

WOMEN VETERANS HISTORICAL PROJECT

ORAL HISTORY COLLECTION

INTERVIEWEE: Kristine Grace Poirier

INTERVIEWER: Therese Strohmer

DATE: May 4, 2015

[Begin Interview]

TS: Today is May 4, 2015. This is Therese Strohmer. I'm actually at [Walter Clinton] Jackson Library with Kristine Poirier in Greensboro, North Carolina, to conduct an oral history interview for the Women Veterans Historical Collection at the University of North Carolina of Greensboro. Kristine, would you like to state your name the way you'd like it to read on your collection?

KP: Kristine Grace Poirier.

TS: Okay, excellent. Well, Kristine, why don't you start out a little bit by telling me when and where you were born?

KP: Okay. I was born May 3, 1976, at—in Fort Jackson, South Carolina. My father was a drill sergeant at the time.

TS: I was wondering about that.

KP: Yeah. [chuckles]

TS: Yesterday was your birthday, too, so.

KP: Yes.

TS: Did you have a nice birthday?

KP: It was very nice.

TS: Oh, good.

KP: Yes, thank you.

TS: Your dad, was he career army?

KP: Yes. He was in the army, in the infantry, for twenty-six years.

TS: Oh, wow.

KP: Yeah.

TS: Do you have any place that you call home, then?

KP: No.

TS: No?

KP: I'm just—I'm kind of a mutt. [both chuckle]

TS: You traveled a lot then.

KP: Yes. Every two to three years, pretty much all my life.

[Speaking Simultaneously]

TS: How old were you when your father got out of the service?

KP: I was—It must have been about nine—twenty or nineteen.

TS: Oh, really?

KP: I was in college.

TS: When he finally retired?

KP: Yeah, I was a sophomore in college at Washington State University.

TS: Wow.

KP: And he retired from Fort Lewis, Washington.

TS: Now, do you have any brothers or sisters?

KP: I have one sister; she's three years younger than me.

TS: Okay.

KP: Katie.

TS: Katie. Oh, she goes by Katie.

KP: She goes by Katie.

TS: Oh, okay. And how about your mom? Did your mom work outside the home?

KP: She was a—she taught Special Ed [Education].

TS: Oh, did she? Okay.

KP: The whole—Our whole—Pretty much our whole life.

TS: Did she stay in, like, the Department of Defense?

KP: No.

TS: No?

KP: She preferred to be with—in the civilian.

TS: Civilian population.

KP: Yes.

TS: Oh, cool. Well, so tell us what it was like growing up as an army brat.

KP: It was fun. My sister and I were very different. I was able to—I was more social than she was so I was able to make friends easier.

TS: Oh, every time you moved?

KP: Yeah. For Katie, not so much, but.

TS: Yeah.

KP: Yeah, you've got—

TS: And then she was younger, following her older sister.

KP: Yeah, so I just let her come with us all the time. [chuckles]

TS: Well, that was sweet. That was definitely sweet.

KP: But it was fun. I used to not like it when I was younger because I wanted—I saw my friends always in the same—growing up with the same people and knowing everyone in the same town, and we would come and we would go, and people would come and go, but now I have more of an appreciation for it.

TS: What is it that you think—

[Speaking Simultaneously]

KP: The travel; the travelling definitely.

TS: Yeah.

KP: Yes, and just new—more cultures. You just learn more—to me—than when you stay in one spot.

TS: What kind of things do you think that you gained before you went in the army yourself from being in that culture? Different world views and things like that.

KP: I definitely gained an appreciation for different cultures and I guess I never had a huge culture shock when I did run into someone. I know my ex-husband, the first time he saw a Filipino he thought they were Puerto Rican. [chuckles] And I never had that—I never experienced anything like that, and that was just one example of someone I saw have culture shock. [both chuckle]

TS: So you could tell different races—

KP: Yes.

TS: —and ethnicities and cultures much more [unclear].

[Speaking Simultaneously]

KP: And now I'm very good at—I can tell—

TS: That's interesting.

KP: —Japanese from Chinese and Vietnamese, and a lot of people I know can't.

TS: Instead of like—

KP: It's an Asian.

TS: —oh, they're all alike.

KP: Yeah.

TS: Yes. That's interesting. So this idea, too, of moving from place to place all the time, was there anything that you liked about that; about the moving around?

KP: I did.

TS: Besides the travel.

KP: I got tired I think after a few yea—as I was getting older I was ready to move.

[Speaking Simultaneously]

TS: Yeah. It was in your blood.

KP: The thought of moving, yeah. The thought of moving was fun for me. New places, you get—for me I could start all over. Especially when I hit junior high, I realized it was a chance to start new and I could kind of be anything I wanted.

TS: Did you make friends pretty easily?

KP: Yes. Yes. I always went with a starter. I would find someone and I would ask them something about themselves or tell them I liked something about them, and I would always get people talking about themselves and that was an automatic—usually an in for me.

TS: Yeah, people love to talk about themselves.

KP: Yeah. [both chuckle]

TS: That's excellent. That's a great—

KP: That was my strategy my whole life.

TS: Did you learn that from someone or you just figured it out along the way?

KP: No, I think I just—I knew that if I didn't make friends I wouldn't have any, and that was just what I started doing.

TS: Did you have a favorite place that you went as a young girl?

KP: Germany was probably my favorite duty station as a dependent. I have fond memories of it. I was only in kindergarten, first grade, but I still remember—

TS: Oh, yeah.

KP: — getting to go to Austria and see all the castles, and we saw the Eagle's Nest where [Adolf] Hitler, I think, died—and—supposedly died. And the volksmarches, the food, I remember. It was just—That's just a really fu—It was a fun couple years for me.

[The Eagle's Nest was a building erected on the summit of the Kehlstein near Berchtesgade, Germany, and presented to Adolf Hitler on his fiftieth birthday. Hitler committed suicide in a bunker in Berlin, Germany, on 30 April 1945.]

[German, meaning "people's march; a form of non-competitive fitness walking]

TS: Kind of like a fairy tale—

KP: Yeah.

TS: — kind of stuff that you get to do there.

KP: I would like to go back. I never got to go.

TS: Oh, you didn't get to go during your time?

[Speaking Simultaneously]

KP: I never was stationed there, no.

TS: Oh. Well, that's interesting.

KP: But I would like to go back there.

TS: Well, what years were you there?

KP: Oh, my goodness. I was kindergarten, first grade.

TS: So six, seven—

KP: Yeah.

TS: —years old. What year were you born?

KP: Eighty-two, '83?

TS: Oh, okay.

KP: Yeah.

TS: The [deutsche] mark was really good then. You could buy a lot of—

[The deutsche mark was the official currency of West Germany and unified Germany until the adoption of the euro in 2002]

KP: Yeah.

TS: —excellent things.

KP: We did a lot of traveling. Yeah, It was fun.

TS: Well, tell me a little bit then about, like, schooling. Did you enjoy school?

KP: I did until I got to high school, and when I was in high school my father was stationed at Schofield Barracks, Hawaii, and—

[Speaking Simultaneously]

TS: You didn't want to be in school there?

KP: [laughs] That was the downfall for me. So I'm just lucky to be here today.

TS: Didn't you get to go there later?

KP: Yes, and then I was stationed there.

TS: Yeah, okay. We'll have to talk about that. That'll be fun. Well, that's interesting. So yeah, you wanted to be outside and playing.

KP: Yeah, my—we used to keep our bathing suits in the trunk, and once we got our—in Hawaii you can have your [driver's] license at fifteen.

TS: Oh, you could?

KP: Yeah, my father made the grave mistake of buying me a car, so.

TS: You were gone.

KP: And my best friend had a car too.

TS: That's it; you're done.

KP: Yeah. [chuckles]

TS: Interesting. Well, was there anything that you didn't like about that kind of experience as a young girl?

KP: Went—Moving. When I did have—

TS: Friends?

KP: —solid friendships it was very hard.

TS: Have you been able to keep any of those?

KP: There's one friend I have from my seventh and eighth grade while we were in Colorado Springs, Colorado; a male that I—Shawn Boyd[?]-we're still friends.

TS: Wow, that's great.

KP: I have another girlfriend from there, too, Tori Cobb[?], and we're still friends. I'm closer with Shawn but the three of us actually hung out.

TS: Recently?

KP: No, no. While we were there, and just stayed in touch.

TS: Oh, stayed in touch.

KP: And they're in touch also.

TS: Are they in the service?

KP: No, neither of them ended up going in the service.

TS: Oh, that's really interesting.

KP: Yeah. [chuckles]

TS: Oh, neat. Okay, so you liked school for the most part. Was there a particular, like, subject that was interesting to you or a teacher that you had that [unclear] things that you liked?

KP: I don't think a teacher that really made an impact on me, but I always liked history. And it's funny because my eight year old loves history too.

TS: Oh, is that right?

KP: Yeah. She wears a necklace with Abe [Abraham] Lincoln around—

TS: Is that Jacqueline?

KP: Jacqueline, yes. [chuckles]

TS: Okay. Oh, she does, with Abe Lincoln. That's interesting. I have a nephew who thinks he's the ghost of Abraham Lincoln, so they should get together.

KP: She wants a top hat.

TS: Oh, that's awesome.

KP: I don't know. Yeah, I liked history, didn't like English, didn't like math. What else did I like?

TS: Were you on any sports or extracurricular—

KP: No.

TS: Okay.

KP: I did not. I was more of a social butterfly.

TS: Okay.

KP: I didn't—So when I did join the army, or ROTC [Reserve Officer Training Corps], and they wanted me to work out I had to be there at 6:30 in the morning and I was like, "What is this? You want me to do what?"
"Push-ups." It was really—yeah.

TS: It couldn't have been that of a shock to you that you had to do it.

KP: It wasn't but I was like, "Oh, gosh." I was more shocked at how out of shape I was. I was very thin but couldn't do ten push-ups.

TS: Really?

KP: Yeah.

TS: Well, you didn't have the—

KP: In a row.

TS: —particular muscle base for that.

KP: My two mile run was over twenty minutes. It was really bad. I had to—Yeah.

TS: You had to work at that.

KP: It was a huge slap in the face for me the first time—

TS: Yeah.

KP: —I showed up. [both chuckle]

TS: That's pretty—

KP: Had a lot to work on, yeah.

TS: So you're a young girl, you're growing up, you're traveling, kind of, all over the world, and what did you think as a young girl in this environment what your future might possibly hold for you?

KP: I had no desire or even thoughts of going into the military. I wanted to be an astronaut, I wanted to do fashion, hotel restaurants, that kind of thing. Never thought about the military, not even when I applied for college. I wasn't thinking about that. And my dad had thought that he could make it work, so I showed up my freshman year, my first semester in he kind of realized I'm going to have to—"You're going to have to get scholarships or grants or something because we're not going to have the money."
And that's when I actually met some girls in the bathroom of my dorm who were wearing ROTC uniforms.

TS: Oh, really?

KP: Yeah.

TS: Where were you going to school?

KP: Washington State University.

TS: Okay.

KP: Yeah, yes. And that was in 1994.

TS: And so, you met them.

KP: Yeah, met them and I was like, "Hey, my dad has that." It was a Class A uniform. And I was like, "What are you guys doing?" and "Are you in the military?"
And they were like, "No, we're in ROTC", and they were going to do flag—color guard for the football game. [chuckles] And they were just getting ready.
I was like, "Wow, that's so cool." And I saw them again later because they lived in the dorm and talked to them and they were like, "Yeah, we're on scholarships."
And I was like—

TS: "What?"

KP: "Wait. What?" So I ended up going up to the detachment with one of them and literally got signed up. They were like, "Yeah."

TS: What kind of commitment did you have?

KP: I got a three year scholarship and I had four years active with four years reserve.

TS: Okay.

KP: Was my—Was what I signed for.

TS: You thought, "Well, that's not too bad."

KP: Yeah. I was like that's a—it was a guaranteed job. Because doing criminal justice was my concentration. I wasn't so sure even then as a freshman how much I really wanted to do that.

TS: Right.

KP: I just chose it because at first I thought it was really cool. And then I didn't—Later on I didn't want to change it because I didn't want to add time on, and plus I was going to get commissioned anyway so.

TS: You're like, "Well, I don't have to go into that field necessarily."

KP: Yes. And my thought was I'll just go in and be an MP [military police] or military intelligence and I can use my criminal justice major and everything will work out perfect. [chuckles]

TS: That's not exactly what happened.

KP: But I didn't get chosen, yeah.

TS: What did your dad and your mom and your sister think when you signed up for ROTC?

KP: I called my dad and I told him I was being all I can be. [laughs]

["Be All You Can Be" was the recruiting slogan of the United States Army from 1980-2001.]

TS: Is that what you said to him? That's too funny.

KP: Yeah, I said, "I'm going to be all I can be; I got a scholarship." And he was happy for the scholarship, but he was like, "Man, Kristine, I don't—I don't know if I give you two weeks. You've got to—that's—"

TS: You didn't seem like the army kind of—

KP: Yeah.

TS: —material to him?

KP: No. And he wasn't even happy about the criminal justice really.

TS: Really?

KP: Yeah. But the army thing, really, he was like, "Man, I don't—As long as you—At least you're going to be an officer," was what he really said.

TS: Yeah.

KP: And at the end of the day, as long as I wasn't going to go in and be enlisted he was—

TS: He was enlisted, right?

KP: Yeah.

TS: Okay.

KP: And he just didn't want me—I don't know—going through basic. [both chuckle] I guess he thought I'd have it easier, and it is kind—for the most part as an officer.

TS: Why do you think it's easier as an officer?

KP: Pay. The pay is better. You're more—You're in the leadership position from the get-go, so you can—you have more flexibility to leave and go do this, and take three hour lunches, not that I ever did that. [chuckles] But just that, and that aspect, and not always having someone—Well, you still have someone telling you what to do but not, I guess, in the same manner as, like, a squad leader or a platoon sergeant, first sergeant, sergeant

major. It's a little—I think it's a little harder to be enlisted, even—especially to make rank. As officers we don't have to make points; we don't have to get—go to extra schooling and driver's training just to have the commander sign off on points for you—promotion points.

TS: But don't you have to do certain things to get promoted, like, to major and above?

KP: Not—

TS: Don't you go to a board?

KP: There is a board but it's—

TS: Don't you have to, like, get a master's and things like that?

KP: Not really, even a master's, no, it's really easy; as long as you don't get a DUI [driving under the influence], as long as you don't kill someone, as long as you can pass your PT [physical training] test, especially nowadays. In my time you were a shoe-in.

TS: Yeah.

KP: Yeah, it really—

TS: So you just had automatic promotions as you went on?

KP: Yeah, my hardest—the hardest thing for me at promotion time was making sure my picture was up to date.

TS: Your picture?

KP: Yeah. You had to have—You had to submit an up to date picture in your Class A uniform, and I was always, "Oh, I got to—"

TS: "What picture am I going to get" or "Where am I going to get it taken?"

KP: [chuckles]

TS: That's interesting.

KP: Yeah.

TS: Well, how'd you like ROTC, then?

KP: I loved it.

TS: Did you?

KP: Yeah, it was our own little fraternity. I'm actually still friends with a lot of those folks. A lot of them, yeah.

TS: This is at Washington State University.

KP: Washington State University.

TS: Okay.

KP: It—We were tight. It was awesome. I—We were even close with the Air Force ROTC. We had navy but we didn't—I don't—I'm not friends with any—

[Speaking Simultaneously]

TS: There weren't that many?

KP: Yeah. The Marine ROTC—

TS: Where's Washington State University at?

KP: It's on the Idaho—the border of Idaho.

TS: Oh, okay, so it's on the east side of Washington?

KP: It's seventy-six mi—yes. Yeah, we were on the Palouse.

[The Palouse is a region of the northwestern United States, encompassing parts of southeastern Washington, north central Idaho, and parts of Oregon.]

TS: Oh, by the desert.

KP: Yeah, with the rolling wheat fields—

TS: The rodeos.

KP: —and the country. Yeah, that's where we were.

TS: Okay.

KP: I was out with the cowboys and the—yeah. [chuckles]

TS: I just think of rodeos [unclear].

KP: My sister got a ROTC scholarship for Seattle U [University] on the other side, and she stayed with—

TS: So she's over by the water.

KP: Yes, she was in Seattle, like, actual buildings in the city and it was way too big for me.

TS: Yeah. You're just the country girl, okay.

KP: [chuckles]

TS: We'll have to get your sister in here, then.

KP: Yeah, yeah, she would be a good one.

TS: Is she still—

KP: Because she was a nurse.

TS: Oh, she was—

KP: Katie was an RN [Registered Nurse]. Her scholarship was for nursing.

TS: Okay.

KP: And, man, yeah, she deployed in the beginning of the war.

TS: She did?

KP: Yeah, so she's—

TS: To Afghanistan?

KP: Iraq.

TS: Oh, to Iraq, okay.

KP: Iraq, yeah.

TS: Okay.

KP: And she took care of freedom fighters [Kurdish Peshmerga?] and even the bad guys. She was there at the very beginning. They set up.

TS: Oh, where does she live?

KP: Now she's in Hawaii with my folks.

TS: [chuckles]

KP: Yeah, she—they all moved back to Hawaii.

TS: I can understand why.

KP: She's actually working as an RN at Tripler [Army Medical Center, Honolulu].

TS: Oh, is she? Excellent.

KP: Yeah, she loves it.

TS: That's good. Alright, so you're in ROTC. Now, what was that like, you putting that uniform on for the first time? How did that feel?

KP: I thought it was cool. Yeah, I liked it; I liked it a lot. It was just—The whole thing was fun for me. I liked learning how to do the weapons. We—Our spring breaks, instead of having a normal spring break like my friends, we always had to go to spring break training—

TS: Right.

KP: —at Fort Lewis [Tacoma, Washington].

TS: Okay.

KP: And it was fun. We stayed in the old World War II barracks and just did random squad STX lanes and going out—

[Situational Training Exercise (STX) is a U.S. Army training program]

TS: What are they called?

KP: We called them STX lanes.

TS: STX lanes?

KP: I'm trying to remember. Yeah, they would set up these different lanes—the cadre—

TS: Okay.

KP: —from our detachment and we would be in little groups of our squads and we would be given a mission and we would have to write a five paragraph op [operations] order, and we would take turns being who's in charge and lead your squad, and get the mission done. And they had these cards and you would get a green card at the end and—graded you and—[chuckles]

TS: Cool.

KP: You'd get peer evals [evaluations]. Oh, yeah. It was really cool. I liked it.

TS: Was there this camaraderie—

KP: Yes.

TS: —or something that was going on?

KP: Yes.

TS: So you really were enjoying it.

KP: Oh, yeah, yeah. I loved it; I was excited. But what we learned was all kind of infantry tactics, so I really didn't know how to do my job when I got into the army. It was—That was a culture shock. [chuckles]

TS: Well, let's talk about that, then. When did you do, like, your officer trainings? Did you go to a—

KP: Yes. I did.

TS: Okay. What year was that you did that?

[Speaking Simultaneously]

KP: Nineteen ninety-eight.

TS: Nineteen ninety-eight, okay.

KP: As soon—As soon as I graduated—I got commissioned May 8 of 1998.

TS: Okay.

KP: That same—I had less than two weeks; I had to be down here at Fort Lee, Virginia.

TS: You like to do everything around your birthday. [both chuckle]

KP: Yeah, I know. Everything happens in May. So I did report in to Fort Lee.

TS: Fort Lee, okay.

KP: Yes. For four months I did officer basic—officer basic course there where they did teach—they gave us an overview of logistics.

TS: Okay.

KP: And logistics is just so huge that you can do anything from mortuary affairs to food service to fuel to—What else did we—riggers; the—they packed the parachutes. There's—It's just a lot, and until you get to your unit you're not actually given a specific—"You're going to be at bath and laundry. Go do it."

TS: [chuckles] Right.

KP: And it was just a huge—in four months it was an overview of all of that and none of us really got—they never specifically break you up and say, "You're going to be all fuel your whole career." It's really—You could go wherever the wind blows you. You have to remember how to do all this.

TS: When you signed up, it was like you were thrown open to whatever was available or did you sign up for a specific field?

KP: They—You get a wish list—

TS: Okay.

KP: —in college. You get a wish list of your top six.

TS: Okay.

KP: And mine were MI [military intelligence], MP [military police]. I think I put signal [corps] third. Oh, I'm glad I didn't get that.

TS: Yeah. Why?

KP: I—This whole computer class, the computers.

TS: Oh. [chuckles]

KP: I am computer illiterate.

TS: Okay.

KP: I would have been the worst if the colonel would have been like, "Come fix my computer." [chuckles]

TS: Like, "I don't think so."

KP: "Sir, I can't." I am afraid of computers, so yeah, I'm glad I didn't get signal.

TS: So signal. What are the other three you put down? Those are the ones you mostly wanted at the time?

KP: Yeah, those are my top three. I—

TS: It's okay if you don't remember.

KP: I can't remember, I—

TS: That's all right.

KP: Quartermaster was on my list.

TS: Was it?

KP: I believe it was at the bottom.

TS: Somewhere. Yeah.

KP: And then after your six you get two more as a alter—It was—I know. I'm like, "Why do we alternate [unclear]—"

TS: Yeah.

KP: "—you only get one." But quartermaster was one of my alternates; it was something that I just threw on there.

TS: Yeah.

KP: So when I got called in by my PMS, by the colonel, and he said, "You got quartermaster," I was, like—I just sat there. I thought he was kidding with me.
I was, like, "Okay." [chuckles]
And then when it—actually when he was, like, "No, you really—you got quartermaster," I started crying. I was like—

[Speaking Simultaneously]

TS: Oh, really? You were disappointed?

KP: —"You're kidding." I was like, "Can you do anything to—Can we change it? Can we appeal? I don't want to do that."

TS: Right.

KP: And he was—I was like, "This isn't what I signed up for." [chuckles] And he said, "Kristine, you know, honestly, this might be the best thing for you."

TS: How did he try to convince you of that?

KP: He told me that, as I would find later—and I did—that logistics would carry over into the civilian world very easily, and he explained how MP—the civilian world—civilian world doesn't necessarily like it when MPs come out and want to join the ranks of—

TS: Because they already have a set way—

[Speaking Simultaneously]

KP: This is how we do it.

TS: —they're doing it and then they have to retrain them, right?

KP: Yes.

TS: Right. I've heard that before.

KP: Yeah. But he was, like, "You could go work for UPS [United Parcel Service]. You're going to be logistics. You can do so much."

TS: Because it's so broad, right?

KP: Yeah.

TS: Interesting. But you weren't buying that at the time.

KP: No. I was, like, "Okay, whatever." But I did it. I was, like, "I don't agree with this but this is what I raised my right hand for so I'm going to do it. I'm going to do my best," but I told him, "I'm probably going to get out at the end." [both chuckle]

TS: Well, where'd you go? Did you get to have a choice of places that you wanted to be assigned?

KP: You got a wish list again.

TS: Okay. How'd that work out for you?

KP: Once again I didn't get [chuckles]—

TS: Nothing?

KP: I didn't get anything I wanted. They—Apparently, the army—the needs of the army, as I would find out the rest of my career, they trump wish lists. [chuckles] So I went straight to Korea from OPC [Officer Preparatory Course].

TS: When I read that on what you emailed me I was really surprised.

KP: Yeah.

TS: I don't hardly ever see that someone goes immediately to an overseas assignment.

KP: Yeah. I was, like, "Oh, I'm only a twenty-one year old. I can't go to Korea." Yeah, I actually wanted to come to [Fort] Bragg.

TS: Okay.

KP: Because I really wanted to do [parachute] rigger and stay with the parachutes and I knew that Fort Bragg, they tend to let their people stay for years and—twenty year—and, like, your whole career you can camp out at Bragg. And I was, like, man, North Carolina. That's just—That's where I want to be.

TS: Yeah, but—

KP: Korea.

TS: —you got sent to Korea and you got sent to Camp—

KP: Camp Hovey.

TS: Where's that at?

KP: It's pretty far up. It's above Seoul. It's—You can't take family if—sometimes they had company tours where if you were in Seoul or Osan, any of those down there, you could.

TS: But this was not a company.

KP: No. Yes.

TS: But you were twenty-one and single so.

KP: Yeah.

TS: Right?

KP: Yeah, so I was—

TS: What the heck?

KP: [chuckles] It was awesome. I got there, I was immediately given a platoon.

TS: Okay.

KP: A fuel platoon. Bulk fuel, so we had—

TS: Wow.

KP: My pieces of equipment consisted of five thousand gallon tankers that you see driving around on the roads that are full of fuel. [chuckles] That's what I did.

TS: You had no real training for that.

KP: No.

TS: Just the leadership training.

KP: Yeah. I was kind of like, "Okay," and I met my platoon sergeant. I was like, "Man—" his name was Sergeant Sims. I was like, "I don't know where I'm supposed to be, what I'm supposed to be doing. Really."
And he was like, "Ma'am."
"I'm just a butter bar" [slang term for a Second Lieutenant, based on the insignia - a single gold bar].
He laughed and he was like, "Let's just stay down in the motor pool. It's safe down there." [both chuckle]
So he kept me down there, they made me an office with his, and really we just did lots of missions moving fuel up to Camp Greaves which is right on the DMZ [demilitarized zone] of North Korea.

TS: Okay.

KP: That was—

TS: Camp Greaves?

KP: Camp Greaves, yeah. And that's where—all infantry was up there; they were monitoring the border.

TS: Okay.

KP: And so, it was a pretty dangerous mission, kind of. Not really when you compare it to Iraq, but.

TS: Right. But you're hauling fuel.

KP: Yeah, fuel. [chuckles]

TS: That alone is—

[Speaking Simultaneously]

KP: Which scared me.

TS: Yeah, I'm sure.

KP: And the roads—

TS: You actually didn't have anything to compare that to, right?

KP: The thing that was most scary, honestly, were the roads in Korea, to me. Some of them on it with those tankers which was—when you're driving up to Greaves and back was scary.

TS: Now, did you ever have to drive any of the tankers?

KP: No. No, I always—I always TCed [track commander], which—just—

TS: What's TC mean?

KP: I don't know.

TS: I'm not familiar with that.

KP: It's—

TS: Okay.

KP: That was just the name we called it. The TC's your—you've got the driver and then your TC who just kind of tells you when the clear—it's clear right and this and that and they keep you awake.

TS: Okay.

KP: But I would TC a lot, as much as I could, just to go with them and make sure it was done right and get the paperwork done there, and it got me away from the commander. [both chuckle]

TS: Yeah.

KP: So, yeah, it was nice.

TS: You just liked to go.

KP: Yeah.

TS: You didn't necessarily have to.

KP: No.

TS: But did you like to stay with your platoon?

KP: Yes. Yeah, and we were very tight. We—Because we had to become a family, because we didn't have families there, so we would do little Thanksgiving things together. Well, it was only—We only were there for one year—it's a one year tour—so we did Thanksgiving, we did Christmas. I didn't even take mid-tour leave.

TS: No?

KP: I stayed. No, I stayed. I loved it there, I loved the—At that time, we had liberty passes still, so we could go off-post. And I'm half Japanese, so I loved going out and just eating the food and meeting the people and it—I loved it; I had a lot of fun. I made friends with—we had KATUSAs, which were the Korean Army—I forget the "T"—they were part of the ROK [Republic of Korea] Army's—What do they call them? Just little—

[Korean Augmentation To the United States Army, or KATUSA, is a branch of the Republic of Korea Army which consists of Korean enlisted personnel who are augmented to the U.S. Army, and was developed during the Korean War to cope with a shortage of U.S. Army personnel.]

TS: They help you learn about the culture?

KP: Yeah, yes, and they worked with us. I always—At the beginning I was, like, "They're spying on us," but they really weren't. They were—I had two KATUSAs in my platoon, loved them, and I actually hung out with them on the weekends. [chuckles]

TS: Yeah.

KP: Yeah, and met some of their families, and ate and ate and ate. It was just so much fun. They—yeah—

TS: I talked to a few women recently who were both in Korea and they both talked about the KATUSAs, and they were much earlier, in, like, the sixties and seventies.

KP: Wow. We had KATUSAs then?

TS: Yeah, and so it's interesting that you're talking about it.

KP: Yeah.

TS: That they still have that program.

KP: Well, I'll tell you an interesting story of one of my KATUSAs. Actually I'm lying to you, he wasn't mine but he was in our company. He was an American. American, went home to Korea to visit family. The ROK Army found out he was there, and because he was Korean they came and got him and he was forced to serve two years.

TS: Because he was half Korean?

KP: Yes. Because he was—

TS: Or Korean citizenship.

KP: Yes.

TS: I see. Yeah, right because—

KP: But—

TS: —that's a part of their—at least he got to be a KATUSA.

KP: Yeah, so he could speak great English. I was like, "Man." [chuckles]

TS: That's how that worked out.

KP: Yeah.

TS: Well, what is it that you enjoyed so much about the Korean culture and being there?

KP: I liked it. I guess I just—It reminded me of Hawaii and just our family, I guess, there. They had some of the same kind of "isms" that we do that just—I guess the way—like, the KATUSAs I hung out with, their families were—they would all live together in one room; sleep together. In Hawaii it's so poor that they do that too. The food. We loved—It was a lot of the same stuff.

TS: Like what were you eating?

KP: Kimchi.

TS: You like kimchi?

KP: Yes. Bulgogi. We'd make it in Hawaii too. Yeah, and just all that stuff. Ra—All the different ramen noodles.

TS: It's good. [both chuckle] You miss that?

KP: Yes, yeah.

TS: You don't get a lot of Korean food around Greensboro, North Carolina.

KP: No.

TS: Well, so you're enjoying that, and now, you get off on your liberty passes [granted time-off].

KP: Yes.

TS: You would just go out on the economy [off-base]?

KP: Yes, with friends. We would—We learned the bus system very quickly and we would go even down into Seoul. There's a famous mountain there, I can't remember the name of it, but we climbed—It's not a mountain but it's a pretty large hill that people climbed. They'd take—they could—It's big for dating; dates and stuff. They go and do picnics. We did that. We ate a lot of food in Kore—in Seoul; went down to O—We had—One cool thing was we had to go to Osan [Air Base] every month to get our fuel tested, so I would make sure I got on a couple of those [chuckles]—

TS: Right.

KP: —every now and then, and it was really fun down there. Osan was just like being in the states because they had regular freeways and highways, whereas the further north you get it's just a—no one abides by anything.

TS: There's no rules of the road.

KP: Yeah, you'll see guys with little scooters with stuff just piled up. Amazing. [chuckles]

TS: You had talked earlier—and I can't actually remember if we were talking about this on tape or before we started—about how it was physical exercise, and that kind of thing that you were like, "Oh, I'm not so sure this is for me."

KP: Yes.

TS: But that was hard for you.

KP: It was hard, and the running was very hard for me, and I ended up having to get surgery while I was there.

TS: In Korea?

KP: No, in college.

TS: Oh, in college.

KP: Yeah.

TS: When you were doing the ROTC?

KP: Yeah, I had compartment syndrome on both my legs, which is more common in accident victims.

TS: Oh, really?

KP: Yeah, the sports doctor that did the release on my legs told me it was—I was the first one he had ever done for exercise-induced. It was usually—the blood will—I just didn't have enough room in my compartment there, so it was pushing on my—that bone—I don't know what that's called—that runs up the center of your leg. Very difficult to run. I had—I thought I had shin splints but—

TS: But it was something different?

KP: —as soon as he cut the meat—Yeah, he just opened it up—both legs—sliced down and it was instant release.

TS: Really?

KP: Yeah, I've—and after that I could—I've run fourteens—fourteen minute mile—two miles.

TS: Oh, wow.

KP: Yeah, it was amazing.

TS: A big change.

KP: Yeah.

TS: So after that it became better?

KP: After that I was good, yeah.

TS: Okay. What about with the—

KP: Pushups were good. Yeah, I stated being able to max everything.

TS: Yeah?

KP: Yeah. My problem, though, the entire time I was in the military I was always taped, no matter what, and I—

TS: Taped?

KP: For being—They consider it—if you get on the scale and you're over what they want you to be, you have to get taped, where they take your tape—oh, what do you call it—body fat.

TS: Okay.

KP: Body fat percentage. And that I would pass once they taped me.

TS: Yeah.

KP: They would say, "Okay, well, you passed," but for some reason.

TS: You mean your weight was—

KP: My—Yeah.

TS: You were overweight?

[Speaking Simultaneously]

KP: For my—they do—

TS: Really?

KP: —by my height—

TS: Because you look at you and you're like, seriously? How can that be? [both chuckle]

KP: I was shocked when I first got in there—

TS: Yeah.

KP: —and they were, like, "You have to be taped."

I was, like, "What?" I was supposed to weigh a hundred and thirteen pounds for the height. I'm only five foot so I've never—I think the last time I was a hundred thirteen pounds I was in high school.

TS: Yeah.

KP: And—

TS: Well, that's crazy.

KP: I was about—I would say I was about a hundred twenty-two pounds for the majority of my time in service.

TS: So you've always had to do that—

KP: Always got taped—

TS: —body weight measurement.

KP: Body fat, yeah.

TS: Wow.

KP: Always. The whole time. [chuckles] Yeah.

TS: That's incredible to me.

KP: I hated that part, but.

TS: I can see why. But in Korea are you doing, like, morning—

KP: Every morning.

TS: Okay.

KP: PT, and we would have to leave PT every now and then depending on who—what commander was coming in and out. While I was there and the year I was there we had two battalion commanders and I had two company commanders. There was always an overlap.

TS: Even just in the one year?

KP: Yeah.

TS: Interesting.

KP: Yeah, for me, because I must have come at a weird time. [chuckles] But, yeah, so they would always change. Sometimes we would do—one commander was really big on officer PT twice a week where each of us officers of his lieutenants would do something different.

TS: Have to lead.

KP: Yeah. And then the other commander, I had a female, she was big on company PT, but literally everybody goes through and leads PT as kind of a leadership—

[Speaking Simultaneously]

TS: So everybody got an opportunity.

KP: Even a private.

TS: Oh, really?

KP: Yeah. I thought that was pretty interesting. I actually liked it. I learned a lot from that.

TS: Yeah.

KP: Just—I learned how even privates can step up.

TS: Yes, of course.

KP: Yeah. It's amazing.

TS: They're doing lots of work anyhow.

KP: I'm like—Exactly. That's when I was, like, "Man." Because I guess I was just so prejudiced at seeing a rank—

TS: Right.

KP: —so you just assume things, but then—

TS: Like that they had it more together than people with lower rank.

KP: Yeah.

TS: Well, how many women were actually in your field; like, in where you were working?

KP: Not many in Korea.

TS: No?

KP: No, and on Camp Hovey the further up you go the fewer female—I—myself, there was a Charlie Company medical girl—another lieutenant—and there was one other female somewhere that I know of that were—We were the three officers.

TS: What about for enlisted women?

KP: There were more.

TS: Yeah.

KP: There were more, yes.

TS: Just because the numbers were higher anyhow there.

KP: Yeah. We had a lot of issues.

TS: What kind of issues?

KP: Pregnancy.

TS: Yeah.

KP: So we—Yeah. Plus we had a lot of—What do you call it?—accused rape and such and such like that going on. It was bad. I mean, that year there—

[Speaking Simultaneously]

TS: Why do you put that in parenthesis when you—

KP: I always feel like—I feel bad for the guys sometimes. Some of them I've known, and they're good people and good officers and I just—and some of the women I know and I'm like, "Man. I just—I don't know how much of—" The army always tends to go with, "Oh, my gosh. The girl got raped. We have to either do what we can to—" [chuckles]

Now they have the whole SHARP [U.S. Army Sexual Harassment/Sexual Assault Response & Prevention] program which is more—It's better, but when I was in it was—it was either, "Let's hush this up and fix this," or, "It's all the guy's fault." And I've seen good officers—males—get relieved and—or moved, and sometimes—there have been a few times—several, actually—where I've questioned how much did we—how much did we really come to the bottom of this on both sides of the story.

TS: The truthfulness.

KP: Yeah.

TS: Because I've read, and heard from other women, that sometimes it's a woman that's removed and shamed and things like that that—

KP: That happens too.

TS: Yeah.

KP: Yeah, that happens, too, but—and it does happen. I just—I think I've seen too many times where I am pretty sure that the female had a lot more deceit—trying to just do some sort of payback or harm the male soldier.

TS: Can you give an instance without saying names or anything of something like that?

KP: Yes.

TS: Okay.

KP: Well, we had—In Korea, the first thing I ever saw, it was at—we had the Charlie Company, the medical commander, **Captain Whitten**[Redacting this name]; I don't know why I remember his name. Awesome guy. I was really only around him because I was just a second lieutenant, but we did—I got to go to some of the stand-up meetings. My commander, she was—the female one—she was big on us being present when she did things to try to teach us how to be a company commander, so she always kind of brought us along. And I liked him, I thought he was a good guy, I felt like he was a genuine officer, and towards the end of our tour one of his medical specialists—I don't know who she was—I mean, I know who she was but I don't know her name—but she was pretty well known on Camp Hovey for getting around, I think. And she did—she accused him of rape and he was immediately relieved; relieved for cause, sent out of Korea; I don't even know what happened to him.

TS: Really?

KP: Yeah.

TS: What happened to her?

KP: Nothing. She stayed. She was a specialist, and so I was kind of like, "Man. Women can get away with anything. All we have to do is—" And I always had felt bad for him, and then as time went on I would see it more. I saw in another company later at [Joint Expeditionary Base] Fort Story, Virginia. We had a supply sergeant, staff sergeant male, accused by his—one of his PFCs [private first class] that worked in the supply room with him, of kind of the same thing and he was married. [Male officer previously referred to] wasn't married, he was a single officer, but this time it was a married soldier who had children. The accuser was a single soldier, PFC, probably just fresh out of basic, and that—I didn't know a whole lot, but things I heard, and I was, like, "Man, once again we can just kind of cry 'Wolf!'" [chuckles] And he was, he was gone.

[To "cry wolf" is an expression that means to "raise a false alarm"]

TS: Yeah.

KP: Like that, yeah.

TS: Well, some women who were advocates for rape victims would say that there's really no upside for women to accuse men of rape because of that shaming culture that goes on.

KP: Yeah. True. That's true. And what has happened to me in particular, over my whole time in the army, I am not a supporter, really, of women anymore in the army. I tend to go back and wish that we still had the WAC [Women's Army Corps]. [chuckles] I—Not a lot of women care to join me in this.

TS: Why would you think that would be better?

KP: I—From what—From my experience in Iraq especially, I think women affect readiness. I think just their very presence affect's a male's—our males are—I would see—when we would get by IEDs [improvised explosive devices] and we were—we would set up the way we're—our perimeter and try to get around the vehicles that were hit and call for help and fire, and the males would come towards me or my other females and—"Are you o—"

"No, you need to go to your spot, not—Don't worry about us, we're fine. She's fine; you need to be over there." I don't know how many times I had to do that. And it affected the readiness of us in our perimeter. That was a huge stressor on me over there. I had several females get pregnant over there either from other soldiers or the KBR. All the contractors; there's a lot of contractors over there and it's very—I mean, you're a female and there's not a whole—there still wasn't a whole lot of females so the ratios—

[KBR, Inc. is an American engineering, procurement, and construction company]

TS: And this was in—

KP: Ninety—2003 and [200]4.

TS: Okay.

KP: Yeah. OIF 2.

[OIF 2 was the second group of American troops who served in Operation Iraqi Freedom.]

TS: So how do you think just bringing back the WAC would be better?

[Speaking Simultaneously]

KP: I just—I see all the girls right now going through the [U.S. Army] Ranger School and I think that's cool, and I love it that they can—that they want equal rights, and I'm all—I'm for it in other areas, but I don't think in the military when we need to focus—I think it's very difficult for males to focus with females there. I remember doing a mail drop down to [Forward Operating Base] Kalsu with some of my soldiers for—I had soldiers stationed out there doing water—reverse osmosis for the people in Kalsu, and when we took the mail down we went and ate at the dining facility they had, and it was all marines and a few army. But when I walked into the dining facility, that was one of the most uncomfortable times I've ever had and I remember thinking, "We're supposed to be on the same side?"

But I can feel that these men would hurt me, like, right now; like, they would rape me or—the look—I had one of them—one guy came up to me and told me he could smell my—the soap on me from across the room and it was just—I was, like, "Oh, my gosh. We have to leave tonight. We're not leaving tomorrow." [chuckles]

TS: Did you?

KP: Yeah, we did. I felt unsafe. And that was one for me where I personally felt like I was affecting readiness.

TS: But isn't that sort of like saying that because the men are acting and behaving in this way that the woman has to be removed from the situation, and then that's punishing women—

[Speaking Simultaneously]

KP: Kind of, yes.

TS: —in a way that—

KP: But—

TS: It's just interesting—

KP: It is.

TS: —to talk about it because there's not very many people who really—

KP: Yeah, there's—

TS: —will discuss it in this way, so that's why I'm asking.

KP: I've never met—I've never met anyone else who feels the way I do.

TS: There are, there are.

KP: But.

TS: Definitely.

KP: I feel like—If we go all the way back to war—the beginning of war—it's typically been men fighting and I always—if we think about, "Well, why—when did women come in? Why did women come in?" We came in to help out. We were admin, nurses, and then with equal rights we started doing more, and that was—I think that was really okay while we were still going by the FM7-8 when it was a linear war, and now when I—when my sister and I went to war it's not a linear war anymore.

[The FM 7-8 is a U.S. Army Infantry School field manual that is distributed to active army, army national guard and U.S. Army reserve. It is used as a guide for training and combat operations]

TS: No.

KP: And, I mean, I have been in combat and seen things that are just horrible and I know a lot of other women have, too, and it's—I think—I'm not saying that it's easier for the men,

but I think just from my own anecdotal experiences and the girls that I know, it's much harder for us to reintegrate when we do our tour, when we've actually seen that—the kind of war that's going on now, and I think—I think we would just be better off not sheltered but—because nurses still really aren't sheltered at all, but they're not on the line like I was; out there—not—I wasn't kicking down doors to try to find Saddam [Hussein] or Osama Bin Laden but—

TS: You were exposed to hostile fire.

KP: I was exposed and I—we did get hit a lot. We were easy targets. Those tankers can only go forty-five miles an hour and they—I mean, they knew they were full of fuel so we got hit a lot.

TS: Did you?

KP: Yeah, a lot, and when you're—when you're hit and everyone's scared and you're holding a soldier's head and—crying for his momma and there's shrapnel in people, that's just kind of stuff that—I mean, I wouldn't want my daughters to do that.

TS: Right.

KP: Ever. And we all—All of us come back, you lose your innocence over there—anywhere in war, and, I don't know, I just—I feel like in a lot of cases certain things could have been different had females not been present. Certain mistakes wouldn't have been made or something so it wouldn't have happened.

TS: But you're saying that more along the lines of, like, men being protective.

KP: Yes.

TS: Not necessarily the performance of the women is bad, but the men are protecting—

KP: But even if we come back home—If we were just at Fort Bragg and we were in the motor pool, I mean, guys—when my father was in there really weren't females so they were—they could smoke, they could have calendars of naked women up, the NCO [non-commissioned officers] club at the time even had dancers. [chuckles] And you could drink at lunch. When I came in those calendars had to come down, it was all EO this, and I have seen so many EO complaints because—

TS: EO is Equal Opportunity?

KP: Equal Opportunity, or sexual harassment complaints from female soldiers, and it just got—to me it was ridiculous. I was, like, "Man, what do you guys expect? We're in the army. It's—The guys are going to be foul and nasty and it's kind of a man's world." That was how I felt. I had no problem with it. I really didn't.

TS: But you had grown up in the army.

KP: Yeah. And then—

TS: And your dad's army.

KP: Yeah. [chuckles] And I would see these girls and I would just be, like, "Why are you even here? Is the army just welfare for you because you're—" And instances like that I would see guys get in trouble and written up; Article 15s; "We're going to take away your money. Oh, and we don't care that you have four children," because he made a remark that someone heard that they didn't like and they reported him. It just—to me I was, like, "This is so ridiculous and it's because we're mixing women and men." To me it was easier to just—if we just go back and we let the men do the serious stuff and we just—

[Article 15 of the Uniform Code of Military Justice permits commanders to administratively discipline troops without a court-martial. One of the allowed punishments is loss of pay.]

TS: Support?

KP: Yeah. Support from afar, not on the line. That's how I feel.

TS: But women have gotten so integrated in all these nontraditional fields—in combat support and combat services—that in the way that the wars are fought now that you can't unweave that quilt

KP: No, it'll never—no, it'll never—And I—I'm watching the Ranger School thing with—

TS: Right.

KP: —with two eyes. [chuckles]

TS: Yeah.

KP: I'm very interested in that. I hope—I only—I'm not actually really sure if it's done. I know there were two left the last time I checked, but.

TS: So it's not that women can't do certain things but maybe that they shouldn't—

[Speaking Simultaneously]

KP: Oh, no, I know they can. I know they can, yeah.

TS: —be allowed to work in certain fields because of this cultural difference.

KP: Yeah, my thing is just that they affect readiness.

TS: Interesting.

KP: Yeah. I know those girls can physically do it. They can—They can throw a dude over their shoulder probably and hump [carry] them out to the helicopter easily. I have no doubt about that.

TS: Do you know the story of Leigh Ann Hester?

KP: No.

TS: Well, I'll tell you about it off-tape—

KP: Okay.

TS: —since we're trying to get your story on here, but I'll direct you to that one because it has something to do with some of the things you're talking about where men and women—so.

[Leigh Ann Hester is a U. S. Army National Guard soldier who received the Silver Star award for heroic action during an enemy ambush on a supply convoy in Iraq on 20 March 2005.]

KP: Okay. I'll remind you about that.

TS: Jessica Lynch you know about.

[Jessica Dawn Lynch is a former U.S. Army soldier who was captured by Iraqi forces on 23 March 2003. Her rescue of 1 April 2003 was the first successful rescue of an American prisoner of war since Vietnam, and the first ever of a woman.]

KP: Yes.

TS: But not so much Leigh Ann Hester.

KP: No.

TS: But that's really interesting. So you're talking about a different kind of, like, culture in the army; kind of like a masculine culture that should stay masculine.

KP: Yes.

TS: Okay.

KP: I think they need that.

TS: Yeah

KP: I think they need that.

TS: Well, you sound like you really did enjoy your Korean tour.

KP: Yes.

TS: Even though you just got thrown in it.

KP: Yeah. [chuckles]

TS: Which is still amazing to me.

KP: I didn't want to go. I went kicking and screaming.

TS: Yeah.

KP: But I made it and I loved it.

TS: You did?

KP: I came kicking and screaming back.

TS: Did you? Where did you end up next?

KP: Fort Story, Virginia.

TS: Okay. How was that?

KP: Loved it.

TS: Did you love that one?

KP: Yes.

TS: What's Fort Story?

KP: It's the army's best kept secret.

TS: Apparently; I've never heard of it.

KP: Oh, my goodness. It's fabulous. I don't even know how I got stationed there. [chuckles]

TS: Where's it at?

KP: It's right on Virginia Beach.

TS: Really? Okay.

KP: Yes, right on Virginia Beach.

TS: Nice.

KP: Right off the boardwalk. [chuckles] I found a very, very nice retired navy man who let me rent one of his—he rented his—it was a top and bottom I guess.

TS: A condominium.

KP: Condo. It wouldn't be a duplex, yeah.

TS: Okay.

KP: And he usually rented them to beachgoers, tourists.

TS: Right.

KP: But I want—

TS: You convinced him.

KP: I needed a place to say and I was like, "Please."

TS: "Let me stay on the beach."

KP: Yeah, and he did.

TS: Wow.

KP: He let me rent it and I was right on the beach.

TS: You were there for about three years?

KP: Must have been.

TS: Something like that.

KP: Yeah. All the way until—I made [was promoted to] captain there.

TS: Oh, did you? Okay.

KP: Yeah. Yeah, I did, and right after I made captain I went to Schofield Barracks, Hawaii.

TS: Tell me a typical day, besides being on the beach apparently.

KP: [chuckles]

TS: Or you can throw that in there.

KP: Once I got there they realized I had done POL—petroleum.

TS: Okay.

KP: So they were, like, "You can take the petroleum platoon."
I was, like, "Great." I kind of wanted—I wanted a change.

TS: Right, sure.

KP: I wanted anything else but POL, but they were like, "No, you know JP-8 [jet propellant fuel]. You're the JP-8 girl." [chuckles]

TS: What's JP-8?

KP: That's the type of fuel. It's a type, yeah.

TS: Oh, okay. Got it. So that's it. You signed your résumé, now you're stuck with it.

KP: Forever.

TS: Okay.

KP: I'm forever bulk fuel. And so, I took that platoon. I was in the 19th Quartermaster Company. And I'm still friends with Dennis Bowers; he was my company commander; love him to death. And he was just a young twenty-six year old bachelor.

TS: Yeah.

KP: Just a young guy [chuckles], and we—the lieutenants—we were really tight-knit.

TS: Yeah.

KP: Yeah. We had a water platoon, the petroleum platoon—what else did we have?—the headquarters platoon. There was one more I'm forgetting. I just can't think of what it was.

TS: That's okay. You can edit.

KP: Yeah.

TS: Well, how did you find this transition back from Korea to the United States? How was that transition for you, because you didn't seem like you had that much of a culture shock going to Korea.

KP: It was culture shock coming back.

TS: Yeah.

KP: All of a sudden it was so loud and noisy. I think I could tune out because I didn't understand anything. [chuckles] So I came back here and it drove me crazy for quite a while; months.

TS: Yeah, it took you a while—

KP: Yeah.

TS: —to get back acclimated—

KP: Yes.

TS: —to that buzz of—

KP: Yes.

TS: —American society.

KP: [chuckles] Yes. The food even. It just didn't taste good to me; it took me a while. Yeah.

TS: Always looking for that good Korean restaurant.

KP: Yeah, but then I—on Fort Story I was able to just eat seafood.

TS: Oh, yeah, right. It was right at the beach.

KP: Oh, yeah, it was great. I found my favorite spots, yeah.

TS: Well, tell me about a typical day.

KP: Okay. A typical day we would show up to formation, do PT, everybody go home, shower, come back. It was very laid back at Fort Story. There really wasn't a mission so we did a lot of training. The navy guys—The [U.S] Navy SEALs [Sea, Air, and Land Team] do—they have a training something there, and so what we would do is we'd do all our focusing on the—that one training mission with them that once a year and everything would lead up to that, and all the preparations—we drew it out and made it ridiculous.

TS: Made it a big thing, right?

KP: It was a huge dog and pony show.

[A "dog and pony show" is an expression that means an over-staged event.]

TS: Oh, awesome.

KP: Yeah, because it was on the beach, and it would be on the beach. It was cool. We did fuel on the beach and water.

TS: So as close as you get to the water, as often as possible, was the ideal setting for this.

KP: Yeah, we camped out on the beach all the time and it was very laid back. There really wasn't a mission so—

TS: Well, then 9/11 happened.

KP: Then 9/11 hit.

[The September 11 attacks, or 9/11, were a series of four coordinated terrorist attacks by the Islamic terrorist group al Qaeda on the United States on the morning of 11 September 2001. The attacks killed 2,996 people, and injured over 6,000 others.]

TS: And so, do you remember that day and—

KP: Yeah.

TS: —what happened after.

KP: After that we were locked down and that was—after that everything changed.

TS: Well, tell me about that day.

KP: That day—

TS: Do you remember hearing about it?

KP: Yes, I was standing—we were actually outside and someone came out. It was early in the morning, 8:30, 8:45, and someone came outside and was, like, "Come into the colonel's office," and he had a TV, and we all just sat there and watched it. I tried to call my folks and wake them up in Hawaii but I couldn't get through, and really that's all we did all day long; that whole day; everything stopped. A few week—Not even a few weeks later we were told we were going to go to Agami, Egypt, and then everything—all the preparations for that started.

TS: So this was in support of the Afghanistan War?

KP: No, it was—What we did was we were part of a show of force to the world.

TS: Okay.

KP: We went out there and—we didn't do it because we didn't have the equip—we were just in support of the badass people who were putting out all their huge equipment and they were doing huge just show of force of—this is what we Americans have and we can get you back if you do this to us. And they set up all kinds of—I wasn't even privy to what all they did.

TS: So a lot of places though out the Mid [Middle] East, is that where the show of force was?

KP: Yes

TS: Okay.

KP: And we were the station—

[Speaking Simultaneously]

TS: I don't think I've actually heard it put that way before.

KP: If you look up—I forget the name of the operation. I'll think of it.

TS: Okay.

KP: But my job there—I got to change jobs.

TS: Oh, you did?

KP: I was now the food service officer.

TS: Okay, and how was that?

KP: It was very stressful.

TS: Oh, yeah.

KP: Yes.

TS: And this was something new too.

KP: Yeah, it was new. I was in charge of all the food—I had to order it—and I never knew the head counts because—

TS: Coming and going.

KP: —we had Italian soldiers, English soldiers, and our soldiers, and I met so many different people—Germans—just coming in and out all the time, and people would constantly be angry with me because we didn't have—hot sauce was a huge commodity. Hot sauce, lettuce, anything fresh; fruits, fresh, very difficult for me to keep.

TS: To get anything.

KP: Yeah.

TS: Because it's not going to last very long.

KP: Yeah.

TS: When did you go over, then, to the port of Agami?

KP: I need to go back and look because I can't—

TS: A few months after?

KP: Yeah.

TS: Something like that. Before the end of the year obviously.

KP: Yeah, and we were there for—I have pictures of me there.

TS: Okay.

KP: Yeah, I'll give them to you. I don't know how long we were there.

TS: That's okay.

KP: Three or four months maybe?

TS: Right.

KP: Not too long.

TS: Yeah.

KP: It was less than six months.

TS: Okay.

KP: But more than three, so it was somewhere in the middle there.

TS: So you did that in Egypt.

KP: Yes.

TS: Was there anything else you want to add about that tour that was, like, a highlight or lowlight?

KP: One—Well, we were on lockdown. Very—Every day was like *Groundhog Day*. I just—All I did—I had my little mission and I stayed in my little part of Agami and made sure the best I could that food was there. But the end, they actually allowed us to go on an MWR [morale, welfare, and recreation] tour to the pyramids.

[*Groundhog Day* is a 1993 American comedy film starring Bill Murray, about a TV weatherman who finds himself in a time loop, repeating the same day again and again.]

TS: Oh, how was that?

KP: Very cool, very cool. That's probably the coolest thing I've ever seen in my life.

TS: Really?

KP: Yeah, was to stand there and actually see them. It was really neat.

TS: Yeah, you do like to travel.

KP: I was so happy. I was, like, "This just made it all worth it." [both chuckle]

TS: Was there anything besides getting yelled at all the time that was especially hard about what you were doing?

KP: No, it was just that I was very stressed out. I was a first lieutenant and I really didn't know what I was doing and I didn't have a great NCO.

TS: A lot of responsibility, not much authority.

KP: Yeah.

TS: Right in the middle of—

KP: It was—People were just expecting so much. [chuckles] It was, like, "There's only so much I can do."

TS: When you came back to Fort Story, did you notice that anything about the army, in the corps you were in, did anything change about—

KP: Yes.

TS: What changed?

KP: Definitely the way the post was run. You couldn't just drive in anymore after that. It was, like, THREATCON ALPHA, and that was when we had to start showing IDs, traffic would back up. It made getting to work—"Grrrr." Just—You'd start off the day already, "Grrrr." [both chuckle] Had to wait in line.

[The U.S. military has four threat levels above "normal" for military installations. THREATCON ALPHA is the lowest level. It applies when there is a small and general threat of possible terrorist activity against personnel and facilities. THREATCON was renamed FPCON, or Force Protection Condition, in June 2001.]

TS: You'd be a little cranky.

KP: Yeah, and you'd have to leave even earlier to beat everybody in. What else changed? Besides just tightening up our shop[?] group, everywhere I guess. Just more security. Everything was secure, you weren't really—They even didn't want us so much to—when we were out in the civilian world, to look like we were army-affiliated—military-affiliated—too much.

TS: Not to wear your uniform?

KP: Yeah.

TS: You were in Virginia so the Pentagon really isn't that far from where you were.

KP: Yeah.

TS: Where that got hit too.

KP: Yeah.

TS: So you're working here and you're living on the beach and you got a deployment in, and then you go back to—Now, your folks are still living in Hawaii when you get—

KP: Yes.

TS: —your assignment back to Hawaii? Well, tell me about that assignment.

KP: So really I wasn't supposed to get that assignment. Gosh, I don't remember where they were going to send me. My father, bless his heart, pulled strings.

TS: Did he?

KP: Yes [chuckles], he did, I'll admit it. He had a—One of the colonels that he was a sergeant major for was now a general and—

TS: At the barrack—

KP: He was something big—some general of something—in Hawaii, and he got me there. Yeah, I don't know what they had to do or what promises my dad had to make.

TS: But it worked.

KP: But it did and they got me to Hawaii. And it was awesome; my family was there, all my mom's family is still there so.

TS: Was your sister in the nursing corps yet?

KP: She was—Oh, yeah.

TS: Okay.

KP: And she was—I think she was stationed either at Fort Lewis, Washington, or San Antonio.

TS: Okay.

KP: Yeah, at the time.

TS: Now, what field are you in in Hawaii?

KP: I got to Hawaii, everything changed then. I was a captain now.

TS: Okay.

KP: So they—The needs of that unit I got sent to, the corps support group, they made me an S-1 for the brigade, for the—Yeah, it was at the brigade level, for the brigade commander.

TS: What does the S-1 stand for?

KP: Admin [Administration]. So all it was, was new people coming in, who are the people—how many slots do we need coming out, all of the colonel's paperwork, signatures. I worked straight for the colonel.

TS: Yeah.

KP: It was very stressful, but awesome, too, and I—

TS: Was it like a 9:00 [a.m.] to 5:00 [p.m.] kind of job? Well, I don't mean those hours specifically.

KP: Yeah.

TS: I mean, like, set hours.

KP: It could be. It depended on what he had going on. Sometimes it was Saturdays even. It depended.

TS: Did you enjoy the job?

KP: I did.

TS: Did you?

KP: I did, and the colonel was great. And he actually set me up for a company command in the brigade, which was awesome.

TS: What did you do there?

KP: Once I left him I took company command and as a company commander I went to Iraq.

TS: Oh, okay, but you're still assigned to Schofield Barracks?

KP: Yes, yes.

TS: Okay, so you got a new job as a company commander within—

KP: Yeah, I was S-1 for Colonel McKenna[?] for probably—I don't even think a year before he made me—he put me in that command slot.

TS: Did you want that?

KP: He gave me the option of two commands. He wanted me to stay with him up in the HH—he wanted me to take HHC, and I didn't. I was, like, "Sir, it's just so much—there's no real soldiers. There's no real mission. I don't want it."

TS: What's HHC?

KP: Headquarters and Headquarters Company.

TS: Okay, but you started out in Korea, so you're, like, "Really?"

KP: [chuckles] Yeah. I wanted to get back down—

TS: With the troops?

KP: —with soldiers.

TS: Okay.

KP: And he was, like, "Alright, alright." So he gave me my company, and within three months of me taking command I got orders to deploy to Iraq.

TS: Okay, and that's in 2003.

KP: Yes.

TS: What kind of company was it? What were you in charge of?

KP: It was—We had riggers, we had a water platoon, fuel, maintenance, and I also had a platoon—an SSA [Supply Support Activity] which was—they ran a warehouse of just all the classes of supply. That was—That became a huge nightmare for me, deployed, but—

TS: This is like Quartermaster Corps?

KP: Yeah.

TS: So you got a company within the Quartermaster of these other subsets within the—Okay.

KP: Yeah, and you have—I literally had everything except mortuary affairs and bath and laundry.

TS: Really?

KP: Yeah, everything else, you name it, I had it.

TS: So what part of 2003—Did you go before the war started in Iraq or after?

KP: It was—When we got there it turned into 2004.

TS: Okay, so at the end of 2003.

KP: OF2, yeah.

TS: Okay. So the war had already started in March of 2003, okay.

KP: Yes, yes. When we crossed over—what happens is when you get to Iraq—at least for me—when we got there we were put into strict training. We met some really cool Delta Force guys who were our trainers for however long it took us, till they blessed off on us to be able to cross the border [Camp] Navistar [Kuwait] and go into Iraq.

TS: Okay.

KP: And it took us a while; it took us almost three weeks, which—for us—I mean, compared to the others we were there longer.

TS: Yeah.

KP: And I didn't think that was enough training. I was like, "I don't think we're ready."
[chuckles]

[Speaking Simultaneously]

TS: You just wanted to make it perfect, right?

KP: Yeah, and I was just—

TS: Were you nervous about being in charge of this company?

KP: Yeah.

TS: What were you most concerned about?

KP: A Jessica Lynch-type thing happening.

TS: Because that had happened already.

KP: Yeah, I was very nervous. And just in my own ability, just to—I was, like, "Oh, my gosh, I have a hundred and forty-eight pezos [soldiers?] here looking up to me to take us from here all the way up to [Camp] Taji [Iraq]. [chuckles] And the maps weren't great and it was just—I tried to do what I could. One of the things I did was I got ahold of some people that were going who—I asked them to be our escorts and they said "Yes."

So I had told my whole company, "We're good. We're not going to get lost. We have escorts who have already come and gone. They know exactly where we have to go."

TS: You were really worried about getting lost.

KP: Yeah. I was really worried.

TS: Because that's what happened with Jessica Lynch.

KP: Yeah.

TS: Okay.

KP: I was so worried about that, and my land nav [navigation] isn't the best; it never has been. So the day came, we were all lined up to leave, we had been blessed off to go, and the escorts came minutes before we were leaving. Literally horrible.

TS: You probably had a lot of anxiety for a while.

KP: And they said, "We can't escort you."

TS: Oh. Oh, really?

KP: Yeah.

TS: Oh, my goodness.

KP: Because they were talking about it and they—we had all the fuelers and they knew we were going to be easy targets, and targets in general, and they—and slow. They said, "You guys are slow. You have a lot of moving pieces of equipment in your convoy. We didn't realize how big your convoy was going to be." And so, they—

TS: Backed out?

KP: —they left without us, yeah. And I just—I just stood there. I had to tell my company, "We're doing it. I can do this. You've just got to trust me." And they were nervous, they were all over the radio, and I finally had to, "Stop. No one else talk." The whole time we took one bad turn where we had to all turn around. It was horrible. [chuckles] I was so worried about—We didn't know, so we thought everything was going to be an IED.

TS: Right.

KP: And we were still safe when we had to turn but we were scared. And I actually asked all my soldiers to just kind of dehydrate themselves. I was like, "We have three days. We have to get there. We have three days to get there and we're going to do it and we're going to stop for the least amount of time we have to. We will use the bathroom and eat and do that when we—at our marked stops."

TS: But no stopping in between; we're just going.

KP: Yeah, I was like, "We are not stopping."

TS: So how was that first trip?

KP: It was okay. It was okay, it was just very scary, and the—not cool thing—but the thing that gave me peace of mind—that gives me piece of mind now more was—because I didn't know it was going to change—but the rules of engagement when I was there—we were allowed to still do warning shots. Everyone had ammo; it was the wild, wild, west; there was no accountability of ammo [unclear].

TS: You mean within your company?

KP: With—Anywhere.

TS: Oh, really. Okay.

KP: Everywhere. I think we could have shot each other and no one would know. [chuckles] I mean, it was crazy. And so, warning shots were good. My—Things we had learned were when you go under bridges switch lanes when you come out because they try to—for the gun trucks they try to put wires down to dehit—decapitate them. We would always—I told them, "If you see people on the bridges do warning shots. Don't shoot them, but do warning shots." And while—halfway through our time in Iraq, the rules of engagement changed and we weren't allowed to do it anymore.

TS: No?

KP: And it was scary for us because we depended on warning shots. It just, I guess, gave us peace of mind.

TS: Right.

KP: So what we did was, I had my soldiers freeze a bottle of water and we would throw it. We threw bottles of frozen water at cars to get them to move because we—I wanted us to always be in the center lane.

TS: I see.

KP: Not on the sides because that's where the IEDs are. If we push the Iraqis to the sides, they normally won't set the IEDs off on their own.

TS: Because they'll be setting off other people too. So the bottles of water were just, like—they didn't know what was in them and so they just—

KP: Yeah, they would move. Oh, yeah.

TS: Got it.

KP: Yeah.

TS: Wow.

KP: [chuckles]

TS: But you had some difficult time there too.

KP: Yeah, I did.

TS: Do you want to talk about any of those?

KP: Yeah, I—

TS: Let me actually pause for one second.

[Recording Paused]

[Extraneous Conversation Redacted]

KP: What was I going to say? My initial problem was, when I was given my orders—Normally when you're given orders your whole battalion will go; everyone's getting deployed. They only needed my company, so I had to take me and my company from Hawaii to Iraq without any of my leadership. None—My colonel—

TS: You're inserted into another battalion?

KP: I fell under a National Guard unit from Iowa.

TS: Okay.

KP: And for me, I just had—as soon as I met them I was like, "These people are not in the real army. They don't know what they're talking about. And I—my mouth did tend to get me in trouble quite a bit there because I ju—and that battalion from Iowa, we fell under another unit that was active duty from Fort Lewis, and no one had any—we didn't know each other.

[Speaking Simultaneously]

TS: There was not continuity with how you were trained—

KP: There was none.

TS: —how you worked; all that.

KP: Yeah, it was so, so hard for me. And, I mean, there were days when my tongue would be bleeding from biting it, just, "Ugh."

TS: What kind of things frustrated you the most about it?

KP: Things—I was still trying to—I was still trying to help my soldiers get promoted—promotion points—and things that they needed were school. They needed to still be able to concentrate on college. They still needed to get points for driver's training, which I didn't see a problem doing. I was like, "They're driving all the time;" these are promotion points.

And my battalion commander from the National Guard, he just—He was like, "We're in war. We don't have time for this."

I was like, "Sir, we're in the real army and these guys still need to get promoted," and stuff like that where him and I—

TS: You were butting heads?

["Butting heads" is an expression that means you're having a conflict with another person]

KP: Constantly; constantly, yeah.

TS: Did you ever get any of the way that you wanted it to be for your soldiers?

KP: I did. I did, yeah.

TS: But probably paid a price for it.

KP: I did. Yeah, I just—He—Yeah, he did not like me and I didn't care for him. It was a very hard year.

TS: Yeah.

KP: But—So what I did was I just—I came to his meetings, I would brief him on everything that was going—usually it was maintenance things like parts—"I can't get my parts"—and what I ended up doing was I took two of my soldiers and I sent them down to—not Qatar. What was the name of that? Whatever it was called—Doha [Qatar]—and I was like, "You go there and you make sure my parts come to me," because people were stealing them down there when they came in.

TS: Oh, okay.

KP: Because it was just the wild, wild West and I couldn't fix anything. I mean, I've done bad things. I've stolen parts from other units in the middle of the night. At the time, we were—We didn't have sheet metal yet—it was a—kind of a new thing—so we were using sandbags, which made us even heavier. So I actually—We, kind of, might have, stole some sheet metal from a warehouse that we found and my maintenance guys—what do you call it? What's that called where they put it on there with fire—they—

TS: Welding?

KP: Welding. They welded it on.

TS: Oh, yeah.

KP: And we had—

TS: So you kind of like had the M.A.S.H. [Mobile Army Surgical Hospital] units where you had Radar going and ta—getting things.

[Corporal Walter "Radar" O'Reilly was the company clerk in the television series *M*A*S*H*.]

KP: Yeah.

TS: That's kind of what you were doing.

KP: We acquired.

TS: [chuckles]

KP: But I had stuff stolen from me. Someone stole a water buffalo [portable water tank]. A forklift; I had a 4K forklift stolen. So what I did was I stole one back. [chuckles] I mean, it was—and we just scratched off serial numbers; we did what we could.

TS: Yeah. That's interesting; that's very interesting.

KP: I stole a vehicle from the 11th ACR [Armored Cavalry Regiment].

TS: Yeah.

KP: They came looking for it but we had already cannibalized it for the parts we needed.

TS: So they couldn't tell—

KP: Nope.

TS: —that it was their—"I don't know what you're talking about."

KP: Yeah, I did. I was like, "You can look. You can look."

TS: Good luck.

KP: They're like, "Look, we're missing a thing.
I'm like, "Oh, you can look. Oh, that's horrible."

TS: But that just went on all the time with everybody.

KP: Yeah, everybody. And it's sad that everybody was doing it, and there were—there are people who went to [United States Penitentiary] Leavenworth [Kansas] for stuff like that—

TS: Sure.

KP: —that just somehow got—

[Speaking Simultaneously]

TS: But you're using it for your unit. It's not like you're taking it and trying to bring it back with you.

KP: Yeah. No, there were people trying to bring stuff back but—yeah.

TS: Wow, okay.

KP: [chuckles]

TS: Tell me about some of the harder convoys and things that you had to do, if you want to.

KP: They were all—They were all hard. The ones where we got hit were obviously the hardest. I constantly had parents, grandparents—just family members—who would email me, and I used to do a—like a newsletter every month and send it to all—everyone who had signed up for my email, and especially moms, and—"Take care of little Johnny please. He's my only baby," and my biggest fear was having to lose a soldier. Thankfully I never lost one. I lost them to things like shrapnel that we just—because they were on top of the gun trucks and I would lose them that way, as far as going to Landstuhl [Regional Medical Center in Germany] and then back home and not coming back to us, but they were alive.

TS: There'd be casualties but—

KP: Yes.

TS: —not any of them killed. Okay.

KP: Yeah, I didn't lo—I lost soldiers upon redeployment. That was prob—reintegrating—I hate the reintegration process. Several of my soldiers, they just failed to reintegrate and either committed suicide, or I had one who—not sure if it was suicide or what, but he had bought a new—not a vehicle—a motorcycle and just was going too fast in a fit of rage and died. And so—And I tend to blame all of that on the deployment because they weren't like that, and their families made sure they let us know, "Little Timmy and Johnny weren't like this before they left with you."

TS: Right.

KP: And that's been very difficult.

TS: So the issue of, like, the post-traumatic stress is real, of course.

KP: Yeah.

TS: So you've seen it in your soldiers, but how about for yourself? I mean, have you—

KP: Oh, yeah.

TS: Yeah.

KP: I—And I denied it, because for me, I knew I needed help over in Iraq. I was—My anxiety levels were off the chart. But for an officer to go get seen is very mu—is looked down upon and—"You're weak and you can't lead us." And so, I didn't—I didn't do anything until I was out of the army.

TS: Really?

KP: Yes. I started—

[Speaking Simultaneously]

TS: Not even when you came back from your deployment?

KP: No, no. I just—It was a no-no in my book. Everyone else I saw that did do it, they were immediately ostracized and—

TS: By who?

KP: Ju—Everyone else—Everyone who—for some reason it was just the thing, like, "Oh, he's being seen [by a mental health professional]. He can't handle it."

TS: So it's an issue of, like, being weak.

KP: Yeah.

TS: Rather than not just toughing it out.

KP: Yes, and that was acceptable behavior, which is so unfortunate, because now I know better. I started—I got pregnant, had my daughter and got out while I was pregnant.

TS: Okay. Was that your first daughter?

KP: Yes.

TS: '02[?]-Okay.

KP: So she was born—I started terminal leave while she was born, or maybe even a few days before, and she must have been—she was still in a stroller at—we were at Fort Bragg and I went to the VA [Veterans Administration] and I knew because I was having postpartum depression on top of all that and I was suicidal. I was very suicidal.

TS: Were you?

KP: Yeah, and I mean, I've been to the point where some women when they kill their baby and then they kill themselves; that's the point I was pretty much at.

TS: You knew you had to do something.

KP: I knew.

TS: Did you talk to anybody about it before that? I mean, non-medical.

KP: My husband at the time. I had gotten married. Yeah, and he was like, "Yeah, you're bipolar, or something's wrong. Please—" He was ask—He had been asking me to go.

TS: To go see someone.

KP: Yeah, and I was like, "I don't need—I don't even know—some psychologist, they're not—they can't help me," and I was, like, "What are they going to do?"

TS: Right.

KP: Snap, you're all better? That was my feeling. And I finally went to the VA in Fayetteville and I was seen there from 2007 to 2011.

TS: Was it helpful?

KP: Yes.

TS: Was it?

KP: It saved my life.

TS: Would you recommend it to other soldiers returning?

KP: Yes, yes. I think it should be mandatory for all of us. Yes, because I don't like it when they just commit suicide and—It's horrible.

TS: Right. You're helpless to do anything.

KP: We lose twenty-two soldiers—that's a day; twenty-two a day. Yeah. So sad. It just breaks my heart that they can make it over there and then they come back here and it's just—and that's why when I hear soldiers say that they would rather be over there or they want to go back, I am like, "You should go back," because I know that that's where—

TS: They'll be safer.

KP: Yeah. They're happy, they're okay, they're—they can deal with the stress. For some reason that's—we get that—

TS: There's a mindset.

KP: Yes.

TS: Well, some of the Iraq and Afghanistan war veterans that I have talked to have mentioned about when they come into, like, the school environment that you're in now, some say the Mickey Mouse stuff [slang for insignificant or unimportant] that goes on is just so frustrating for them, as if you have that same sort of thing about, like, intolerance, I guess, [both chuckle] or certain behaviors and maybe—Why don't you describe what it's like for you instead of me saying what other people have said?

KP: You mean, like, after reintegration here? Yes.

TS: Yeah.

KP: Oh, yeah. I—Every year around Veteran's Day or Memorial Day you can go into a Harris Teeter or a Walmart and you'll stand by the hotdogs and you'll hear people arguing about—"Oh, they're out of Nathan['s Famous Hotdogs]. What are we going to do?" And it's just—everything is—"There's no watermelons." And it's just so sad that they don't have what they need.

And I'll stand there and just—I used to get very mu—really enraged because I was like, "Man, you don't even know;" like, "What is today to you?"

TS: Right. Do you just keep that all inside?

KP: Yeah.

TS: You don't actually, like, say it out loud?

KP: Yeah, no, I've never said anything. [both chuckle] But I've wanted to.

TS: Yeah.

KP: I've given some dirty looks, just kind of like, "Really?" But—

TS: This is so insignificant—

KP: Yeah.

[Speaking Simultaneously]

TS: —to what's happening over with the soldiers.

KP: You're so complacent—

TS: Right.

KP: —that to me, the people, the civilians, they just—they don't really totally get it or appreciate what's going on and—

TS: What would you like to say to them, those people who don't appreciate or understand what's going on?

KP: "Well, you know, the soldiers that are currently deployed, they don't have Nathan's Hotdogs right now." [chuckles]

TS: Right.

KP: "They're not even getting to enjoy this weekend. They're actually out pulling missions and trying to clear land mines and IEDs and fight for your freedom so that you can have that hotdog."

TS: Yeah.

KP: Just kind of be like, "Hello? Think about what today is."

TS: It's become—

KP: It's just a holiday. "Oh, four day weekend. We're going to go to the beach and—" Yeah. And for me, people—I always see people enjoying it and I never do. I'm always sad.

TS: Things like Memorial Day and Veteran's Day?

KP: Yeah.

TS: Yeah. Well, is there any more you'd like to talk about with your Iraq experience and the deployment?

KP: No, I guess that pretty much covers it. I mean, we definitely got our missions done.

TS: Okay.

KP: Never lost soldiers while deployed. Lost a lot of equipment though. [laughs]

TS: That's an amazing story.

KP: We did do some—We did do some bad things as far as the stealing and the acquiring and—but, I mean, overall—I'm still really good friends, even on Facebook, with a lot of my soldiers.

TS: Are you?

KP: Yeah. We're very close now.

TS: Yeah. It's a certain kind of bonding that you—

KP: Yeah, and we probably always will be. Yeah.

TS: —will never go through with anybody else again. Well, when you got back then, you were a little bit longer in Hawaii and then you moved to a new station?

KP: I got married, yes. I—

TS: Oh, you got married, okay.

KP: I came back. Yeah, somehow. [laughs]

TS: You met somebody?

KP: There—When I redeployed—I had known—We were—We were just all friends.

TS: Okay.

KP: Back when I was an S-1 I met Mike.

TS: Okay.

KP: And he was a battalion S-1 and I was the brigade [S-1]. So all the battalion 1's and I, we just hung out, it was just the thing, and he just kept in contact with me while I was commander. He kind of helped me while I had three months to get ready to go.

TS: Right.

KP: And when I came—and he kept in contact with me the whole time I was gone. He was kind of the person I could bitch [slang for complain] to.

TS: Okay.

KP: And complain, yeah. And I really didn't think too much about—I liked him, but when I redeployed he was really there for me, and it didn't take—I—within months of being redeployed we went to the justice of the peace—

TS: Yeah.

KP: —and got married. Yeah, and that was it. [chuckles] Yeah.

TS: That's in Hawaii?

KP: And then we did a bigger wedding for my folks, because my mother was like, "Oh."

TS: Yeah, I'm sure. [chuckles]

KP: Small little Japanese lady about to die.

TS: No kidding.

KP: So we did it. We had a nice wedding at the Hale Koa [Hotel]. It was nice. And then he came down orders for Fort Irwin [National Training Center], California.

TS: Okay.

KP: We went there and he was a commander there for a real short—because he ended up—He was an engineer—combat engineer, and while he was doing that Fort Bragg asked him to come do civil affairs because he speaks French and they needed a French speaker, so he gave up that and we moved out here.

TS: Oh, he gave that up—

KP: Yeah.

TS: —just so you could have a joint assignment?

KP: Yes. And he left engineers completely. He's not even an engineer anymore. He's now a civil affairs officer, and he—he wor—he's still stationed at Bragg and he mainly works—when they deploy they go to Africa and he works for the embassies as an almost translator between the villages who speak French and the embassies, and the Special Ops guys.

TS: Interesting.

KP: Yeah, so he doesn't even wear a uniform when he—he tries to blend in as a civilian.

TS: What did you do at Fort Irwin?

KP: I was a SPO; I was a support operations officer. Actually, they made me S-1 again. That was the first thing I did.

TS: Okay.

KP: I was like, "Ugh!" And I did that for six months, and then I guess I got pregnant somewhere in there, and then I went over to SPO, because S-1—I think—I don't know why. Or maybe the SPO left. I can't remember what happened, but for some reason, I gave up S-1. I was tired of that anyway.

TS: Yeah.

KP: Yeah, I was much happier over in the SPO—support office.

TS: Why? What was different about it?

KP: I was right there in the colonel's office in the headquarters building, where SPO was across the street and they had their own little hooch [slang for building] and it was—it just—you could breathe.

TS: Yeah. Okay.

KP: I could be pregnant. [both chuckle] And itchy and everything. And grumpy and—

TS: Oh, I see.

KP: Yeah.

TS: So you had some—Yeah—

KP: Yeah.

TS: —autonomy.

KP: Yes.

TS: Where you didn't really have that, and you're not under the microscope every second. I see.

KP: Yeah.

TS: Okay. You, at some point, decided, though, you wanted to get out?

KP: Yes, when I—the more I got pregnant the more I realized I was like, "Man, this little baby." We were thinking about getting a nanny. We didn't know what we were really going to do.

TS: Right.

KP: Because I was coming up for major.

TS: Okay.

KP: And we were like, "Money, money, money."

TS: Right.

KP: [chuckles] But the more I got pregnant I was like, "Man, I just want to be with this little baby. I don't want to go back to work." I was like, "I don't think I can go back to work." I was dead set on breast-feeding. I was like, "I'm going to be the best mom ever." [chuckles] So I made the decision. I prayed about it and talked to the colonel about it. His wife, Kay[?], was a stay-at-home mom for their children, and I talked to her and I was like, "Man, I'm not going back[?]."

TS: Yeah.

KP: I could take the pay cut. We could make it work.

TS: Right.

KP: And so, I resigned my commission, and I had done my four years and four years of—that eight years I actually owed.

TS: So you totally laid it out and—

KP: Yes. I was done. I—They tried to get me to stay but I was like, "No. I want out."

TS: Yeah.

KP: So I got out, had Jackie, became a house—a homemaker.

TS: Yeah.

KP: And we got—we got sent here.

TS: To Fort Bragg?

KP: Yeah, and our relationship kind of went downhill. A lot of it was my PTSD [post-traumatic stress disorder], I think.

TS: Right.

KP: My post-partum depression was huge. And he started—He had to go to schools and all kinds of other silly stuff that—It was a lot of pressure on him and we just—

TS: So it just didn't work out.

KP: Yeah. It's a very amicable divorce. We're good. He's actually driving up here tonight and we're going to go to the [Greensboro] Grasshopper [baseball team] game because—

TS: Oh, are you? Okay.

KP: —our girls go—the girls go to Our Lady of Grace and it's—

TS: Would you have just a few more minutes because we're—I know we're at the end of your time.

KP: Yeah.

TS: But you have actually answered a lot of the questions I have.

KP: Oh, good. Good.

TS: But there's a couple general things. We talked about things that women maybe shouldn't do in the—

KP: Yes.

TS: And issues of sexual harassment. Well, actually, we talked more about rape, but what about, like, harassment?

KP: See and that—yeah, that's the other thing. I just feel like—I feel like there's too much pressure on sexual harassment, on the men. I don't think they should have to be that locked down and you can't say any—no little remarks, no nothing.

TS: Yes.

KP: I'm, like, "Man, that's just not fair to them." And if—And when you think "army" you kind of—you don't think, "Oh, we're all in suits and proper language and gestures and—" The army is much more crass, I guess, to me.

TS: But is there something beyond the pale even for, like, an army guy to say to a woman that you think is like, "Okay, that's too much."

KP: Yeah, I think there should be something there.

TS: Okay.

KP: But I think that even with this whole SHARP [Sexual Harassment/Assault Response & Prevention] thing, I think it's a little overboard from my—in my opinion.

TS: Right.

KP: In my humble opinion. [chuckles] I feel for the guys because I feel like they're already being made out to be the bad guy, or they're already prosecuted, and I feel like a lot of times the girls aren't always so innocent.

TS: Okay.

KP: That's just my opinion.

TS: How you feel about it.

KP: Yeah.

TS: Sure. And so, how do you feel, like, in general, your relationships were with both your superiors and your peers and the people that you were supervising?

KP: Good, for the most part, yeah.

TS: Except for those incidents you talked about.

KP: Except—Yeah, except when I had to fall under [chuckles] someone I didn't know.

TS: Right.

KP: And a lot of that was even me. I was being bull-headed and stubborn and not user-friendly, I—but, yeah, I think for the most part I got along with everyone.

TS: Yeah.

KP: Yeah, we—

TS: Did you have any good mentors or did you mentor anyone?

KP: I did. I did. I—My—Colonel McKenna—not McKenna—Matlock. Patricia Matlock. I have lost contact with her, but she was probably the biggest—She made the most impact on me.

TS: Where was she at?

KP: Schofield Barracks, Hawaii.

TS: Okay.

KP: I worked—She was the XO [executive officer] for the brigade and I became the S-1. So she used to bang on her wall—we were just a wall apart—when she wanted me. [laughs]

TS: Oh. That's it. That was her "Come here."

KP: Yeah.

TS: Got it.

KP: And she was a fireball and she—no one liked her but, man, I loved her.

TS: Why didn't they like her?

KP: Because she was a hardass. She expected—I mean, she—when she wanted something done and—you better do it. [chuckles]

["Hardass" is slang for a person who follows rules and regulations meticulously and enforces them without exceptions.]

TS: Yeah.

KP: And don't come in—I learned—from her I learned, "When there's a problem don't just come to me with a problem, you need to also come to me with two or three courses of action that's going to fix this problem because I am not the fixer." [laughs] And she taught me that and I took that on with me into company command when I did take it.

TS: That's a great lesson.

KP: Yeah. And, I mean—And she drilled that on me because I used to be like, "Oh, my God, the world is falling apart, ma'am."

And she'd be like, "Get out of my office and come back when you have three courses of action." And I was just—I've never been talked to like that.

TS: Yeah. Did it throw you back at first?

KP: Yeah. I was like, "Man, she's a B [bitch]." I ha—I hated her. I was like, "Oh, I have to stay up here with this witch," And I was not ha—

And people were like, "God, you're right up there with Matlock." From the get-go everybody was like, "I feel sorry for you." And she—yeah.

TS: But you came around.

KP: Yeah.

TS: You understood what she was trying to—[unclear]

[Speaking Simultaneously]

KP: And we ended up—

TS: Yeah.

KP: She was awesome.

TS: And so, then did you mentor in that way to pass that on?

KP: I did, yes, and my XO for my company who is—she is a major now at Fort Bragg, and we are, like, best friends. Heather Riley[?]. She came from—She was coming from Korea. She came down to be—and I made her my XO when I took command, and we deployed together, and we've just been through everything together. She's part of my family, so.

TS: Yeah.

KP: Yeah, I mentored her and she—when she took company command she told me that I was her mentor and it was just really cool.

TS: Yeah.

KP: Yeah. To be thought of that way.

TS: To feel like you could pass this on to someone, and now you've seen her even surpass—

KP: Yeah.

[Speaking Simultaneously]

TS: —where you've been.

KP: Yeah, I'm living vicariously through her now. [both laugh]

TS: Is that right?

KP: I'm like, "You have to make general for both of us".

TS: There you go. That's good.

KP: Yeah, but—Yeah, so it's been a good run. It was a good run. I miss the army. I definitely miss soldiers but—

TS: Yeah, the camaraderie and everything.

[Speaking Simultaneously]

KP: —I'm glad my soldiers stay in touch with me.

TS: Did you feel like you were treated fairly—

KP: Yes.

TS: —throughout your career?

KP: Yes. I do.

TS: Did you ever receive any sort of memorable decoration or award?

KP: Nothing that's not out of the norm, that no one else—we all got the BSMs [Bronze Star Medal?] and the—I've got too many ARCOMs [Army Commendation Medal] and the—I never got an MSM [Meritorious Service Medal]. [chuckles]

TS: Yeah.

KP: I think you got to be colonel to get that one.

TS: Yeah.

KP: No, nothing out of the ordinary.

TS: Well, see, it's just like you get the reward from the dealing with the troops.

KP: Yeah.

TS: That sort of thing.

KP: Yeah.

TS: What was the most rewarding thing about your military career?

KP: I think, even though I don't have, like, a thing to show for it, I still have them to show for it. And just watching their successes and seeing them have families. It's just really—That's why I like Facebook because I can just—from afar even, watch them and—

TS: Definitely.

KP: —it's really cool to see them having families now. [chuckles]

TS: Well, it's a little bit off the road a little bit, but as far as when you were in, "Don't Ask, Don't Tell" had been implemented for a few years—

KP: Yeah.

TS: —by the time you went in, and then as you were in it left, so what are your thoughts on that issue of, like, homosexuals in the military?

["Don't Ask, Don't Tell" is the official U.S. policy on military service by gays, bisexuals, and lesbians. The policy prohibited military personnel from discriminating against or harassing closeted homosexual or bisexual service members, while barring openly gay, lesbian, and bisexual people from military service. Don't Ask, Don't Tell was repealed 20 September 2011]

KP: I had no problem with it. My supply sergeant, Sergeant [name redacted]—I'm very good friends with her still—she's a lesbian, and I knew she was when I took command, and no one—even the other females in the unit, no one had a problem with it.

TS: Was this during "Don't Ask, Don't Tell?"

KP: Yes.

TS: Okay.

KP: And she didn't make it known but we—I mean, we knew.

TS: When you say you knew, how did you know? Like, what kind of clues would you have to know? Because people say that a lot but—

KP: Yeah.

TS: —they don't really say, "Well, it's because of—", this or that. Because when they say you have to hide it—

KP: Yeah.

TS: —and she wasn't really showing it—

KP: She had a girlfriend.

TS: Okay.

KP: And we did see her with her.

TS: Yeah. Pretty constantly[?].

[Speaking Simultaneously]

KP: And it wasn't like—at first it was just the perception to me and I was like, "Well." And then I was like, "No, yeah." [chuckles] "They're together."

TS: Maybe. Okay.

KP: Yeah. And—But I love her.

TS: Did you think that that whole issue of having those kind of prohibitions on homosexuals was maybe just off?

KP: Yeah, because, I mean, I know men who are gay who were in the military and I never had a problem with them. I think other males definitely did. I saw, for the friends I do have, they chose to tell everyone, "Look man, this is how I am but I'm not trying to be weird on you." And by telling everyone it made it easier.

TS: Because then that tension is gone.

KP: Yes, it was done and they—mos—they really didn't have any problems.

TS: Yeah.

KP: Like some of the stuff you hear about, like the hate crimes and stuff.

TS: Right.

KP: Yeah, my friends are doing just fine. Yeah.

TS: That's good. Are they still in?

KP: Yeah.

TS: Oh, that's good.

KP: [chuckles]

TS: That's good.

KP: Yeah, they're doing great.

TS: Even though you were raised in the army, how is your life different because you went into the army yourself?

KP: I see civilians now as—I think of—this is something we learned in the—from the VA. Because we would be so angry that the normal people in this fairy tale world here, they

don't—they can't relate to us or understand what has happened to us, and so we—what I do now is I just pretend like I'm Superman, so I never would have been Superman if I hadn't joined the army. And I can be Clark Kent to all—ev—all the civilians, everybody that I sit with in class, and they just see me as a normal. But I know when I change into my outfit in the comfort of my own home or with my friends that I'm Superman and I can wear the cape, and what I've done for them and—

TS: Very interesting. That's a very interesting way to look at that.

[Speaking Simultaneously]

KP: Yeah. That's something we learned to do. That was one of our, like—the VA guy—the VA psychologist—yeah, he was awesome. Man, he nailed it with us. He literally saved our lives.

TS: Did you go in a group or just be yourself?

KP: Both.

TS: Okay.

KP: He had us—Yeah, he offered the group therapy also and I did do it—

TS: Yeah.

KP: —and it was—

TS: And that was helpful.

KP: —very helpful.

TS: Because then you see other people are going through the same kind of thing.

KP: Yeah, and we just sit, circle the chairs in the room and I was, like, "Are we AA [Alcoholics Anonymous]?" [both chuckle] And it was cool.

TS: Yeah.

KP: I really liked it. Yeah, and I'm actually Facebook friends, and we're friends, very good friends, Chris Ketchman and I, and he actually left the VA and opened his own business in Fayetteville [North Carolina]. He works with autistic—He tests for autism now.

TS: What's his name?

KP: Christopher Ketchman. Great guy. Yeah, you should—You should contact him. He worked—He was the OIF [Operation Iraqi Freedom], OEF [Operation Enduring Freedom] psychologist. He was the only one at the VA for, I don't know how many, years. Bless his heart.

TS: Very interesting. For a long time. Well, you've already said that you would not really want your daughters to go into the army.

KP: Yeah.

TS: What about other people? I mean, like, if someone came up to you, male or female, and asked you, "I'm thinking about joining the army," what would you say?

KP: I always—I always encourage it. I do.

TS: Yeah? Even women?

KP: Yes, I do.

TS: Just not your daughters.

KP: Yeah.

TS: [chuckles] Okay.

KP: Yeah, I do. I tend to keep that whole—my thoughts on women in the military usually to myself.

TS: Yeah.

KP: There's only a handful of people who really know, but I do, I'm like, "That's awesome." I just met a boy at the checkout in Harris-Teeter the other day and he was taking off to go do the Marine thing and I shook his hand. I met another one at Target too.

TS: Yeah?

KP: Yeah. And—because they see my ID when I opened up my thing and—

TS: Oh, I see.

KP: Yeah. And they always ask me about it. It's funny how they can catch that stuff.

TS: Sure. Well, if you're having to wear this—It's there.

KP: Yeah.

TS: When you've been there, or thinking about it.

KP: I'll congratulate them. I'll say, "Thank you for what you're going to do for us. Keep your head down. It's going to be fun."

TS: Yeah. Well, what does patriotism mean to you?

KP: I think patriotism to me is—is not, "Oh, you need to serve your country." I think it's just having an appreciation for those who do, and remembering them. And, like, the people in—on those special days, on those weekends, to just literally remember them and think about even the ones who are still alive and still fighting, that there is still a fight going on and that the knowledge of as long as there's man there's going to be war, so we always just—not to be complacent.

Patriotism, I don't even think, like—From things that I've seen, there have been times where I felt like we were the bad guy, and I just think that just to love your fellow man, all of them. Somehow, some day, maybe we could all get along. It'd be really great.

TS: Like humanity.

KP: Yeah.

TS: All one humanity.

KP: Just be a patriot for all of us. Because I've personally stuck a weapon in other people—in Iraqis—No, a woman—in her face, and I'll never forget her eyes because she thought I was going to shoot her. And I was like, "Man."

TS: Why did you have to put it in her face?

KP: We had gotten hit. We didn't know. It's very difficult and so at that point you're just kind of setting up and they were pushed over to the side. Poor family. It was a family.

TS: It was just that's where they were and that's where you were.

KP: Yeah, and because they were there—we didn't know at that point—Men, women, even children could be a threat, so it was you see a target, you hold them there until help comes, and that's what we did. And I had to sit there and look at that woman for a long time.

TS: It obviously had an effect on you too.

KP: Yeah. And so, I just think that patriotism goes further than just your country and your own that are fighting. It could just go for the whole effort, like, everybody in, and maybe—just because you never know when you're the bad guy and maybe they're the good guys, in a way.

TS: We've talked at the beginning about how you really enjoy being in other cultures and learning about the culture. It seems, obviously, that you have enjoyed that in the places you've gone, and so maybe to recognize that, the similarities rather than the differences, in some way?

KP: Yeah, yeah, definitely. I don't even know how to add to that. [both chuckle]

TS: Well, you don't have to. Would you do anything differently?

KP: No, I—No, I really wouldn't have. I—The only thing I really could have done was, with females, try to do this and that to keep her away from him and then she wouldn't have gotten pregnant.

TS: Right.

KP: Things like that when you have to send soldiers back, it trickles downhill and it affects the mission of that platoon when Sergeant Singletary's now gone back because she's pregnant and now we don't have a leader right here to do this slot.

TS: Right.

KP: Stuff like that. But I think I still wouldn't have changed anything.

TS: Yeah.

KP: Because it all—it all worked out. It all worked out. The only thing I might have changed was the reintegration process.

TS: Coming back.

KP: Yeah. And somehow they've got to fix that.

TS: Yeah. Do you think it's better now? A little bit? It's been, like, ten years since you reintegrated.

KP: I know. I don't.

TS: No?

KP: Because the statistics of the twenty-two a day? That's a lot to me.

TS: Of suicides.

KP: Yeah. I think they can do better. I think it should be—I think it should be mandatory that we all have psychologists—psychiatric and psychologic—whatever that's called—help.

[Speaking Simultaneously]

TS: Because you think there's, like, hidden—

KP: Oh, yeah. Even—

TS: —hurt[?], even though—

KP: Even if you were in a—stuck to the forward operating base and you are just—

TS: Typing?

KP: —typing stuff the whole time, you're still getting mortars that come in, you're still—
you're still being affected. You're still coming back different.

TS: There's some level of change that's happening to you.

KP: Definitely. Just the idea of, "Oh, my God, I'm going into a warzone," I think is enough to
give you—to change you, and you lose that innocence. They come back, they look
different to me. If you look at their pictures before they left and when they come back,
everyone's aged. It's sad. It's very sad to me.

TS: Well, is there anything that you want to add that we haven't talked about?

KP: Not that I can think of. Sorry that I cried the whole time. [chuckles]

TS: No, I think that you're allowed to cry. It's no problem.

KP: No, this was a lot of fun.

TS: Well, I wish we could talk for hours because—

KP: Yeah.

TS: —I'm sure that you have a lot to say.

KP: I'm going to definitely dig out pictures—

TS: Pictures, okay.

KP: —and give them to you.

TS: Okay.

KP: Do you have an office here?

TS: Yeah. I'll shut this off, but—so thank you.

KP: Yes.

TS: —very much.

KP: Thank you.

[End of Interview]