that a woman can't control her advances on a man.

So, just clear cut, yes, a woman should be allowed to, but then there should also be things put in place; classes given maybe, I don't know; more threats; more serious consequences, that should come with, you know, people disobeying the rules. And if

things do happen, and if a female comes forward and says, “Hey, this and this and this happened,” maybe not to continue to victimize her and say, “You brought it on yourself because you knew this could happen because you’re on a submarine.” That’s not the correct answer at all. That’s not what she asked for and signed up to go on a submarine, or to go anywhere.

TS: Right.

TIGB: You know? It’s not what she asked for at all. And now I’m starting to take this somewhere else. [chuckles]

TS: No, that’s all right. Well, the idea, too, that the military’s disciplined and it follows orders.

TIGB: Yes.

TS: So, if there—if there’s a discipline issue, isn’t that separate from a performance issue of women serving in certain positions?

TIGB: Yeah, definitely. But it’s just—it all comes down to human nature, is what it is. No amount—I won’t say no amount, but it seems as if, maybe, no amount of discipline, no amount of morals, or whatever—if somebody wants to do something, even if they know it’s wrong and they’re not supposed to do it or whatever, they’re going to do it. If they want to do it, if there is something in their little brains that clicks for half a second and thinks that whatever that wrong thing is is a good thing, they’re going to at least attempt, you know. And it sucks to say that we do have those in our military ranks who are disciplined, or should be disciplined, but who come in and are already messed up, up there, and who don’t follow guidelines, and who don’t follow the professional role, or the—the role of the disciplinarian; you know, whatever, all that stuff that should be instilled, and you just have bad people everywhere. And it sucks that you can’t exactly weed them all out.

TS: Well, at what point did you decide to leave the Marine Corps?

TIGB: At what point. Literally until the last day I could be in, is how long it took me to decide on whether or not I was going to reenlist or get out. I teetered back and forth and back and forth and back and forth. I loved the Marine Corps—love, still present tense, the Marine Corps. That became my job; that became what I knew; that became my

profession; that became my family; that became my town; that was my home; Jacksonville; and that's what I had grown used to.

So, picking up and leaving all that was definitely really hard, and trying to figure out what I wanted to do—I knew I wanted to come back to school, of course. And like I said, I knew I wanted to come back for teaching. But it was just letting go of that life and just making that disconnect and that separation and starting over from scratch. And that, yeah, it took me a really long time to finally come to grips with. And so that's why, after I'd been out for only—only a month, I actually tried to come back in. [chuckles] I talked to different recruiters, and I'm like, "Please, what can I do? I'll even take a B billet; whatever. What can I do?" And because of the drawdown they weren't, at the time, accepting any more prior-enlisted packages. So, I couldn't come back in active duty, so they're giving me all these other options and I'm like, "No, I want to come back active duty. This is—" you know, so—because I still had another—November, December—two and half months before school started in the spring. And I had already gotten accepted; all that; already registered for classes.

So then I thought, "I can at least the Reserves. I can at least still have my little taste of Marine Corps [chuckles] once a month," and so that's what I—that's what I decided to do. Because I loved the uniform, I loved putting it on, I loved being a marine, I loved what comes with being a marine; that sense of—of—of dignity and just—I don't know. I feel more empowered as a female knowing that I'm a marine as well, you know, than just some—God, I hate to say that. I shouldn't say that. Never mind; I'm not even going to finish that sentence, because I don't want to put anybody down and, like, sound rude or anything. So I'll just stop that sentence there.

TS: [chuckles] Well, I have to say, of all the women that I—the services that I interview, marines have the most—the strongest tie to being a marine and being—and their job, I would say—

TIGB: Yes.

TS: —and that close knit family. Not that all the other services don't feel like it's a family and things like that, but there's something about the Marine Corps that—that's a little different.

TIGB: Yes.

TS: I can't put my finger on it exactly.

TIGB: I don't know. I think it's just that—

TS: It's a smaller service.

TIGB: That, and the band—that bond—excuse me—that they—that bond that they just instill in you, and just they—I don't know. I think that if from the beginning, if my Marine Corps career had been like the later part of it—like what I told you about how it was just craziness in the shop until we all, kind of, got used to each other. I think that if from the beginning, if it had been like that, my story might be a little different. I might not feel like, “Yeah, we're all Marine Corps. I love it. I want to go back,” if it was like—but because I was met with such, like, open arms and caring people, who not only cared about me as a marine but cared about me as a person, you know, and brought in that family connectedness. If it hadn't been for that, I don't know that I would feel so strongly about it. You know what I mean? Because really, that's all you really know is that—what you're in right there; that situation you're in; that unit you're in; that shop you're in; that's all you really know of the Marine Corps until you start deploying with other units, or unless you transfer from air wing to ground side and you start working, like, in motor T [a military occupational specialty, motor transport] or something like that. Or unless you transfer to a completely different base, like out on the west coast or Japan or Hawaii, you don't know anything but that little community that you're in, you know? So, I think that if that had started off horribly I probably—and if it hadn't changed, I would probably not feel this way.

TS: Right. Well, what—was there anything that was particularly—well, maybe there was because you said you wanted to go back into the Marine Corps right away, but was there anything in particular that was hard to transition into the civilian life again?

TIGB: I would—I would say just my routine, you know, because I developed a routine when I was there, and like I said, I felt like I was leaving my family there, and of course this is home and I had all my friends and my actual family here, but it wasn't the same. And I just felt like I was coming back to somewhere where people wouldn't really understand me.

TS: That's something you talked about it that article in the *G.I. Jobs*, a little bit, about being in—

TIGB: [extraneous comment about tissues redacted]

[Recording Paused]

TS: You all set?

TIGB: Go ahead.

TS: Sorry, Tavia.

TIGB: Okay, so I was—I was saying that I just—I felt like coming back home I would be faced with a situation where, like, people didn't really know me as well as they did before I left. Of course I was the same person, but, kind of, not really; kind of had a different mindset.

TS: What do you think changed?

TIGB: My maturity level. Even—I don't know. Just my experiences; you know, going to other countries. Anybody can go to another country. Anybody can go on a family vacation and go to Dubai, but they won't come back with the same experience of, you know, having to carry a weapon around, and having to be alert, and knowing that, you know, you might have to handle a situation, you know what I mean? And it's not a vacation.

Just—I don't know. Just—and it did happen. I came back and I—my jokes were different from, like, their jokes; I'm talking about my friends and stuff. I'm—I was used to hanging out with all the guys and having, you know, jokes that girls wouldn't usually tell or even laugh at. And I would come home and a guy would say something; I'd be cracking up and all the other girls are like, "Oh my God, I can't believe you just said that."

And I'm like, "Oh, come on." So, there was that and just feeling like I needed to find a way to fit yet again.

TS: Did you feel like you fit in really well into the Marine Corps, then?

TIGB: Yeah. I felt like I fit in more in the Marine Corps than I did when I came home, and it wasn't just because of, like, the joking was on a different level, but it was because, you know, people had started moving on and, like, getting married and having kids and, like, all that; nesting. And I wasn't there, you know. I just, kind of—not like the Marine Corps held me back, but I don't know, I just wasn't ready for that yet. And I just—even at home. Coming back home was a huge transition. Number one, there was, you know, getting used to not being on my own anymore, because the time I was out there I pretty much by myself, and now I'm back home again and, you know, I had moved back in with

my mom for a little while, and dealing with the, “Where are you going? What time are you going to be back?” all that.

And I’m like, “Oh my god. Are you serious?” So, coming back to that was definitely hard. Trying to explain—I think I’m crying now because I feel guilty.

TS: What do you feel guilty about?

TIGB: Because I came back home and, like, I was excited about being home, but I just, kind of, shut everybody out. And all they wanted to do was come in my room, sit on the bed, and talk, and do something like this and find out about all my experiences. But I just shut everybody out. I just didn’t want to talk, and I was like, “I want to go back to Jacksonville,” and “I love you guys, but please just leave me alone.” And I just, kind of, shut down.

And my mom said she definitely noticed a difference, because before, like, I would still be smiling and nice, respectful, and stuff—like me, but I wasn’t as—as fun to be around, is what she said. She said it was like I was always in a bad mood. I was—not always but more often than not I would snap at them for stuff. And I just felt bad because I didn’t know why I was doing it. And I didn’t mean to do it. I would never, like, mean to snap at my mom and my brother for no reason at all and be like, “Just leave me alone. What do you want?” I was never, ever, ever like that. But for whatever reason, when I came back it was just such a huge—just a huge difference, and just trying to get back to being used to being around, you know, civilians; because I always surrounded by military folks, and how we talk, and how we handle situations, and how we go about, you know, our day. And you can look at somebody and know they’re in the military, and I came back home and I look at people and I’m like, “You are so undisciplined.” [chuckles] You know?

TS: Well, one person explained it to me once as—saying that in the civilian world there’s no sense of urgency about completing a job—

TIGB: Right.

TS: —or finishing a task or, you know, making a decision.

TIGB: Right.

TS: And that was one of the hardest things that he had to deal with.

TIGB: Yes.

TS: Is that—

TIGB: That's very—very, very true. I know in the military a lot of times it's hurry up and wait, but when it's time to get something done there's always a sense of urgency; get it done, get it done right, but you get it done quickly. And it's like, really, when you come here in civilian—we always say “civilian world” like it's a completely different, you know—but seriously, in the civilian world it's like nobody cares. And it's like, “Okay, I'll get it done sooner or later.”

And it's like, “What? No,” you know?

TS: Or if someone says, “Oh, I'll have that done for you by Tuesday,” and Tuesday comes and goes.

TIGB: And it's not done and you just want to pull your hair out. Yeah, you know. Or even—It's crazy, but even driving down the road and—I'd never had road rage, that I know of, but I came back home and I was angry at everybody. I'm like, “Get out of my way.” I'd never been like that ever, you know, and nothing was ever fast enough. You know, like you talked about making the decision thing? That used to kill me, and it still does. I don't get as upset—I don't get as upset about it now, but it still just irks my nerves sometimes, you know, and I'm like, “Please, somebody just make a decision.”

TS: Where are we going to eat?

TIGB: Yeah. And everybody—

TS: Twenty-five minutes later.

TIGB: Exactly. And everybody's like, “Well, what do you want? Well, what do you want?

And I'm like, “Look. This is what we're going to do,” dah dah dah, you know.

Like, for instance, for this marathon that a group of us just ran this past Sunday, we were all going to carpool up there; it was a total of eight or ten of us or something like that; we're all going to carpool up there. So a week prior, still nobody has said who's driving, who's riding with whom; all that. So, I posted on our little forum. I said, “What's the driving situation looking like? Who's going to drive? Do I need to drive?” I didn't want to drive because I'm going to have just finished running; that's kind of the point of me wanting to carpool.



So then there's ten other people who are like, "Well, such and such said they're going to drive. Well, such and such said this. Well, this could happen, and this could happen."

And so, I'm like, "You know what? Oh my God." I said "I'm just going to drive myself."

They're like, "Why are you going to do that?"

I said, "Because you guys can't make a freaking decision." Like, "Please, somebody just come up and say, 'I'm going to drive. This person, this person, this person's going to be in my car. This person's going to drive. This person, this person, this person's going to be in their car.' Boom. It's done. Let's do this." That's the way I like to work. Like, "Get it done. Just be done with it," you know.

But yes, so I still deal with that every now and then, and I've gotten better with not getting so upset, or as upset, so quickly because I realized my training is obviously much different than what some people, I guess, haven't had, you know.

TS: How does that carry over into school and classes and things? Or does it?

TIGB: It does, in a sense. Where—like we were talking about having a sense of urgency and making sure stuff is done—excuse me. That's definitely in the classroom, you know, and I'm not always, like, right on target; sometimes I slack too. But the biggest difference is, like, hearing some of the younger students talk about, like, "Oh man, I didn't have time for it. I was out drinking. I was out at my buddy's house. I was—"

And I'm just like, "Wow," you know? And—I don't know. Or, like, you hear them talk about work, and how they hate their job. They hate this. They hate that; dah dah dah. Life sucks. This sucks.

I'm like, "You no idea," you know. Like, "You complain so much, but you have no clue." And it drives me insane.

The worst ones are when they're like, "Oh, my dad didn't give me money for this. My mom didn't give me money."

I'm like, "Shut up." [chuckles]

But at the same time it's like they can't help it because that's what—that's how they've grown up. They've been sheltered, you know. They've been provided for their whole lives. They haven't had to grow up. But it sucks to think that these are the kids who are now considered adults, who are sitting in a college classroom next to me, who are going to be graduating with me, and who are going to be leading the world. You know what I'm saying? And it's like this is what they think reality is, you know. Maybe wake up and go to class. Maybe turn in an assignment on time. Maybe, actually, complete the full assignment. Maybe graduate and go out here and get a job. Maybe turn

in the assignment on time, you know. And it's like, "No. How are you going to be the next leader of the world when that's your mentality?"

TS: Well, do you find that there's a misperception by civilians about people in the military, or about the military itself?

TIGB: Do I feel like there's a misconception with civilians thinking things about military folks?

TS: Yes.

TIGB: [pause] I don't know; maybe a little. I don't want to speak for, like, the military as a whole, but I think there is a—maybe one misconception; one major one, you know, where everybody thinks that we're all angry people who just want to kill people. And that sounds really crazy and blunt, but I definitely heard it. "How many people have you killed? Why are you so angry—"

TS: Do you think that's because you're in the Marine Corps?

TIGB: This is before they know I'm actually in the Marine Corps.

TS: Oh, okay.

TIGB: I just say if I'm in the service, or something like that, and they're like—I don't know, just—but you can definitely tell a military person when you see one, I think. Or maybe I just have an eye for it. Because we just—we stand a little bit taller; we kind of walk with a different air; we kind of have this sense—like, you can see the discipline, usually, vice [sic, versus?] walking next to some other kid, you know, [chuckles] walking down the hallway. Like, we just look like we have somewhere we need to be, you know; not be-bopping around.

But I don't even know if civilians have a—if there's a misconception there. Just the one I hear mostly is that they think that all military folks are angry people who are going to, like, freak out one day; you know, PTSD [posttraumatic stress disorder] thing; oh my God. I can't tell you how much I heard that when I came back home.

TS: From whom?

TIGB: Friends. When I was, you know, first back here in school, and people started asking about PTSD, and sitting—I remember my—when I first came back and we started—we were doing the veteran's cards; we were doing the Veteran's Day signing things. And we're

out there at a table, and this is when we were over here at the dining hall downstairs, and we had a table set up. And there were a group of kids who were sitting outside of what's now, I guess, the Taco Bell. They're sitting outside at one of those tables and they're talking about, "I had a buddy, or my brother knew a guy, who got out of the army and he had PTSD real bad and he tried to kill his family, and all those military folks are freaking crazy, and dah dah dah. They're all pretty much going to kill—" I mean, just kept going on and on and on.

And I'm just like, "Don't talk about what you don't know about," you know? And I know—for whatever reason—I don't know if it's because of the movies or because of things that was actually in the news, but all of a sudden there was this huge deal with everybody talking about PTSD. It's real and it comes in different forms and fashions, and different levels and all that, but everybody thinks that PTSD means that you're going to flip out and start killing people.

And so, there's a huge misconception that people who are in the military, whether they've just come back from deployment or are still in and are just stressed out or they get out and come back to civilian life, they're going to freak out and do something crazy. So, I think that's a huge—that's probably one of the biggest misconceptions—

TS: Yeah.

TIGB: —that civilians have about military folks. I've yet to do anything crazy. I don't have the mentality to do anything crazy, you know. I'm more likely—I'm more than likely to stare somebody down than—[chuckles] than to actually do anything. I would never, but—

TS: Well, have you had anybody come up to you and say, "Hey, you know, I was thinking about joining the military."

TIGB: Yes.

TS: What do you tell them?

TIGB: To do it.

TS: Why?

TIGB: I usually tell them to do it, especially if it's somebody young, simply because of the—the discipline that they can get out of it. I'm all about discipline. I was like that before I went in, and I guess that's because my mom raised us; she disciplined us when we were coming up.

TS: So, you think you were a pretty independent-minded person before you went into the military?

TIGB: Yes, definitely; definitely. But I would definitely tell especially younger folks to go because they need to experience something that's not this nest of just knowing home, and just thinking this is all there is out there. I tell everybody but my brother. Like, my brother approached me about joining the military a while ago and I was like, "Don't do it," you know. And it was just because I was scared for him, not because I didn't want him to get everything I'm sitting here talking about.

TS: [chuckles]

TIGB: I'm like, "No, please. Go do—" I'm pulling the mom card. I'm doing exactly what my mom did to me; "Please, no, go do something else please." But I'm pretty sure he's going to do it because he said he talked to a recruiter some weeks ago, so—

TS: How old is he?

TIGB: He just turned twenty.

TS: Okay.

TIGB: So, that's crazy to be following in my footsteps—

TS: Yes.

TIGB: —and going in when he's twenty.

TS: So, you think it would be a good maturing experience?

TIGB: Yes, absolutely. Even for the older individual, sure, join. Maybe you missed that growing period; that maturing period, you know. I don't know. I think—I hate to say the military can sometimes be a good stepping stone, but it can be a good stepping stone, you know, because you see not only a different side of the world, but you see a different side of yourself. And you start to learn things about yourself and you learn that you can actually be pushed further than you think that you ever could have before or than you've ever tried to push yourself before. And you definitely learn and see that you are more complex than you've had a chance to realize before.

TS: Do you think your life is different because you joined the Marine Corps?

TIGB: I think so. I think I handle situations a little differently. I think that—I mean, like I said before, I’ve always been very independent. I’ve always been a very strong-minded person. I’ve always been a very disciplined person, but I think that the military helped to reinforce those things. And the military has definitely given me a greater sense of pride, and made me feel like I can do more things than I probably ever would have tried, you know, before joining.

Like, I would never see myself, you know, handling a rifle. I don’t mind guns, like pistols, but I would never see myself handling a rifle and feeling comfortable with going out on a rifle range, and having to carry one around on my shoulder, and there was time when we were in Iraq—we were going to Iraq from Kuwait, and this was during the first deployment, and they made me a guardian angel. And a guardian angel is where you sit behind the driver and you have your M-16, your rifle, and you have rounds. And you are told to put your weapon on fire if anything crazy happens. Like, you are that person who has to handle the situation; if you’re the guardian angel.

So, I never would have thought that I’d be in that situation where I’m like, “I might have to kill this man;” ever, and that’s so scary, you know.

And that was my first deployment, and they’re like, “Hey, here you go. You got your rifle? Of course you do. Here’s some rounds. Go sit behind the bus driver.”

“What? I’m sorry, do what?” And if anybody had asked me in 2004 when I was here and I left UNCG and they’re like, “Where are you going to go do with your life?”, I would never ever think that I’d say, “Probably going to end up sitting behind a bus driver with a loaded M-16, trying to protect fifty other marines on my bus. [chuckles] You know?”

TS: Well, [pause] here’s a question for you. What does patriotism mean to you?

TIGB: Patriotism, to me, means pride in one’s country; pride in one’s services, like armed services; pride in one’s service men and women. Patriotism, to me, means even regular civilians being able to stand up for their country, and do what they can to protect their country and their people. Really it’s just—the big word for me is pride. Pride in one’s self; pride in one’s country; pride in one’s community; and at all costs doing what you can to protect those things from outside forces; and saluting the flag.

TS: Yeah.

TIGB: Yeah, definitely. I don't think a person has to have served in the armed forces to be a patriot, or to expr—or to be able to show their patriotism. It's even as simple as wearing a little flag pin, or like I said, saluting the flag or standing up to say the pledge of allegiance. It's having pride in your country and doing what you can, you know.

TS: I don't have any more formal questions, but is there anything that we haven't talked about that you would like to talk about?

TIGB: I could talk to you about how the Reserves is completely different from active duty.

TS: Oh yeah, we didn't get into the Reserves; let's talk about that. So, you decided to join the reserves a month after you got out. How was it different?

TIGB: It's different in that it's the exact opposite of everything I just talked to you about. [both laugh]

TS: Give me an example.

TIGB: It's different—Oh God. Okay, so I talked to you about my incredibly amazing unit and how awesome it was and how there was a family and that—that nest there. And I'm not going to speak for all Reserve units, but where I am there is not that family nature. I went back because I missed my family. I missed my military family. I missed my military affiliation. I missed the things that came with being in the military. That's why I went back.

And I got there and it was seriously like—almost like culture shock, seriously. Like, I mean—and I under—I guess I can understand it's because a lot of the marines who are there—the junior marines rather, are the ones who just got out of boot camp. They went straight into the Reserves. They didn't do active duty and then Reserves; they went straight to Reserves. So, they don't see or experience the real discipline that comes with being a) in the military, and b) comes with being a marine. My first drill period—my first drill—and then it's—you know, we only meet once a month—or one weekend a month. My first drill experience, when I had to go and meet up with a gunny, I was standing there and I was checking in, having paperwork signed, and I was standing there at parade rest, like how you're supposed to. I go to another office to get some stuff signed; there are PFCs and lance corporals standing there with their hands on their hips, like, “Yeah gunny, what's up?” blah, blah, blah, blah; another dude's got his feet kicked up on a desk. Yeah. And I'm like—I was telling my active duty friends about this and they're like, “No, you're lying.”

And I'm like, "I'm really not. I swear to you. I will take video next time so you can see what I'm talking about;" complete and utter disrespect for rank.

I mean, it just ate away at me, and it still does. But now I'm to the point where I'm comfortable enough with marines that I tell them when they're wrong; I correct them. And I didn't say anything at first because number one, I was new to the unit, and they're like, "Who's this?" That's number one. Number two, I wanted to see how the higher-ups there in that unit, how they handled that stuff, and it sucked to see that they didn't handle that stuff. And it's because, like you mentioned earlier, a lot of the awesomeness and good—no matter what it is you feel about a unit, it comes from the top to the bottom, right? And that's absolutely the case, whether it's good or bad, and it sucks because they weren't being corrected.

So, if the ones up here are not going to correct the ones who are down here, the ones who are down here are going to think that's the way it happens; that's the way it goes. It's going to—nobody understands that they're actually setting these junior marines up for failure, because number one, they're going to live their Marine Corps career out like that. Number two, they're going to end up being activated and forward deployed with, maybe, not this unit but another unit who is active duty and who's totally locked on, and they're going to be freaking in a world of hurt, you know, because they're going to go up to some gunny and be like, "Hey gunny, what's up? Yo gunny. Hey, First Sergeant, what's up?" Are you kidding? You'd have a boot in the chest probably, you know. And it sucks because nobody corrects them.

So, with my marines there who I do have more contact with, we sit down and we talk about customs and courtesies, we talk about discipline—and this is during their counseling sessions and stuff like that. I tell them, "This is the way you're supposed to act. This is, like I said, customs, courtesies, discipline, core values; all that stuff." You just go over it and it's something you have to keep reminding them because they only see it one weekend a month, two weeks out of the year, for their AT [Advanced Training]. So they don't get the everyday discipline that they should to really know what it's like to—

TS: What kind of reception do you get to that?

TIGB: They respect it, because they know that I'm prior active duty, and I get asked a lot of questions, which I really appreciate. And I tell them straight up answers. I don't try to babyface[?] anything. I paint the picture as clearly as I can. I say, "This is the way it's going to be if you ever go active duty. This is the way it's probably, more than likely, going to be, so you might want to stop acting like this, this, and this, and get your crap straight," [both chuckle] you know.

And—And then you have some of the ones who really don't care, and those are the ones that kill me, you know, because I take—whether you're what—active duty

people call us “weekend warriors” —whether you’re a “weekend warrior” or you’re there 24-7-365, you know, it’s like you’re still a marine, you know what I’m saying? And you still need to have these things instilled in you; you still need to care. You still need to care that you have the title; still need to care that you wear the uniform. It just sucks when I do try to get that across, and I try to get other people, like other sergeants or higher-ups, to come together with me on that, and then you have those ones who don’t care.

They’re like, “I’m just trying to get out of here; the game’s about to come on. I’m just trying to go home,” you know?

But then you do have a handful who really do care and they do have my back, and we have each other’s back. But it doesn’t help when you do have those—those ones up at the top who don’t care, and the ones down here at the bottom see that the one’s at the top care. So why should they care? If the ones up here don’t care, why should the ones down here care? You know what I’m saying?

TS: Yes.

TIGB: And so, we try to press that sometimes. It’s hard being an E-5 trying to express to, you know, and E-7, E-8, E-9, “Sir, this is how it’s looking. Our junior marines are seeing this and that’s not good.” What’s that sir going to do?

He’s going to say, “Okay, roger that. I understand.” And he’s going to go on about his business because he’s like, “That’s your job to correct them. That’s your job, sergeant, to correct them and make sure they don’t act like we act.” [laughs]

It’s like, “No. That’s not it at all.”

TS: So, it’s a lot less professional environment than—than it should be?

TIGB: Yes. It’s a lot less professional; a lot less discipline; a lot less—a lot of stuff. Yeah. A lot less respect; a lot less, just—

TS: I think it—you know, the point that you made, too, about it’s an iso—you’re looking at a particular place in a particular time with certain leadership.

TIGB: Yes.

TS: And, you know, over here another unit may be completely different, and maybe you would fit into that—

TIGB: Yes.



TS: —much easier, and it would be all—

TIGB: I don't know, and I say I don't know simply because I have spoken with people who are in other Reserve units and they have complained the same way.

TS: Yeah?

TIGB: Complain the same way.

TS: That came from active duty?

TIGB: That came from active duty.

TS: But aren't a lot of the Reserve units—don't they get deployed? And—

TIGB: Yes, some of them.

TS: Yeah? Not as much, I guess, as in past years.

TIGB: Yes, not as much as in past years, and even still, like—well, some of them. I can say this, for some of the marines, I know, from my unit currently who have deployed and they've attached to the other units who are deploying active duty, they've come back and they're completely different. And it could be because of the experience of being deployed, or it could be because now they've been around active duty marines and they see how it is that you really are supposed to be; supposed to act. So, I look to those marines who come back. I look to them to show these other marines who haven't been exposed to that. I look to them to show them, "Hey, this is what you need to do. This is how it really is. This is how you're supposed to be. This is how you're supposed to act. Not just one weekend a month but always; all the time. [chuckles] You're a marine all day long."

TS: Right.

TIGB: You know, so it's just—

TS: Do you plan on staying in the Reserve?

TIGB: I don't.

TS: How long do you—did you sign up for a certain period of time?

TIGB: You know, I actually didn't sign an official contract. I was drilling through my IR—IRR [Individual Ready Reserve] time—

TS: Yes.

TIGB: —which is the additional four years that you have on your contract.

TS: Right.

TIGB: I was drilling through that, and then because they sent me to their MOS school—because I was MOS mismatched; I came from aviation side, they're supply. So, I had to go to their MOS school over the summer. So, because they sent me there I was automatically obligated for two years, although there was never an official contract signed. So, I'm not going to combat it; I'm just going to do what I have to do. And that con—that obligation—

TS: Comes up this year?

TIGB: —is up next July.

TS: Oh, next July.

TIGB: Yes.

TS: Oh, because you went to the school after you did that; I see.

TIGB: Yes, next July. So, I'm going to not do anything where I'm obligated and I'll probably just continue to drill through my IRR time, and I'm not—because I don't want to let people or units or anything like that break my love for the military, and break my love for the Marine Corps. So, whether I stay at that unit, I don't know, but I don't want to give up being a marine, you know what I'm saying, just for the sake of not having to deal with—

TS: Once a marine always a marine?

TIGB: That's true, but—but I like feeling like I'm actively doing—

TS: Doing marine work.

TIGB: Exactly; exactly.

TS: I see. That's interesting. It's interesting to look at the differences too. Is there anything that you see that might be same; any similarities between being in the Reserve and on active duty, as far as being a marine goes?

TIGB: As far as being a marine goes, I'd say once we're actually training—once we're actually doing stuff, like when we're out on the rifle range and doing, like, land navigation like we did last drill, and all that, then all of a sudden it kind of snaps; it kind of sinks in. They're like, "Oh yeah, that's right; Marine Corps," [chuckles] you know. And then when we actually start training and we're not just stuck in the drill center doing classes, then that's when it's the same; and then that's when people are motivated and you can tell that somebody's got some initiative going somewhere. Somebody's got some motivation, and that's when everybody's kicking it into high gear and we're doing what we're supposed to be doing, you know, and things just float. So, I don't know if maybe it's because of the setting, you know, like, we get to feel like we're really being marines when we're out in the field and we're not in the HTC [Home Training Center], you know. That could very well be it, but I just—I personally don't feel that the setting should be what makes a marine act like a marine.

TS: Good point. That's very good. Is there anything else you want to add?

TIGB: That's probably it. I'm probably going to get a lot of backlash for that. [both laugh]

TS: No. No, probably not.

TIGB: No, not really.

TS: Okay.

TIGB: I don't think so. Nothing that I—There's a lot more stuff that I could say but nothing I can—nothing that I can say about—

TS: You don't want to put it on tape right now?

TIGB: Right.

TS: I see. Well, maybe we'll have to have an addendum—

TIGB: [laughs]

TS: —after July.

TIGB: Yes.

TS: Okay; all right. Well, thanks, I'm going to go ahead and turn it off then.

TIGB: Okay, thank you.

[End of Interview]