

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

INTERVIEWEE:     Teressa Jenkins Lawrence

INTERVIEWER:     Therese Strohmer

DATE:               6 March 2015

[Begin Interview]

TS:     Today is March 6th, 2015. This is Therese Strohmer. I'm here with Teressa Lawrence at the Jackson Library at the University of North Carolina at Greensboro. We're here today for an oral history for the Betty H. Carter Women Veterans Oral History Collection. And so, Teressa, how would you like your name to read on your collection?

TL:     Teressa Jenkins Lawrence.

TS:     Okay, excellent.

TS:     Well, Teressa, why don't you start off by having you tell us where you're from, when you were born?

TL:     I am from Wilson, North Carolina. I was born and raised there, and I was born on February 13 [1956] in Wilson, North Carolina.

TS:     And did you have any brothers or sisters?

TL:     I have two brothers and one sister, and my oldest brother has passed away, so I have one brother that's living and one sister.

TS:     Yeah. I'm sorry to hear about—

[Speaking simultaneously]

TL:     And I'm the youngest one.

TS:     Are you the youngest?

TL: Yeah.

TS: Oh. How was it growing up? What did your folks did for a living?

TL: My mom worked at a hospital and she was a—she cleaned up like a maid, and my father, he built homes.

TS: Oh, yeah?

TL: Yeah.

TS: Now, where you grew up, was it like a rural environment or was it like—I'm not familiar with that town at all.

TL: No, we actually lived in the city.

TS: Oh, you did? Okay.

TL: Yeah, we lived in the city. Some parts of Wilson was rural I would think, but we actually lived in the city.

TS: What kind of things did you do for fun?

TL: Oh, God. We used to—Well, my sister, she lived with us, and my sister ended up having six kids.

TS: Okay.

TL: So me being the youngest, they were my little brothers and sisters.

TS: Oh, okay.

TL: So we used to go outside and jump rope, play marbles, hopscotch, play baseball; little things that kids would do.

TS: Yeah. And so, did you always have a lot of other kids around then, at that time?

TL: Sometimes there were a lot of kids around. A lot of times it was so many of us we just played with each other.

TS: Yeah. Right.

TL: There were other kids in the neighborhood and we would visit them and they would come visit us, but sometimes mom would say, "It's too many of y'all here, some of you-alls got to go home."

TS: [chuckles]

TL: So.

TS: Yeah.

TL: So we had a good time.

TS: That's good. How about school? Did you enjoy school?

TL: I loved school. I loved school. I've always loved school. That was my outlet from the craziness that would happen at home. When it would get too intense, when it would get too noisy, when it just get too crowded, I—I was looked forward to going to school.

TS: What did you like about it?

TL: I think the peace and quiet really.

TS: [chuckles] Well, was there a subject or a teacher or anything like that that you enjoyed?

TL: Some of my teachers lived in the neighborhood with me and I think that was a comfort for me—

TS: Yeah.

TL: —because they treated me well and I excelled in their classes. They didn't show me any preferential treatment, but it was just—it was a good feeling to know that I knew a teacher that lived in the same neighborhood that me—that I lived in. And the only subject I didn't like was math, but I think I really did like reading. I loved to read and I loved history, so those were my two best subjects.

TS: So you kind of stayed connected to that for a long time?

TL: I did. Yeah, I did.

TS: You can get lost in those kind of books and things like that.

TL: Yeah, and I think I was looking for that escape, so I wanted to go somewhere else besides go home and be with all of them all the time.

TS: [chuckles]

TL: You need that quiet time sometimes.

TS: Oh, I know; I understand that. Well, in Wilson, so when you're growing up, you're in the sixties?

TL: Yes.

TS: That era. There's a lot going on in the sixties.

TL: Yes, yes, there was a lot going on. A lot of things happened that I didn't understand and—I don't know—I think back then my mom and dad didn't live together, they lived in separate homes, and my mom was not the type of person that you could ask a lot of questions to. So a lot of things that were happening I didn't know, I didn't understand. So I would have to ask other people or just listen very intently to try to understand to get a grasp of what was actually happening, particularly during the time of [Dr.] Martin Luther King [Jr.].

[Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. was an American Baptist minister, activist, humanitarian, and leader in the African-American Civil Rights Movement of the 1960s. He was assassinated on April 4, 1968.]

TS: Yeah.

TL: And to me it was just—it just bewildered me, it filled my mind with all kinds of thoughts as to what was going to happen. And when you're growing up in that era, during that time, I had a feeling of insecurity, not within myself, but thinking that we may lose our home. You hear about all these horrible things that was happening and you wonder is it going to happen to your family. Luckily it didn't.

TS: Why did you think that you would lose your home?

TL: Well, you—I was seeing all this horrible stuff that was going on on TV.

TS: Like the Civil Rights [Movement]?

TL: Yeah, during the Civil Rights Movement.

TS: Okay.

TL: And I knew some—I had friends that were in school that were white. But then you'd start thinking—or I started thinking, "Are they going to turn on me? Are they going to dislike me? And my mom, is she going to lose her job? Are they going to hurt her on her job?" You would see people getting hurt and you just wonder is it a possibility that that could happen to you? At least, I did anyway.

[The Civil Rights Movement encompasses social movements in the United States whose goals were to end racial segregation and discrimination against African Americans and to secure legal recognition and federal protection of citizen ship rights enumerated in the Constitution and federal law.]

TS: Right. Well, were you in a segregated or an integrated school? What—

TL: I was in—In elementary I was in a segregated school, but when I went to high school I was in an integrated school, and Wilson was not the type of town that was as friendly as it is now, or say, Greensboro is now.

TS: Okay.

TL: It was a segregated town and, like I said, I had some white friends, but of course I dared not go to their house and they never came over to my house; we were friends in school. And the feeling of—You hear about what's happening and you're wondering, "Well, are they going to stop being my friend because of what's happening?" Even though I understood it wasn't happening in Wilson, but it did affect the community and I actually think it affected all of the African American community. And you'd just wonder as a child what's really going to happen.

TS: Did it put a tension at all in the school?

TL: It did; it really did. It put a tension in the schools. I saw some of my teachers that I really liked—some of my white teachers that I liked that—that I admired and respected and I saw them being cold. I felt this coldness. They were not mean but they were just distant. And then I started realizing that this was a lot bigger than what I thought it was.

TS: Did you have anybody that you were able to talk to about these kind of issues at that time?

TL: I asked my mom some things and she tried to explain it the best way she could. And I asked my dad, and course your parents try to explain it the best way they can, and at the same time I think they were trying to shield me from what was actually happening. So I think I got more of the answers that I wanted from school, because I started talking to—I had African-American teachers and I started talking to them. I was very inquisitive and I started asking questions about, "What really is this? How big is it? Where is it happening at? Have you ever been through stuff like this?" So I eventually got my answers that I wanted, but I was still curious as to—It's a shock as a child to know why is this happening. What—What's causing of this? So.

TS: Well, and you would've been about twelve when Martin Luther King Jr. was assassinated.

TL: Exactly. And then at that time, my father passed away.

TS: Oh, okay.

TL: And my father, even though my mother and father didn't live together, he was the backbone of the family. And when he passed away it really left, like, a hole, an emptiness; that was my security blanket. And when he passed away, I knew that mom was a strong lady, but I also knew that I had to really, really stand on my own two feet then.

TS: Did your father die right around that same year or right around that time?

TL: Around that time. He died of diabetes, it wasn't because of any type of injury or anything.

TS: Right.

TL: It was a natural death.

TS: Right.

TL: But it was just a real blow, and then you'd hear about other adults in the neighborhood that had passed away, and it was just a real confusing time to me.

TS: Right. Do you remember the kind of atmosphere that went on when Martin Luther King Jr. was killed? Do you remember that day or that time at all?

TL: That day I remember a lot of tension, I remember a lot of quietness. And then at the same time, I remember a lot of adults asking questions. And it was like everywhere you went, every adult you went around, if they were talking together—they were—it was some anger, you could hear anger in their voice, and a lot of questions; "Who did it? Why did it happen? I knew it was going to happen. It's just a matter of time." And it was just—it was a real tense time. And I see—I remember seeing adults in the neighborhood coming together.

We had a church down at the corner from our block, and I remember the adults going to that neighborhood, and my youngest—my younger brother and I, we went to the church and we stood outside, we could hear them talking. And they were talking and it's as if they were getting ready to do something. I felt like they were getting ready to do something they don't need to be doing.

TS: Like a scary thing.

TL: Yeah, it was a scary time. And I remember when my dad came out, I asked my dad—I said, "Dad, is everything okay? Are we going to be okay?"

And he said "You're going to be okay, don't worry about it. You're going to be fine. I'm not going to let anything happen to you."

And it wasn't long after that, like I said, that my father had passed away, and then that really scared me to death. It was like, "Oh my God, now he's gone." But I got through it. I began to understand—As soon as the days went on, the tension was down.

TS: Yeah.

TL: And it made me feel safer and I got through it.

TS: So, like, as each day—you made it through, you felt a little more strength about—

TL: Yeah, I felt a little more strength, even though for some reason the relationship between me and my white friends, I still felt a strain. It wasn't as strong as before.

TS: Yeah.

TL: I couldn't understand it, I never asked them why, but—

TS: Did you ever talk about race relations with them at all?

TL: No.

TS: No? It was just not something you ever brought up?

TL: No. No. That was like a taboo thing.

TS: Okay.

TL: No, we talked among ourselves, but we couldn't talk to—it was a known fact you don't talk to another white person about race relations; that was just a known fact. And I think if I had been in another city that it would've been okay, but in Wilson it was not okay.

TS: Pretty small.

TL: Yeah.

TS: Everybody knows everybody.

TL: Oh, yeah. And it would've—I was more afraid of what my mom would've done, not what somebody else would've done to me. But I was more afraid of if mom—if it had got back to mom that I had said that to a white person; that's what I was afraid of.

TS: Yeah.

TL: So no.

TS: [chuckles] Now, what kind of things did you do; like, did you have any extracurricular activities you did at school or at church or anything like that?

TL: Well, I was in Girl Scouts. I started at Brownie Scout and I was in Girl Scouts and I really enjoyed that. And then I used to go—I remember going back to school—Excuse me—learning how to crochet and knit, so I used to do stuff like that. And I remember going back to school—this was after school was over during the day and I wasn't able—I wasn't able to do every day but the times that I did, I would go back to school and I would crochet. I used to love the paint; I used to love to paint. And the Girl Scouts, the Brownie Scouts, and we had the cheerleading little thing. So it was like the little step squa—step squad thing.

TS: Okay.

TL: I remember going back and participating with that. When I got older, or as teenager—seventeen—fifteen, sixteen, seventeen, there was a high school band—high school marching band—and it was a block away from our home—our house. And of course, it being a block away from our house, when they would practice at the school everybody heard it.

TS: Right.

TL: So that was the place you would go and watch them practice, and at the same time my brother was a—he was the Wilson County basketball star. So you would go and you watch the guys play basketball and then you would watch the band practice. I always wanted to learn how to play a flute or a saxophone but my mom couldn't afford an instrument so I didn't do that.

TS: Yeah. It's tough to pay for those things, that's true. So okay. As you're a young girl and you're going through these tensions and times and things, what kind of future did you see for yourself? I mean, did you have dreams about what you wanted to do or be, or anything like that, as a young girl?

TL: Well, as I said, I used to read a lot, so I read about the Hans Christian Anderson, the Mozart, the Pied Piper and all that kind of things, and I told myself, "I'm going to visit that place one day." So when I grew up—I mean, you say things when you're a child.

TS: Right.

TL: And when I grew up, I went to Germany and I visited those places. But as a child, what I wanted to be—you're confused, you don't really, really know. I admired the teachers in the neighborhood, so at one time I wanted to be a teacher, and I think I still have that part of me in me. My mom wanted me to either learn how to sew, which I just despised, or



become a nurse. I didn't want to do that because I didn't like the idea of having to stick something in somebody.

TS: Right.

[Speaking simultaneously]

TL: Because that hurt. As a child you get a needle stuck in you, and that hurt me, I'm know going to hurt somebody else, so that wasn't me either. But I used to love the nurses' uniforms and the little white hat. I used to love to see them dressed in that.

TS: Right.

TL: So when I got a little older, I said—Well, let me go back just for one minute.

TS: Sure.

TL: When I was a little girl, I used to hang around my dad a lot. My dad would build houses and I said, "I want to grow up and build houses;" become an architect. Then when I got a little older, I said—I went to school and I went for business and I did want to—I didn't want to build houses but I did want to become an architect. And along the way of trying to become an architect, me not knowing the financial aid ins and outs, I ran out of money. I didn't know how to reapply, didn't know who to ask, and everyone that I did ask, that was bold enough to ask a question to, I was turned down. So that's when I decided to go into the military.

TS: Okay. So what year did you graduate from high school?

TL: I graduated in '74.

TS: Seventy-four?

TL: Right.

TS: And so, then after that you went to college for a year or a couple years?

TL: I went to—Right, I went to Howard University for a couple of years.

TS: Okay. Okay.

TL: Yeah.

TS: Now, how did you get from—Okay, you're in—I understand running out of money, but going right into the army, did you know anybody that had been in military?

TL: My brother had went to the air force.

TS: Okay.

TL: And that's what I initially wanted to go into. But then I said, "No, I don't want to follow him. I don't want to do what he did."

TS: Okay.

TL: "I want to do something different." So I decided to go into the army.

TS: When did you start thinking about it?

TL: Actually, when I—the thought crossed my mind when I was in high school, because he was in the air force when I was in high school.

TS: Okay.

TL: The thought crossed my mind then. But then when I really made my decision was when I could no longer go back to school because I didn't have the money. I knew that my options was not to stay in Wilson. So I knew that I had to do something to support myself and do it quickly, so I decided to go to the military.

TS: Did that seem at all like a scary prospect to you? Because there weren't a lot of women in the army or military at that time.

TL: It really didn't.

TS: No?

TL: It didn't. I think I had that will to know that I couldn't stay where I was at.

TS: Yeah.

TL: And I always had this independent spirit of wanting to have my own. And I knew that if I stayed in Wilson the prospects of getting a job, enough to support myself, pay my rent, get me a car, and do all the other things I wanted to do, that probably wouldn't happen anytime soon. So I decide I'll go to the military.

TS: Now, did you see your brother's experience in the air force as something that seemed like a good plan? I mean, did that help you see for stability maybe?

TL: He enjoyed it. He said he enjoyed it. But his experience was not as great as I thought it would have been. I don't want to get into what happened to him, but I was kind of disappointed in him, because I'm thinking, "You could've done better than that."

TS: [chuckles]. Right.

TL: Yeah. So I said, "I'm going to the army.  
And he said, "Really?"  
I said, "Yeah."  
He said, "You [unclear] really going into the army?"

TS: [chuckles]

TL: And he said, "Why didn't you go to the air force?"  
I said, "Because you didn't leave a good taste in my mouth about that."

TS: Right.

TL: So I—And it wasn't the air force, per se, it was just him; I'm thinking, "Oh God, you could've done a whole lot better than what you did." I thinking he served, like, one tour and then he decided he wanted to come home, being a momma's boy, and I'm thinking—

TS: [chuckles].

TL: So I went to the army.

TS: Did you feel that you were independent at that time? Yes? Yeah?

TL: Yeah, I did. When I left Wilson, I knew I was completely on my own. I knew that I had that independence that I was going to either make it or break it. And I had enough in me to know that you're going to make this right, because you're not going to go back to Wilson and live with your mother and do nothing. I just didn't want to—I had the foresight to see that that was not a place for me to be. That I had the foresight to know that I needed to move on, away there, and do better things.

TS: Yeah. And so, the army looked like it might give you opportunities that you didn't have in Wilson.

TL: Exactly. Because I knew I couldn't travel in Wilson.

TS: Yeah.

TL: I knew I wouldn't be able to meet people that I didn't—I've always liked the idea of meeting other people. I knew just practically everybody in Wilson.

TS: Right.

TL: [unclear] grow up with them. So I wanted to meet other people, I wanted to see how other people lived.

TS: Yeah.

TL: I wanted to go to the places that I had read about.

TS: Yeah.

TL: I just wanted to do something else different. It's like—To me it was like sitting in a class and the class is on one level and you're on ten levels above the class. So I was getting bored, so it was time for me to go.

TS: I see. Did you have any idea of using it for educational purposes, like the benefits from that at that time?

TL: I did. I thought about it, and I said I'm going to go in, and I'm going to do the best I can. I knew I wanted to go back to school and I said this would be probably the best route for me go. My family was not financially able for me to—to send me back to school. And I knew from the beginning if I was ever going to go back, that I was going to have to make a way for it to happen myself.

TS: Now, what did your mom think about your decision?

TL: My mom was a nonchalant type person. She pretty much—It was okay with her. She said, "If that's what you want to do, then go ahead and do it."

TS: How about the rest of your family and friends?

TL: My friends were a little shocked.

TS: Yeah?

TL: My family, they didn't have too much to say about it. I think they kind of thought that I would probably do that anyway. Me being the youngest, I guess I had always wanted to outdo or do better than what I had previously seen from my brothers and sisters, and I'm looking at everything that they had done, I'm like, "No, I don't want to do that, I don't want to do that, I don't want to do that." So I said, "Let me try this."

TS: Right. That's interesting that, as the youngest, you can see the paths they took and say, "Okay, I'm taking something different."

TL: Yes. Yes.

TS: That's an interesting way to look at it. Well, why don't you tell me about a little bit about your experience? So it was 1970s-ish, something like that.

TL: Yeah.

TS: And so, how was basic training?

TL: Basic training to me was fun.

TS: Was it?

TL: It was fun, I had a good time. I mean, you get tired, you get aggravated, you get pissed off, you get frustrated, you want to come home, but I had a good time.

TS: Did you?

TL: I mean, we did the same things in basic training to me that we used to do as a little girl—as a girl. We had a back field in our back yard and we used to run and play ball and jump ditches and climb trees. So all of the running and the climbing in the trees and all of that, that was fun. And basic training was fun to me. It was like a camp.

TS: Was there anything that was physically difficult?

TL: Not really. There were things I didn't want to do. [both chuckle] There were things I didn't want to do, but that was nothing—not physically difficult for me.

TS: No.

TL: Not really, no.

TS: No?

TL: No.

TS: How about mentally?

TL: Well, mentally, there were thin—yeah. Because at a point, you get to the point you're thinking, "Why are they making women do this? Why do we have to do this?"

TS: What kind of things would you think that about?

TL: Like, climbing up a wall, but not—but then as you—you get to the point where you think, "I got to do it regardless, so I might as well do it and get it over with. So I had to think of

something that I had already done to get climbing up that wall, a straight wall; straight up. I'm thinking, "Who does this?" So I thought about—Excuse me—climbing trees.

TS: Okay.

TL: And I thought—

[Speaking Simultaneously]

TS: It kind of put you in the mindset to do it.

TL: Yeah. And I had do it. I'm standing there looking at this wall and I'm thinking, "God, what did I enlist in this for? What did I—Why?" Other than that—I got over it. That was okay.

TS: Yeah. Now, you were in South Carolina, you said, for that?

TL: Yes.

TS: What months were you there? Was it during the summer?

TL: Oh, wow. It was during the summer months and it was hot. Oh God, it was hot.

TS: Yeah?

TL: And we had all that gear on, and we used to take those long marches, and it was hot. The only other thing that I did not like—and that was camping.

TS: Why?

TL: I didn't like camping because I didn't like sleeping on the ground. I was a girly girl.

TS: Oh, you were? Okay.

TL: I didn't like sleeping on the ground. I mean, I liked it to a point but—the reason I didn't like it was because I was afraid of snakes. That was my number one thing. Still is. And I'm thinking, "God forbid, if I see one or if one gets in this sleeping bag," I know I was just going to die; just instant death. I knew that was going to be the destiny of me to see one and just die. It didn't happen.

TS: Well, that's good.

TL: I got through it.

TS: It was okay.

TS: So 1977 [sic, 1978], you're a WAC, then.

TL: Yeah.

TS: So the Women's Army Corps.

TL: Right.

TS: And so, things are a little bit changing, because the Women's Movement's come through.

[The Women's Movement, or feminist movement, refers to a series of political campaigns during the 1960s and 1970s for reforms on issues such as reproductive rights, domestic violence, equal pay, women's suffrage, and sexual harassment.]

TL: Yeah.

TS: Did you get any sense of that in the army at that time or before?

TL: I got a little sense of it, but I think I missed a lot of it. And at that time I didn't feel like I was given enough information about it.

TS: From who? Who would that information have come from?

TL: I thought—Because I heard a little, and I thought that my chain of command—my upper chain of command—would have gave us more information about it. And because they didn't, I thought maybe it was just for the officers and for us not to ask questions about it. So I didn't.

TS: What do you think that you missed out on?

TL: I think I missed out on some opportunities that I was probably entitled too, but at the time, like I said, it could've been just I didn't know; I thought maybe it was just for the officers, not for just enlisted.

TS: You mean for specific job opportunities or training and—

TL: Exactly, training.

TS: —things like that?

TL: Yeah, exactly.

TS: That were opening up to women that—

TL: Right.

TS: I see.

TL: Right. I mean, I thought it was just—and then later on I heard that it was for everyone, and I'm thinking, "Wow, that was an opportunity I missed," And I said to myself, "I'm starting going—I'm going to start asking more questions."

TS: Okay.

TL: "Because I'm not going to miss that opportunity again."

TS: Did you start asking more?

TL: I started asking more questions; I started asking a lot of questions. I was the quiet one. I was quiet up until the point where I got to know you. If I got to know you and I felt comfortable around you, then we were cool. But up until that point, if someone came in and said, "This is for this, this, this, this, this," and they presented it in a way where it wasn't—it didn't include me, I wouldn't ask questions.

TS: You're also in—Vietnam's over.

TL: Yes.

TS: The army's changing to a vol—

TL: Yes.

TS: It's been a volunteer army now.

TL: Right.

TS: And so, about the time you're coming in, the Women's Army Corps is dissolving, soon after you get in.

TL: Yes. Right.

TS: What was that like?

TL: Well, it got to the point of a little insecurity, because I'm thinking, "What am I going to do?" Then around that time, that's when I met my ex-husband, and I said, "I'll get married



to him." I don't know why I did, but I did. I ended up getting pregnant and that was my deciding factor then. It was like I didn't have to decide, "What I am going to do," anymore.

So I ended up getting pregnant and I knew that I had choices to make. I could stay in and I could let someone else raise my child, or I could get out and raise my own child. I looked at my support system at home, I looked at his support system, and I said, "No, I'll raise my own child." So I got out.

TS: Yeah.

TL: And I raised my own child.

TS: Well, we're jumping ahead a bunch of years, right? [chuckles]

TL: Yeah.

TS: So you're in the army and you get through basic training, and then you were sent to Fort Hood [Texas], right, you said?

TL: Yes.

TS: And how was it that your job was decided? Did you sign up for that; were you assigned that job? How did that happen?

TL: They signed me up for that. Actually, they asked me did I wanted to be a cook or did I want to go transportation, and I said, "What else is available?"

They said, "Well, if you're at a transportation unit you'll probably go into supply," and they explained that to me so I decided to go to transportation unit. Then when I was in the transportation unit, that's when it was a combination of transportation and supply. That's how I got into that.

TS: Okay. Were you offered anything else? Just those?

TL: No.

TS: That was it?

TL: No.

TS: Is that where you feel like you should've asked more questions?

TL: That's where I feel like I should've asked more questions.

TS: I see. Okay. Well, tell me a little bit, then, about your experience at Fort Hood. Where'd you live, what was it like?

TL: I didn't live on the base at Fort Hood, I had my own apartment.

TS: How'd you get that?

TL: What do you mean, how did I get that?

TS: How were you able to get an apartment off base?

TL: Well, I don't even—If I remember correctly we had to ask permission or something.

TS: Okay.

TL: And—

TS: Did you go with some other women or all by yourself?

TL: No, I went—I had my own apartment by myself.

TS: Really? Right away.

TL: Yeah.

TS: Okay.

TL: I took my money and I budgeted and I had my own apartment by myself.

TS: So you didn't do a lot of barracks living, except for maybe in basic training?

TL: No, no, I didn't do a lot of barracks living at all. No. No.

TS: [chuckles] Okay. So tell me then, how was Fort Hood?

TL: Fort Hood was a nice place. It was—At the time I was there, it seemed like a—the most—the largest desert I had ever in my life seen. It was a whole new experience from little Wilson, North Carolina. You meet everybody from everywhere, all over the world. I had a good time there. It wasn't the digital age of course. But we would leave and we would go to Dallas and Houston and other places in Texas. So I enjoyed that. I didn't have a bad experience at Fort Hood. Really; really, I did not. I had a—

TS: A good experience?

TL: —good experience at Fort Hood.

TS: Well, describe a typical day for somebody who doesn't know what it would've been like at that time.

TL: Well, I would get up, of course, and—early and I had a tendency of—I wanted to run a mile before I would go to work. So I would get up and I would run a mile, and then I'd come back and wash up, and get dressed in my uniform, catch the bus, go on base, go to work, go to the mil—I mean, the—sometimes we would have a briefing. Not every morning, but sometime we would have a briefing. We would go to the briefing and it—if we had a briefing it was probably something about—Excuse me—we were getting ready to go on some type of—

TS: Training exercise.

[Speaking simultaneously].

TL: —training exercise, or something like that. And if we didn't have a briefing, if that was not scheduled, you just get up and you go to work, just like you would your regular job. You would go to your job and you start working all day and that's it. You take a break, and when it was over you go home.

TS: Yeah.

TL: That's it.

TS: Well, you didn't have formation that you had to go into everyday?

TL: We would have the formation. I miss that. We would have the formation. Sometimes—The only time we would have formation everyday was when someone in our unit had did something that would piss off our captain, really. Sometimes we didn't have formation every day. Sometime we would have it three days a week, or if he was in a really good mood he would say we wouldn't have it at all that week. So it just depends. But I do remember sometimes we would have formation, and then after formation you would go on and do what you had to do.

TS: And you said you had to catch a bus onto the base.

TL: Yeah, I had to catch a bus in the beginning because I didn't have a car.

TS: Yes.

TL: So I was smart enough to move in a place where I knew there was a bus line that would go straight to Fort Hood.

TS: Right.

TL: So after that—after catching the bus for a while—it wasn't long—I started meeting friends that had a car. And then I started meeting friends that lived in the same apartment complex that I lived in and they had a car. So then we started riding together.

[Speaking Simultaneously]

TS: You'd all go together. Oh, okay.

TL: Yeah.

TS: Now, when you're at your job, what kind of environment are you in? Is it, like, a desk job in a room or what—

TL: It was a desk job, it was a very small room. As a matter of fact, the desk that I sat at was very small, and the room was so small that my ex-husband, he sat behind me at his desk—and he would do the supply part and I would do the transportation part—and the room was so small that when we backed up to move away from the desk, we would hit each other in the back, and he would irritate me. So—I remember—I'm trying to describe the room itself. It was cold, you had to bring your own heater, or they provided us with a little heater.

TS: Like a little space heater?

TL: Little space heater. The back room was—We had to get up and go down the hall to go to the bathroom. The windows were up top; they were not, like, eye level, so they were up top. It was a little square room. It was—I remember it being brown.

TS: [chuckles]

TL: A dark brown room.

TS: Right.

TL: And everything in the room was brown, except for the filing cabinet; the filing cabinet was army green. And we had a coffee pot in there, of course, that they expected me to keep filled but that didn't happen.

TS: Who expected you?

TL: My ex and the—his lieutenant that expected me to finish—I think it was a woman's thing of, "She's here, she could do the coffee pot for us."

"No, I don't even drink coffee."

TS: Is that what you told them?

TL: Yeah, I did tell them that; said, "I don't even drink coffee." So my ex, he kept a coffee pot filled.

TS: Did you ever experience anything else, like, that kind of sexism in the army, where you had expected role models because you were a woman?

TL: I did. I remember one time—They had a girl—a women's and a men's bathroom, and the men would go—they would stop their bathroom up and they would go into our bathroom and they would mess that up, and then—It was—I'm trying to think. It was me and maybe one or two other women in that building. And then they would come to us and they say, "We're going to flip coins or pull straws or something, see which one of y'all are going to clean the bathrooms."

"No, no."

Or they would say, "We'll write your names on this sheet of paper—this slip of paper and we're going to pull your name out of the hat, see which one of you is going to clean the bathroom."

"No, no." I was rebellious then. I always thought that I was going to get written up; like, "Oh my God, they're going to write me up. I know I'm going to get written up." But they never did.

TS: No?

TL: And I never cleaned the bathroom either.

TS: [chuckles] So you just, kind of, had a strong will to keep them—

TL: Yeah.

TS: Oh, that's interesting.

TL: Look, I grew up with brothers and sisters, and I was the youngest, and my sister had six kids, and I'm like, "Look, I've done enough cleaning of the bathrooms." [chuckles] That's what I'm thinking in my mind.

TS: Right.

TL: "I'm not cleaning this bathroom."

So I didn't—I didn't clean the bathroom, I didn't do the coffee pot, but then I started doing—that's how I started getting into the paperwork with supply. Because it's like, "Well, she won't do the womanly things, so let's let her do—let's train her to do the supply things." That was fine with me; I didn't mind doing that.

TS: How was that different from what you were doing before?

TL: That was different because with transportation, you just did—it was like being a dispatcher—

TS: Okay.

TL: —for all the Jeeps and the military vehicles that they were going to use that day. With supply, you started—I started actually ordering supplies.

TS: Okay.

TL: I started doing inventory and things of that nature.

TS: So you had more responsibilities.<sup>7</sup>

TL: Exactly. I didn't mind, I just managed to do it and get it done.

TS: Yeah. And so, did you enjoy your job?

TL: I did; I enjoyed my job.

TS: Yeah.

TL: I enjoyed my job. I actually didn't—When I did supply, I did that better than my ex did. And I remember them telling me, "We want you to go and work in the captain's office," or the building that he was in, "and we want you be the supply secretary," or whatever you call it at that time; I'm probably using the wrong term.

TS: That's okay.

TL: But they wanted me to do that. And that—I didn't know that was the position that my ex wanted, I just kind of fell into it. Because I was telling him, if you keep your papers on this side, and you do this, try to set up his desk, and tell him how to do things. That's how I fell into that.

TS: So you did get that job?

TL: I did get it.

TS: Now, were you married at that time or not?

TL: No, when I got that job I was not married.

TS: Okay.

TL: But I ended up marrying him; my ex. But when I got that job I did—I was not married.

TS: Yeah. Did you feel like you were treated fairly in the army?

TL: For the utmost, yeah.

TS: In what ways did you not feel like you were treated fairly?

TL: I think when it came time to—When I got the position and—for supply, I think when it came time to—they would give you other training, and the other training was actually for you to go to officer school [Officer Candidate School], and I wanted to go to officer school. I did my paperwork and I was on top of my job; I was doing really good; I was a good little soldier.

But I think a lot of times—and I know I was—I was overlooked. And I'm going to tell you the reason why I was overlooked. I was overlooked because the other women in the unit, they were having sex with the captains and so forth, the lieutenants and so forth. I wouldn't do it. So because I wouldn't do it, I was overlooked. My paperwork was—And when I was, like, sent out the file[?] for officer school, they would say, "Well, okay, it's going to take ten days, twenty days, whatever, before we hear an answer." The standard time, whatever it was at that time. I would go back and I would ask and they would say, "Oh, we forgot to turn such and such in."

But another female, she would apply for officer school, and in the standard amount of time, before it was over she would hear, and she would be accepted and she would be getting ready to go, thrilled to death. I never was accepted. So I thought that—that kind of held me back from going to officer school, because I wouldn't have sex with them.

TS: Right. The ratio, I guess, of men to women was pretty high.

TL: Oh yeah, it was more men than women.

TS: Yeah.

TL: A whole lot more.

TS: In your unit?

TL: Yeah, in my unit.

TS: And in your particular battalion.

[Speaking Simultaneously]

TL: In my battalion as well.

TS: What was the racial mixture? Was there a lot of different ethnicities?

TL: There was quite a few—No, not really. Well, I remember—Of course, nothing like it is now, but I remember maybe one or two Asians, and maybe one, maybe three or four—

TS: Hispanics?

TL: Yeah, maybe three or four Hispanics. But the rest was African-American and white, that's it.

TS: What about for the women?

TL: For the women it was mostly African-American; it was mostly African-American. I remember one Hispanic lady, and I don't think she stayed in our unit long. I don't know what happened to her, but I do remember that she wasn't there long. But I remember one—just one Hispanic lady, and the rest of us were African-American.

TS: Well, what about, like, issues of sexual harassment? Did you ever experience anything like that?

TL: I experienced that in basic training.

TS: Oh, you did?

TL: Oh yeah, that was in basic training. We were called—I was never touched or anything like that, but we were called all kinds of sexual names. We were referred to as very derogatory, sexual names; the women were.

TS: Was this the drill instructors?

TL: That was the drilling sergeant. There was one particular drilling sergeant, he was very vulgar; very vulgar. And I remember at the end of basic training he was—I think they told him that he had lost his job because someone had reported him. And I do recall, now that you bring this back up, that the captains and a major was coming around, and they asked the females had you ever heard this man say anything derogatory. And we were all sitting in there looking, and we were kind of afraid to say yes or no.

TS: Right.

TL: So I think most of us just shook our head yes. He was very vulgar. So I experienced that in basic training. And then when I went to Fort Hood it was—I didn't experience it



myself, but you knew about women that would get in rank quickly, or was having favors to not have to pull twenty-four hour duty, and things like that, because they chose to have sex with the men.

TS: Yes. Do you think—

TL: And that was the officers, not the enlisted; that was officers.

TS: Officers that were—

TL: Yeah, the off—

TS: —getting—

TL: The officers that was part of our battalion.

TS: —were soliciting women for sex?

TL: Oh yeah.

TS: Okay.

TL: That was a—That was rampant. That was a known thing then. It wasn't—They didn't do it in a way where—"We're going to force you to do it," but it was—it was very, very open that they would come to you and they ask you just up front; you either went with it or you didn't. I just chose not to.

TS: But you were asked?

TL: Oh yeah, I was asked.

TS: Yeah?

TL: But I didn't want to do it.

TS: You didn't see that as sexual harassment though?

TL: I did see it as sexual harassment.

TS: Yeah.

TL: Because I saw those same women that did, they got rank.

TS: Yes.

TL: And they got to go in places like—you know when your time is up you could choose two or three different places that you go? They got to go where they wanted to go. They didn't have to pull twenty-four hour duty. Sometimes I would have to pull twenty-four hour duty two times a week, and you were actually supposed to pull it once a month.

TS: Did you ever get to do any special training? Or, like, a special deployment, or anything like that?

TL: No, I didn't.

TS: No?

TL: No. So because of that—And you see—As a woman, you see these other women going to places [unclear]; I would have loved to go there.

TS: Yeah?

TL: I think if I had—I think one time I had—I'm trying to think of a place that I wanted to go. It may have been somewhere like California or upstate New York or something.

TS: Sure.

TL: And they got to go and I didn't, and I think because of that, that was the reason why when I decided to get out I said, "I'm going to travel, and do the things that I didn't get a chance to do, and I don't have to have sex with somebody that I don't want to have sex with to do it."

TS: [chuckles] Yeah.

TL: So.

TS: Well, what was it that you liked the best about being in the army?

TL: My independence, really.

TS: Yeah?

TL: Yeah. I liked my independence, I like the idea of being able to make my own money, not to have to ask my brothers and sisters or my mom or my dad. I liked the idea of, like I said, meeting new people, doing things that I would have never got to do in Wilson, North Carolina. Learning different occupations. I don't think I would have never been able to work in a transportation department in Wilson, or supply for that matter.

TS: You don't think you would have had that opportunity?

TL: Oh, not—Oh, God no. No.

TS: Why not?

TL: Because the thing that African-American women did then, you either went to the sewing plant or you work in a tobacco plant, which I did it at some time, but I knew that was not my thing; that was not my cup of tea. So you either was—you was going to sew or you was going to work in a tobacco plant.

TS: You weren't going to get a desk job anywhere.

TL: No, no. No.

TS: That wasn't a possibility.

TL: No, no. I'm too much of a free spirit. And I didn't want to become a nurse, so.

TS: Right.

TL: I enjoyed the army, I really did.

TS: Some women have told me that in this time, when there's, like, this high ratio of men to women, and that constant solicitation for dates and sex and things like that, that one way to stop that was to get a boyfriend.

TL: That's when I married my ex. But I'm going to tell you now, even after I married my ex it didn't stop.

TS: No?

TL: No, it didn't stop. Because we got married and I remember I had moved to another apartment, and my first sergeant and another sergeant, I remember one night I was at home, by myself—he had twenty-four hour duty, and they know who has the twenty-four hour duty because they assigned it. So they assigned him twenty-four hour duty, and they came to my apartment. I didn't open the door. I had a little peephole; I could see they came to my apartment. And I remember my first sergeant knocking on the door really, really hard, and telling me I need to open up this door, and blah, blah, blah, blah, blah. And I didn't. He scared me, and I didn't open it up. And I—

TS: Did you say anything to let them know you were there at all?

TL: He knew I was there.

TS: Okay.

TL: I didn't say a word.

TS: Okay.

TL: He knew I was there.

TS: And then what happened?

TL: The next time I saw him he called me into his office and he said, "I always thought—" he made this little spiel—"I always thought you and I would have something together. I can't see you being married to this guy," and blah, blah.

Seriously? I'm thinking, "My God, I can't believe he's sitting here telling me this."

He actually told me that. He said, "I always thought you and I would have something together. You're the only women in this battalion that I admire and—" I mean, he just went over top. And he said, "Well, you know I came by your house; I knew you were there."

I said, "Yeah, I was there."

He said, "If you had opened up the door I had something for you."

I said, "Whatever it was you had, I didn't want it."

And he said, "You're being defiant."

I said, "No, I'm not being defiant," I said, "because I—" and I remember we called him [unclear].

And he said, "Why—" He said, "You don't know what I had."

I said, "Yeah." I said, "Well, if it's the same thing that you had for all the other women I know I didn't want it." And I said, "How do you think—" my ex's name is Chris [unclear] Sergeant Lawrence. "I said, "How do you think he's going to feel when I tell him that you're talking to me like this?"

He said, "You're not going to tell him, are you?" And he said it like a threat.

TS: Right.

TL: And I just looked at him, I said, "I don't know, I might," because I knew what that look meant.

TS: Right.

TL: And then the other sergeant that came to my house, he was always kind to me and always nice to me and everything. I think he was, like, a E-5 or E-6. But when—That night when we came to my house I looked out the peephole—and I remember distinctly I was not feeling well, not knowing I was pregnant then—and he said—he even told me—he said, "I saw you looking at me through the peephole." He said, "I knew you was in there. He said, "Why you didn't open the door?"

I said, "What did you want?"

He said, "I just wanted to come by and see you and talk with you."

I said, "Yeah, right."

So he said, "I'm disappointed. I thought you liked me. I thought we were friends," and all this and that. So yeah.

TS: This is all while you're married?

TL: Oh yeah.

TS: Yeah.

TL: Oh yeah. So it wasn't long after that—I think it was maybe the first month; the first month that I got married. Because it wasn't long after that that we left and we went to Georgia.

TS: Is that when you got out, then?

TL: Yeah.

TS: You got out.

TL: Excuse me. When we went to Georgia, that's when I made the decision, "I need to go ahead and get out."

TS: You got out in Georgia?

TL: Right.

TS: Okay.

TL: Right, "I need to go ahead and get out."

TS: Well, what was life like after you got out?

TL: I missed the military.

TS: Did you? What'd you miss about it?

TL: I wasn't a homebody. When you get that—that go, go, go in you, and—I always liked doing different things, and I wasn't the homebody type. And then my ex, I didn't know, or realize, that he was an alcoholic, and a substance abuser, and that was a new thing to me.

TS: Had you seen any of that in the army when you were in?

TL: Oh, you see it all the time.

TS: Oh, okay.

TL: But when you actually live with it, that's a different story.

TS: Okay.

TL: Oh, you see it all the time. I saw a lot of it; a lot; lot, lot, lot of it. But to live with that, and I had never lived with nothing like that before, that was a new thing to me. So he never abused me or anything, but it felt abusive, to have to deal with somebody that's always high, always drunk.

TS: You always have to be the adult in the room.

TL: Exactly, I always had to be the adult in the room. It was like, "Wow, this is not what I signed up for." I was happy to be a mom.

TS: Were you worried about your daughter?

TL: I was.

TS: Yeah?

TL: I was. I was worried about leaving him with her.

TS: Yes.

TL: What he would do, with—not so much to me, just to her, so.

TS: Well, some people say the military's like family.

TL: Yeah, that; I missed that too.

TS: Camaraderie.

TL: Exactly.

TS: Yeah.

TL: Exactly. Even though he was still in for a while after we got married, and I was around them, but it was a big difference when you're around them and you're not participating.

TS: You're not included in the stories in the same way.

TL: Exactly, exactly. You don't go—You don't get to go on the training deployments, stuff like they do. So I miss that.

TS: Yeah. Do you wish that you had made a different choice ever?

TL: Sometimes I do, really; sometimes I do. Sometimes I wish I had—I was glad to be pregnant because I love kids and I wanted to have my baby. Sometimes I wish I had had a person of support that I could have left her with and continued on. But now, in hindsight, I'm glad I didn't because I knew I would have missed her terribly, and I wouldn't have been able to function, so.

TS: Yeah.

TL: I'm glad I made that choice.

TS: It was the right choice at that time.

TL: Yeah, it was the right choice at that time.

TS: Yeah. Well, do you think your life is any different because you did join the army?

TL: I do. I think it's a lot different. It taught me a lot of things about myself. It taught me about—

TS: What'd you learn?

TL: I learned that I was a lot stronger than what I thought I was; a lot stronger. I learned that—Like I said, I used to be the quiet one that didn't ask the questions. I learned how to speak up for myself. And I learned not to worry about things that I didn't know anything about or couldn't understand. So it taught me the independence to—first of all, if you want to know how to do something you need to learn how to do it yourself. Ask questions, stand on your own two feet, and not depend on someone to do the things you could do yourself. So that's what I learned about me. Because being the youngest in the family, even in the neighborhood people think, "Well, she needs some help. She can't do this." Even nowadays when I tell people I used to chop wood.

"Chop wood?"

"Yeah, I used to chop wood. Had to. Mom said do it and you did it." [both chuckle] So yeah, so.

It taught me self-control. It taught me not to get upset about things; that eventually they're going to work out anyway. And it taught me things about myself that I knew my mother would never have taught me, or my family.

TS: Like what?

TL: Like not letting everything some—not believing everything somebody tells you; not letting a man come to you and tell you something and you automatically believe it; little things like that. It taught me things about managing my money and myself when you're out and you're on your own and you don't have your mother and father or your family, or

any immediate family members around you; you've got to get it done by yourself. You got to know that this is it. That—And you got a choice. You can go back to mom, but what are the alternatives? You can run back to mom, and you're still young, you can hear her mouth. Or you can stay here and get it done.

TS: So it gave you, kind of, a confidence in yourself—

TL: It did.

TS: —that you hadn't really had. Maybe you had it but maybe it brought it out in you.

TL: Right, I think I—Like I said, I had it, but a lot of times in Wilson I couldn't show that confidence like that. It didn't give me the outlet to show it. And then it wasn't a good thing to show it. My mom was not the one that you came across too confident with her.

TS: [chuckles]

TL: She was the confident one, that was the way it was going to be—

TS: Follow her plan, right?

TL: —and that's it; that is it.

TS: I understand. Well, is there anything you think that people who've never been in the military misunderstand or misinterpret about people who are in uniform?

TL: Yeah, a lot of things. They think that women that go in the military, they're automatically homosexuals; they think they're automatically gay; "Oh, you must love women."

"No, I don't love women. I just wanted to go away."

And they think that it's going to be so hard. It's not. I think it's—To me, the military is just like anything else, it's what you make out of it. There are a lot of opportunities there. A whole lot more now than there was when I was there, of course. So it's what you make out of it. It's what you—what you get out of it. And I think they look at it as a—"Oh, that's easy. That's easy to do." There was a lot of times it wasn't easy. It's just like a job. You may like your job some days and some days you just absolutely hate it.

And a lot of people, especially during my time when I came up, they would think, "I would never go somewhere where I had to have somebody tell me what to do all the time, twenty-four hours a day; tell me when to get up, when to get—" But that was the discipline in me.

TS: Right.

TL: From what my mom stored[?] in me, and my dad. So that doesn't bother me. And I was usually getting up anyway, doing chores before I go to school. So the mis—



TS: Chopping wood.

TL: Yeah, chopping wood, had to; bringing coal in the house, and whatever she said do you did it. So it—The misconceptions are not as bad as they were in my day. I think they do a good job now of letting you know what it's really about. And then people go to the military now as it's like they're going on a vacation.

But compared to what we were—Because I think when we went to the military—when I went to the military—it was real military. Other than the fact that the only thing that really shocked me was, like I said, the sexual part of it where men would just come up and just—it was like a known fact, and they'd come up and ask you for sex, or "Come over to my house. Come over to my—we're getting ready to have a party," stuff like that.

And the alcohol and drug abuse. Now, they're more under control with that than they were then. And it was—then it was like a known thing. Nobody was prosecuted. You didn't hear about a captain or a major or anybody getting prosecuted for that. That was a known thing to do; that was the manly thing to do. So it's changed a lot.

TS: It has changed. Well, what about on that issue of homosexuality. So, like, when you were in there wasn't even "Don't Ask, Don't Tell," there—

TL: Oh God. That—It was there.

TS: Okay.

TL: But you didn't—It was there, and it was a secret thing. It wasn't—You didn't know no signs of it. Even though, say, for example, I may have known—I may have known—that person may have been gay or homosexual or whatever term is appropriate to use, but it wasn't something that was spoken about; it was a hush hush thing. And even if I—Say if I had come in and I knew that I was a lesbian, I was—Excuse me—expected to act as feminine as possible. Even if the whole battalion knew—

TS: Right.

TL: —I was still expected to act as feminine as possible.

TS: Do you think people were judged by the work they did, then?

TL: Yes.

TS: Yeah?

TL: Oh yeah, no doubt.

TS: So do you think that after the implementation of "Don't Ask, Don't Tell" in the nineties, and then it was repealed [unclear] years ago—

TL: Yes.

TS: —do you think that that was a good policy, to just let people openly be gay or homosexual?

TL: I do.

TS: Yeah?

TL: I really do. And I say that because back then, before that policy, if you was, and even though you didn't say it, people knew it. If you was, there was a lot of abuse, a lot of violence. They were getting beaten up, they were getting overlooked for rank, for progression; a lot of just mean things were happening.

TS: Are you talking about for men and women or—

TL: Men and women.

TS: Yeah?

TL: Men and women. It wasn't just men; men and women. And a lot of derogatory terms were being used, openly, and nobody said anything. Everybody laughed about it.

TS: Right.

TL: Nobody said anything. So that "Don't Ask, Don't Tell," it changed a lot; it changed a lot.

TS: Yeah.

TL: So now you could go in, of course, and you could choose—be whatever you want to be. As long as you can perform the job, it really shouldn't—

TS: [unclear] have this hanging over your head.

TL: Exactly, exactly.

TS: Well, in some instances, like you were saying, you turned down a lot of the solicitation.

TL: Yeah.

TS: Pretty much all of them.

TL: Yes.

TS: But some women who might have said no then would be accused—

TL: Right.

TS: —of being a lesbian or something.

TL: Exactly, and some of the lesbians would have sex with the men just to try to say that they were not.

TS: Right.

TL: Even though they knew they were, and that was a horrible thing.

TS: Yeah. Well, we talk about how the army's changed, right?

TL: Yes.

TS: The military's changed. The jobs that women do now are—Like, if you look in Iraq and Afghanistan, in some cases the military police women are fighting right next to the guys.

TL: Yes.

TS: Do you think there's any job that women shouldn't or can't do in the military?

TL: That's a good question. I don't think there's anything that they can't do, really. Because I'm thinking, if they could take a woman and put that woman in a infantry unit and let her fight and go to war, there should be no other job, period, that she cannot do. None. If she—If—It's just like me going to school. If I can go to school and choose whatever degree that I want to go to school and major in, and if the military accept me as an officer coming in with that degree, then they should accept me for any job that they have.  
Now, there may be some that they don't want to do.

TS: There may be some that men don't want to do either. [chuckles]

TL: Oh, yeah.

TS: Yeah.

TL: But I don't think there's nothing—I don't think there's no job in any—any section of the military, whether it's army, navy, whatever, that a woman cannot do. None.

TS: You kind of spoke with this a little bit, and maybe you didn't have any mentors or anything like that to help you through—like you were saying how if you had known

somebody to help you figure out and ask the right questions at that time. But did you have anybody that you kind of looked up to?

TL: In the military?

TS: Yeah. At any place that you were stationed or—male or female.

TL: Not really. No, not really. You meet so many people, and they come and go. I was just trying to learn a little bit from everybody that I came in contact with. I knew there was something that they could teach me that I didn't know, because I knew the scope of the military itself was huge. And you meet people coming in from different places all over the world, and sometimes you try to get to know them, you ask them a question—"Where'd you come from? What did you do? Stuff like that—but I don't think I've ever had anyone that I can recall right now that I looked up to as a mentor. All the men had the highest ranks, and they were like absolute [corps dogs?].

TS: [chuckling]

TL: They were.

TS: Alright.

TL: You come—I would come in contact with—I think maybe one time—Geez. It wasn't that many. Maybe one or two times I saw a female officer.

TS: Okay.

TL: But she was not approachable, and she didn't—she was not friendly—she was not friendly—she didn't mingle. She was there to do the job and that was it. And she wasn't even in our battalion long. So I'm looking for female mentors. That was what I was looking for because I'm thinking, "What can I do that a woman has done to [unclear]."

TS: Right.

TL: But there wasn't—wasn't any, really.

TS: No.

TL: No.

TS: Well, when you transitioned out of the Women's Army Corps into the regular—So you would have gone to the supply, transportation.

TL: Yes.

TS: The insignia.

TL: Yes.

TS: You know how you had the insignia of the WAC—

TL: Right.

TS: —and then you could wear the insignia—

TL: Right.

TS: —of your unit, right.

TL: Yes.

TS: Or your branch.

TL: Right.

TS: Did that make any difference at all, for acceptance or—

TL: Not really.

TS: No?

TL: No, things were about the same. Not really.

TS: Because you were already there.

TL: Right.

TS: You were already in the branch.

TL: Yes.

TS: Yeah. Well, we talked about sexual harassment, but there's a lot in the news about rape.

TL: Yes.

TS: And the treatment of women, and men.

TL: Yes.

TS: Was that anything that you had any knowledge of?

TL: Yeah.

TS: Yeah?

TL: I heard about it. Everybody heard about it. You would hear about it, especially when the men would get drunk. That was the thing. Men get off of work they go get drunk, in the military. Women get off from work, we would go shopping. Or look for new hair, new clothes, stuff like that; girly things. We took care of our kids if we had them with us.

TS: Right.

TL: But the men get off of work, they would go get drunk, and you would hear about—particularly one incident when I was in the military and women had to pull twenty-four hour duty too. See, when you pull these twenty-four hour duty you are by yourself.

TS: Yes.

TL: And you're walking around these buildings in the dark by yourself. And you would hear about women getting raped, or a man for that matter, which at that time I think being in the military and a man getting raped it was like we don't tell that, we just say something else happened.

TS: Right, pretty taboo to—

TL: Yeah.

TS: Still is.

TL: Yeah, right, right. But you would hear about it; you would hear about men—women getting raped. You would hear about the women that stayed in the barracks, men coming into their room, and maybe it started out we're drinking together, we're smoking marijuana together, having a good time, but it ended up rape. You would hear about it. But there's nothing you could do about it. I mean, don't—

[Speaking Simultaneously]

TS: Would you—Go ahead.

TL: The whole battalion heard about it, but nothing was done.

TS: Were you ever afraid?

TL: Sometimes. Sometimes. Not to the point of being terrified, but when I would pull the twenty-four hour duty I would always be very cautious; very, very, very cautious. And I remember one time you was hearing about either some woman getting raped or some woman having sex during twenty-four hour duty. And I knew this one particular major—I can't think of his name but I can see his face—he would always come to me and flirt with me, and I hadn't pulled twenty-four hour duty in a while. And at that time you could actually pay somebody to pull your duty, the duty just had to be pulled.

So this one particular time I couldn't get anybody to pull my duty, and I'm thinking, "God—" and I knew this particular major was going to be on that base—I knew he was—that night, because sometimes, not all the time, through the night, three o'clock in the morning they would come to see, were you still there, walking around doing what you're supposed to be doing. And I knew he was going to be there, and I didn't want to pull that duty that night.

So I told my ex—at the time he was my boyfriend—I said, "I want you to come by and check on me." And that was against the rules. Wasn't nobody was supposed to come by and check—unless it was just the major; not like have a friend come by.

TS: Right.

TL: But I told him come by and check on me anyway. And he said, "Why?"

And I said, "Because—" I can't think of this major's [unclear]. Call him Major Dew[?]. I said, "Major Dew is—he is going to be the officer that's going to come by and check." I said, "You know he's been flirting with me, and you know he's been trying to get me for the longest—"

So I remember Major Dew came by, and from the position I was standing in, it was dark—black dark—but I could see his headlights coming. And I remember there was a—like a highway out on the opposite side of the base, and I saw these lights coming and I said, "I know that's him. I know that's him." And my ex was there, and so I told him, I said, "I don't want you to get into trouble." So he actually hid, and sure enough, here come Major Dew. Took him about—From the distance that he was at, that I could see him at, and where I was at on the base, it took him about maybe about twenty minutes. Saw him park his car and everything. He turned his lights out and he came and I heard him calling my name. The standard—The procedure was they call your name before they actually get up on you so they don't startle you or scare you or whatever.

TS: Right.

TL: So he called my name and he said, "Walk over here to me." And I knew something was wrong because you wasn't supposed to walk over there to him, you were supposed to meet together. I was supposed to walk to him and we supposed to be talking as we walking to each other, but he said, "Walk over here to me."

And I walk over there to him, and the closer I got I remember just feeling like, "This is not going to be good. This is not going to be good."

And you're supposed to be dressed—Whoever comes to see you, they're supposed to be dressed in their military uniform as well. He didn't have on his military uniform, so I knew right then, "Man, this is not going to be good. This is not going to be good."

So he said, "Well, how's it going?"

It was, like, three o'clock in the morning, I'm thinking, "Why is he asking me this dumb question?" I said, "Fine."

He says, "Pretty quiet, I guess?"

"Yeah."

"Anybody around? Seen anybody?"

"No." And I'm saying, "No, sir," of course; I wasn't just saying, "No," I'm saying, "No, sir."

TS: Right.

TL: And he said, "Well, why don't you take a break?" He said, "When's the last time you had your break?"

I'm thinking, "Oh Lord, here we go."

He said, "When's the last time you had your break?"

I said, "Just, maybe about twenty minutes ago, right before you came up." So it wasn't really time for me to have another break.

TS: Right, saying that; right.

TL: Yeah. So he said, "Well, let's go take a break anyway. Ain't nobody out here but me and you. Nobody's going to know."

And I'm thinking, "Oh God, here we go." And I'm thinking in my mind, "How am I going to fight this man? This is a grown man. How am I going to fight this man off me?" Because I just felt like, "This man going to try to rape me tonight."

So I don't know if he knew, or just forgot about it, because it was hi—he was in the heat of the moment thinking, "I know I'm going to get her tonight," and whatever.

TS: Right.

TL: But we went to the same office that me and my ex was working in, and my ex was in the office.

TS: He went to the office?

TL: He went to the office. It was okay for you to come on base and go to the office.

TS: I see.

TL: But it wasn't okay for him to walk—say like, his office was here and the building was here and I had patrol around this building over here.



TS: Okay.

TL: So that wasn't okay, but it was okay for you to come on base twenty-four hours if you wanted to. So he was in the office, and we went in there and he said, "Have a seat," and when we said have a seat my ex came from behind the filing cabinet. Actually he was standing beside it. He said, "Oh, Sergeant Lawrence, what you doing here?"

"Oh God, thank you. Thank you, thank you, thank you."

And when he sat there he talked to him, he said, "Alright." He said—Lawrence looked at me—I was Jenkins at the time—he said, "Alright, you've had a break. You can go on back to your duties."

I'm thinking, "Thank you, thank you, thank you."

So he sat there and he talked to my ex, but I knew—I knew and I told him—I told my ex, I said, "If you hadn't been in that office—Thank God you went in there." If he hadn't been in there I knew—I just felt like I was going to be raped, hit, something.

TS: Right.

TL: Something bad was going to happen to me that night.

TS: Right.

TL: I just knew it.

TS: Did you ever run into him again?

TL: I mean, you see him on the base.

TS: But nothing like that.

TL: But nothing like that. He would give me that evil look, but nothing like that. He would go and I would salute him and go on and he never said anything else to me. Yeah.

TS: You feel lucky that you got out of that?

TL: Yes. Yes.

TS: You still sound like you're lucky. You feel that way today, like right now, like—

[Speaking Simultaneously]

TL: Yes. You can—I can recall the tension.

TS: Yeah.

TL: I can recall the fear. I can recall everything—all that moment of what I felt.

TS: Yes.

TL: And I'm sweating—my hand—rubbing my hands thinking, "Teressa, how are you going to get out of this one?"

TS: You ever think, like, you really couldn't say no because of his rank and—

TL: That's another thing. He told you to come regardless of whether he was dressed or not in his military uniform. He tell you to do something you got to do it.

TS: Yes.

TL: And I'm just thinking—I'm trying to think of all kinds of things. I'm thinking, "Well, wherever he's getting ready to take me—" I didn't know he was going to take me over there, I'm thinking, "Wherever he's getting ready to take me I'm just going to have to scream really, really, really loud," hope that my ex hear me, or somebody hear me. But I remember that.

TS: Yeah. Yeah.

TL: But I dare not go tell nobody else.

TS: Right, because you're afraid.

TL: That would have been the end of me. They would have found some reason to kick me out of the military with a dishonorable discharge.

TS: They would blame you?

TL: Oh yes, of course. And I got out with a honorable discharge.

TS: Well, did you ever use your GI benefits [GI Bill]?

TL: I tried to use it to get a house, but they told me the time had run out.

TS: Oh, for the housing benefit?

TL: Yeah.

TS: Okay.

TL: That's what I was told, yeah. Because I remember the—As a matter of fact—this was not too long ago.

TS: Yes.

TL: The—I bought a house in Kernersville [North Carolina] since I've been here in the Triad, and I've been in the Triad since 2000. And I inquired about it, and they told me—

TS: Who's "they"?

TL: God.

TS: Was it the lender?

TL: Yeah. Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah. It was one of the lenders—

TS: Okay.

TL: —told me I could not use it, the timing ran out. Yeah, and I—You said something about my educational thing.

TS: Yes, the GI Bill?

TL: They told—The GI Bill, they told me I couldn't use that either because the timing ran out, because I inquired about that.

TS: There was a timeframe on that, and I wasn't sure about the housing.

[Speaking Simultaneously]

TL: I thought at one time that it was unlimited—there was no timeframe—but then they told me I had—the time had ran out, so.

TS: Got it.

TL: Because when I went to Guilford Tech [Technical Community College]—I went to Guilford Tech—

TS: Yes.

TL: —and that's when I inquired about the GI Bill and they told me time had ran out.

TS: Yeah. Were you in when they did VEAP at all? The Veterans Education Acceptance Program, I think is what it was.

TL: I believe I was. That was going on at that time.

TS: Yeah, because that was different from the GI Bill.

TL: Right.

TS: And so, there was a different—there were different restrictions on it so it might have been—

[Speaking Simultaneously]

TL: That could have been it; that could have been it.

TS: That's interesting. Well, would you do it all again?

TL: Yeah.

TS: Yeah?

TL: I would.

TS: Do you consider yourself a pioneer at all?

TL: Yeah.

TS: Yeah?

TL: Yeah.

TS: Why?

TL: Because I'll take a risk. I'll take a risk and—not so much of unknown; I try to inquire about things before I do it, and I get as much [unclear] as I—if it's comfortable for me to do it I'll do it.

TS: Do you feel like when you were in the army you were making a path for other women that came behind you?

TL: Yeah.

TS: Yeah?

TL: Yeah. My daughter, she asked me—she said, "Mom," she said, "What made you want to do that?"

And I sat down and I talked to her and I told her, "It's not what you think it is." I said, "It's part of life. It's a path that you choose, and it's what you make out of it once you're there."

TS: Yes. Would you recommend military service to your daughter at any point?

TL: I have.

TS: You have?

TL: Yes.

TS: And would you today too?

TL: Sure.

TS: Yeah? You have a grandson?

TL: I have a grandson and a granddaughter.

TS: What about them?

TL: Yeah, I would.

TS: Yeah.

TL: Yeah.

TS: Yeah. Well, what do you think patriotism means? What does it mean to you?

TL: I think patriotism means standing up for what you believe in, standing up for the values that you was raised on, even though sometimes those values can change. I think patriotism means always being there for someone that needs support.

TS: Yes.

TL: And more importantly, I think it's being true to yourself. If you can be true to yourself, and if you can always stand up for yourself, you can stand up for someone else.

TS: Well, now you're going here to UNCG.

TL: Yeah.

TS: What are you majoring in?

TL: Social work.

TS: In social work.

TL: Yes.

TS: How long have you been going here?

TL: About a year.

TS: How do you think the services for veterans are here?

TL: That's a very good question. I haven't actually looked into the services since I've been here, and I know that's a negative on my part and I need to, because it's always in the back of my mind, "Teressa, you need to go check this out; you need to go check this out." But it seemed like last year I've just been so engrossed with family, school, and I said I wanted to immerse myself into the atmosphere first. I joined the social work club, and things happening with family. I said I want to just get my feet kind of wet, see what the smell is about—

TS: Yes.

TL: —before I just go jump in everything else. But that is one of the ones on my list that I want to do.

TS: I'll give you some information when we finish about the Student Veterans Association.

TL: I'd appreciate it. I'd appreciate it.

TS: How about in the classroom? Do you feel like you can speak about your time as a veteran? Have you ever had to do that?

TL: Never have.

TS: No?

TL: That never came across with the classes that I've taken so far. That was the farthest thing from—

TS: Haven't come up.

TL: No, never. It never came up; never.

TS: Yeah. Well, is there anything about your time in the army that we haven't talked about that you want to mention?

TL: I think I've covered everything. I had a nice time in the army, but I had a better time out of the army.

TS: Yeah? [both chuckle]

TL: Yeah, I did.

TS: You think it gave you some kind of good foundation to kind of move on with your life.

TL: It did. It did. It gave me a real good foundation, because—it gave me a foundation of that independence and that confidence I needed, and I would never have gotten it if I stayed in Wilson.

TS: Yeah.

TL: So. That's why I still take a risk, but I guess you could call it a—I'm not a risky type person but I don't mind doing different things.

TS: Right.

TL: Taking different ventures.

TS: Calculated risk.

TL: There you go. There you go. Because I'll take one of those.

TS: [chuckles]

TL: I'll take one of those. As long as it don't involve snakes, oh, God no.

TS: [chuckles] Well, fortunately you didn't have to have that.

TL: [chuckles]

TS: Well, thank you so much for talking with me today. I really appreciate it, Teressa, thank you.

TL: Oh, you're welcome. You are most welcome.

[End of Interview]