

WOMEN VETERANS HISTORICAL PROJECT
ORAL HISTORY COLLECTION

INTERVIEWEE: Robin D. Hamilton

INTERVIEWER: Therese Strohmer

DATE: 22 April 2016

[Begin Interview]

TS: Today is April 22, and I'm at the home of Robin Hamilton in High Point, North Carolina, to conduct an oral history interview for the Women Veterans Historical Collection at the University of North Carolina of Greensboro. Robin, how about you state your name the way you'd like it to read on your collection?

RH: Okay. Robin D. Hamilton.

TS: Alright. Well, Robin, why don't you start off a little bit by telling me when and where you were born?

RH: March 8, 1962 in Danville, Virginia.

TS: In Danville? You told me earlier you didn't live there very long. How long?

RH: Till I was five.

TS: Till you were five. Do you have any memories of that area?

RH: My grandparents and some family members still live there so I do have some good memories of there.

TS: Yeah? Where'd you move to at when you were five?

RH: We moved to Greensboro.

TS: Oh, Greensboro, okay.

RH: North Carolina.

TS: And so, what was it like growing up as a young girl in Greensboro?

RH: It was a lot simpler then. Things were a lot safer. You really didn't lock doors, and you walked to school by yourself, and it was a different time.

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

RH: I have three older brothers.

TS: Three older brothers?

RH: Yeah.

TS: And so, you're the youngest?

RH: I'm the baby and the only girl.

TS: Okay.

RH: So I grew up a little bit—very much so tomboy; very much so. "We need a fourth player, we need another—"

TS: [chuckles]

RH: And you didn't have a chance to say, "No," you just sort of got "voluntold."

TS: Yeah. Well, now, what did your folks do?

RH: Both of my folks worked for Dan River Mills, and my dad was a mechanic—a fixer—and my mom was a weaver.

TS: A weaver?

RH: Yes.

TS: And so, when you were growing up in Greensboro, where'd you go to school?

RH: I went to—the first through the fourth grade I went to Aycock Junior—it was like Aycock Junior High. I don't know how—like, first through eighth. I think it changed later but that's what it was for us, I think; first through the eighth.

TS: Were your schools integrated at that time?

RH: They were.

TS: They were?

RH: Yes.

TS: Did you enjoy school?

RH: Not right off the bat. I think the first three days of school I threw up every day.

TS: Oh, really?

RH: I did, because I was definitely a mama's girl and didn't want to leave my mom, didn't want to leave home; didn't want to go to—not so much didn't want to go to school; I would have preferred if mom had been with me.

TS: Come with you to school?

RH: Yeah, to come with me to school. So I remember, or I was told—I do remember throwing up the first day, but I was told—I think I threw up the first three days of school. I hadn't thought about that in a long time.

TS: Well, what kind of stuff did you do for a kid? You're growing up in the seventies, right?

RH: Yeah.

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

RH: Well, we—all of us, my brothers and I—we all liked to bike ride, and my brothers were really famous for taking bikes and destroying them, but they would—not so much destroy, but change; make them into, like, something else. They didn't come from the factory like that, okay? They would change this wheel or that handle bar or whatever, and they would always soup them up [modify] or do something crazy, but they usually—

TS: Customize their bikes.

RH: They usually worked. They didn't look like they did when they rolled off the factory showroom, but yeah, we did a lot of that. We liked animals. I remember we had a blind squirrel.

TS: A blind squirrel?

RH: A blind squirrel one time. And always bringing home animals. We lived off Fisher Park in Greensboro, right downtown.

TS: Yeah?

RH: Greensboro. So it was neat. We'd ride our bikes downtown and—

TS: Where's a place to go in Greensboro when you were a kid?

RH: They used to have Monroe's Drive-In. I remember that; I can still smell their french fries. It was just a neat place to go. My dad had a beautiful red Impala convertible—it was red with the white top—and I think that's why I've had three convertibles myself. And I think I get that love for that open-air driving from my father. I used to always put my arm around him; I'd stand behind him and I'd wrap my arm around him and I'd stand right to the left of him as he was driving. We didn't have seatbelts and made you sit down, but that's probably one of—if not one of my fondest memories with him.

TS: Yeah.

RH: But I did get my love of convertibles from him. I've still got one; got one in the garage right now. But we liked to go to Monroe's, and eat, and it seemed like everything back in the day was always surrounded around family and food. It's not so much now; everyone's got their lives and they're so busy.

TS: What was the food spread that you would have?

RH: Fried chicken, and homemade mashed potatoes, and deviled eggs. My mom was—My mom and dad owned a restaurant actually.

TS: Oh, did they?

RH: We moved to Rockingham County. We didn't stay too long—three or four years in Greensboro—but my parents divorced when I was eight. That was also the year I lost my grandmother, who raised me until I was five. So I stayed with her every day of my life and, I mean, both my parents worked so they would drop me off, because the other kids were in school but me.

TS: Right.

RH: So I was very close with my grandmother on my mother's side. But anyway. My mom, after my grandmother passed and she divorced, she wanted to be closer to her father, who lived by himself in Danville, in Ringgold, Virginia, and so we moved to Rockingham County. And so, I started my grades, like, I think, the fifth through all the way up to my associate's degree from Rockingham [County] Community College was in Rockingham—

TS: In Rockingham?

RH: —County. Yes. And we lived—I lived in Ruffin, North Carolina; I lived in Reidsville, North Carolina; I lived in Eden, North Carolina; through that whole time period I lived in those three cities. We just had a really good time. We didn't have a lot to do, but you just—when you're little you just build forts and go out. We did a whole lot of that in Rockingham County, because we're an hour out in the country, we're not living in the city. We lived—Next door we had a house to some folks that had a farm, and then we would just—it was—here we go again with the minibikes and the go-carts, and taking

them apart and rebuilding them and making them into something else, but they always ran; but they didn't look that way coming off the showroom. But we'd go out and build forts. Played a lot of football. We played—When I was little we played a lot of—and I don't remember it being tag; I remember it being tackle football, But we could have—possible could have been tag; we played a lot of football.

TS: You didn't do the flag?

RH: We didn't have any flags so it could have been touch. Maybe we did a little bit of touch but—

TS: Touch tackle? [chuckles]

RH: —but I think when my brothers played, a lot of times it was just tackle.

TS: Tackle.

RH: I think the girls played or the younger kids played, I think they just did touch.

TS: Took it a little easier?

RH: Yeah, touch. But we played a lot of that at my grandfather's house in Ringgold, Virginia. He lived on and his wife died in 1970—I was eight—but he didn't die until 1995. But we'd go to his house—I have to say this—when you walked in the house he would—his famous thing would be if he cooked the big pot of white beans, and I'm not joking. And you didn't care if you had meat—you did not care—but if you walked in and he had pintos it wasn't the same thing. For some reason this man could cook a pot of white beans like nobody's business, and nobody has ever done it since; not even my mother. But he just fixed some cornbread mix or—like that Jiffy cornbread mix—and a pot of white beans, sliced tomatoes out of his garden, and cucumbers, and it that was a good day. Sometimes someone would pick up some chicken or some meat but you just really didn't need it.

TS: Didn't need it; it was a great pot of beans, huh?

RH: But my mom had a—my mom remarried my stepfather when I was eleven, and he raised me the rest of my—until my adult life. He was also in the navy; my oldest brother was in the navy. And so, I was going air force out of high school, and delayed that for a few years and ended up getting my two year degree.

TS: Right.

RH: And then I ended up—I was like, "Okay, now really, seriously, what do I want to do?" [chuckles]

TS: Well, let's go back a little on that. When you're in elementary school and high school,

what kinds of things really interested you then?

RH: Elementary? I was a really good runner, but we didn't have a track program because the schools were so much smaller, and even when I went to high school I went to a 1A school in Ruffin, North Carolina, eighth, ninth, and half of the tenth. And then we merged three schools—Bethany, Ruffin, and Wentworth merged and made a 3A school, and when I finally got there we had a track team. We didn't have a track, we had to practice in the parking lot.

[For the North Carolina High School Athletic Association, high schools are classified as 1A, 2A, 3A, or 4A, depending on the size of the student population]

TS: What'd you like to run?

RH: I ran the 220, I ran—

TS: The shorter?

RH: Yeah. I didn't run—I ran the 100 sometimes, but the 220 was my specialty, the triple jump was my specialty. I think when I left high school I had at least thirteen school records—when I left school. And of course, remember, we didn't have a track team.

TS: [chuckles] Right. So you set the records.

RH: So I'm sure several of those have been broken since then.

TS: Right.

RH: Yeah, I ran a lot of the—

TS: You established the base line for everyone.

RH: I did. I did. I did. But I liked the field events. I just—I loved track. But I also played volleyball and I played basketball in high school.

TS: Did you?

RH: Yeah; three sports.

TS: Did you have a sense of what you thought you would do after high school? I mean, did that come to you at any point, where you felt like, "This is what I want to do with my life"?

RH: To be honest with you, no.

TS: No?

RH: No.

TS: You're just going through day to day, being a kid?

RH: Yeah. I really, honestly can say I wish I'd had some mentors; I really didn't. My parents—like I said—my mother remarried when I eleven, and he had a daughter that was grown and married and had a child, and my three older brothers were all—they were all basically—well, my brother was still at home—he graduated from high school in 1978—so he was still at home, so it was just us two at home with him and her; his name was Gene; my mom's name was Hazel. Anyway. And I didn't really know, and they were so busy. They had a country store at the time—they bought a county store—and he worked for the [United States] Postal Service—he was in charge of vehicles in Greensboro so he was daily coming from—he was coming from Reidsville to Greensboro and back. So my mom kind of ran the business. We had a country store, mostly dealt with farmers. We had a grill, so there'd be, like, hot dogs and hamburgers and french fries, and that kind of—

[Speaking Simultaneously]

TS: You have to work in it yourself?

RH: A little bit after school and on the weekends, but my mom, they really didn't want me to work.

TS: No?

RH: They just wanted me to stay in school, concentrate on school, and I was involved in sports all year long—I played softball in the summer—so it was all year long that I was like, "I need a ride here, I need a ride there."

TS: [chuckles]

RH: That was like the happiest day on earth, was when I could finally drive myself.

TS: Right.

RH: And the day I turned sixteen I got a car [chuckles], because they're like—and they opened a checking account, because that's another thing, my mom was like, "I'm so sick of you calling me going, 'I need money for pictures,' or, 'I need money for something.' We'll just open a check book—checking account, we'll solve that problem, and you'll learn how to write checks."

TS: There you go.

RH: So that helped a lot. I took mostly business classes throughout my career. I just—That's sort of—I think that did kind of come from them, because later on they owned a restaurant in Eden. It served breakfast and lunch and that was it—no dinner. It was just breakfast and lunch—and then later on they owned an auto parts business in Reidsville, North Carolina—G&H Auto in Reidsville, a hundred thousand dollars worth of parts. I mean, you had to know what you were kind of doing. My mom was really good with figures and math, and that was more so her forte, and my dad did a lot of other things in the business. He had already retired by that time.

TS: Okay.

RH: So the restaurant and the auto parts business. He had already retired from the post office and that was his next life.

TS: Taking care of business? Got you.

RH: His next occupation was doing those things.

TS: So you didn't really have a sense of where you wanted to go?

RH: Not really.

TS: You said you had thought about the air force or something?

RH: I did. I thought about the air force and I thought about the—going—doing—a state trooper.

TS: Okay.

RH: I got accepted for that.

TS: What appealed to you about these different—

RH: I don't know. I don't know if it was—I remember something—one of my—one memory that I have, I've really never talked about it a whole lot, was when I was little and we lived on 202—it's Belle [Bellemeade?] Street, Greensboro, North Carolina, right off—a block off of Fisher Park [historic neighborhood]—but our house, I don't know if you know the neighborhood, but all the houses are huge. Our house was two story and it's huge, so you could get lost. I remember we had a sunroom and we had a lot of boxes out there. I think my mom and dad used it for storage. But I ran across my dad's uniform, in the Marines, and it triggered something I'm sure that I've never probably linked together, but it had to, now that we're talking about it. It had to have influenced me in some form or fashion.

TS: Like planted a little seed or something.

RH: Right. And then I remember, like, the Sears catalogs, and I remember always getting to the—like, I had a little outfit that mom bought for me and it was a cowgirl outfit with a skirt, and I had a little couple of six-shooters, and I had a hat, and I probably could find that picture now.

TS: [chuckles]

RH: So it had to have been something to do with the uniform. It had to be like, why law enforcement, why the military? It had to be—It had to have been some sort of link between his military—his marine uniform and those catalogs. I used to see, like, the little outfits and the things people wore; nurses; whatever; different outfits.

TS: Candy stripers.

RH: And I see that little cowgirl outfit that I had, and then there's actually a picture and I would love to find it. I'd love to get my own hands on it. But I have a picture of me on the front of the USS *North Carolina* and I am, like, in a little pair of blue shorts and some little deck shoes and a little t-shirt on, and my mom and my stepdad bought a dixie cup—a little white dixie cup that the sailors wore, and they bought me one and the kids bought—the kids had them and they wore them, and I'm on the front of the USS *North Carolina* and I'm saluting.

["dixie cups" is the nickname for the white enlisted U.S. Navy sailor cap].

TS: [chuckles]

RH: And I want to go back with my dress blues, back to the USS *North Carolina*, and I want to stand in the exact same spot and take another picture, and that's going to be, at my retirement ceremony, my beginning and my end.

TS: That's a great idea. I like it.

RH: I think now that you kind of brought it up there's a couple of things that trigger in my mind that might have got me to this direction. Of course, I don't do it full time.

TS: Well, when you graduated from high school, was that '80, right?

RH: Nineteen eighty.

TS: Eighty.

RH: I had no clue. [both chuckle]

TS: Well, so what'd you do? What'd you end up doing?

RH: I was thinking about going in the air force and had changed my mind. And then I wanted to be a state trooper, and then one of my good friends had gotten shot just like recently; like, when it—

TS: When you got accepted?

RH: The same timeframe, like, give or take a three month period, someone had—

TS: Gotten shot as a police officer?

RH: Someone—He was a state trooper and someone had walked up—he had walked up on a vehicle and someone had pulled a gun on him and shot him, blew his head off. I'm like—I was devastated, and I was like, "Oh, well, I don't want to go out that way."

TS: Right.

RH: "I don't want to do that."

TS: Changed that. What took you away from the air force?

RH: And then I decided—I mean, literally, talking to a couple of my high school friends, we had went out, and we were all talking about literally—this is that summer of 1980, trying to figure out, "What are we going to do with our lives?"

TS: Right.

RH: And a couple of them says, "Well, I'm going to RCC—I'm going to Rockingham Community College."

And I said, "You know what? I think that's what I'm going to do."

And I went the next day and registered for class, and I started out in college parallel, but then I transferred. I was like—I probably was in it a few semesters and realized—I'm like, "I'm not even sure if I'm going somewhere else after here, and I don't want a degree that says college parallel." [degree programs designed to transfer to four-year colleges and universities] So I just switched my major back to sort of where my roots were, which was business administration, and it's a very general—you have accounting and economics and this and that. I figured I could try to find my way. And so, I just got—settled myself down and determined this is what I'm going to do. And then I graduated in 1983.

I'll tell you a funny story. My stepfather and my mother were going on their second trip driving to Alaska. And I had to take five classes that summer—it was the summer of '83—because I kind of screwed up the first year. So I finally settled down. Mom and dad's paying. I got to go. Got to attend, got to get some good grades, and so I did. And they're like, "Well, we want to go to Alaska again so do you think—" the first time they went I went.

And I say, "No, I think I'm just going to go to class this summer. I'm going to go

ahead and register for these five classes. Probably what'll happen is I'll end up dropping one of them." And I was like, "And I probably won't graduate, so I'll probably graduate in December or something like that. Just go on your trip, have a good time."

Well, I had—The thing that saved me was that I had typing Monday through Friday at eight o'clock—Monday through Friday—and my teacher was rough. But my high school teacher—I can honestly tell you I didn't really learn how to type in high school because I cheated too much; I kept looking at my hands. Well, my college instructor was not going to have any of that. She's like, "You've got to learn how to do it." And then she wouldn't let you miss but, like, I think—since it was a summer class they were quick and accelerated I guess.

TS: Right.

RH: And she was like, "I'm not going to have any absences." I think it was like you could have maybe two, or be late, like, two. You had to be there at eight o'clock. Pretty much you better be here at eight o'clock.

TS: That's a tough hour, tough class.

RH: So I was like, "You know what? I'm here, it's eight o'clock, I might as well go to my other class." [chuckles]

TS: You're already up, right?

RH: So I ended up—I took it anyway, and I did learn how to type. I'm a great typist right now, and it helped me throughout my life, and it helped me when I went in the navy. I think my typing school in the navy, it was a week long, forty-four hour class, and I think I was in and out of there in two hours, from beginning to end, and the guys were still over there pecking away with one finger.

TS: Right.

RH: But that helped me a whole lot, and I kind of thank her now for being—the people that are the hardest on you only want the best. Anyway. I ended up graduating in the summer of '83.

TS: Okay.

RH: And my parents were in Alaska.

TS: [chuckles]

RH: So my Aunt Brenda came, and a couple other family members came, but I graduated and that was—I was the first person in my family to get that far. I had—My other family members had gotten—my brother had got three degrees in a row from RCC; like little diplomas, like auto mechanics and welding and machine shop. And we had a—My

brother's first wife, she got her nursing degree from RCC. But I got just the regular Business Administration associate's degree, which is right over there on the wall.

TS: Yeah.

RH: And so, that kind started that going in that direction.

TS: And so, then, how did you end up joining the navy?

RH: The navy? Jill Klutz[?], wherever she is, joined the navy fulltime; she was good friend of mine in the Rockingham County area. We hung out, we did a lot of crazy things; drove to Myrtle Beach, dipped our toe in the ocean and drove all the way back. Thanks, Jill.

TS: [chuckles]

RH: But anyway. We did a whole lot of crazy things. Anyway, she joined the navy fulltime. When you're in boot camp they ask you—I don't know if they do this in the other services—but in the navy they'll ask you, "Do you know three people that would like to join the navy?" And Jill gave them my name and the guy started calling me from Greensboro. At the very [unclear] that I drill at, was the Reserve Center's of—I mean the—

TS: That they were calling from?

RH: That—The guy that does the recruiting.

TS: Okay.

RH: I'm sorry, the recruiting office.

TS: Right.

RH: So that's where he was at. It was actually where I drill at now, which is funny. And my best friend, she's a recruiter there now. The very office that I started talking to him in.

TS: What'd you think when he called you?

RH: I told him he was crazy.

TS: [chuckles] Okay.

RH: The first time he called me I said, "You're crazy. I'm not interested. Don't call me back." And then he just kept calling me. And then he took me—Then just he and I met a couple of times, and he'd take me out to dinner, and we met several times before I ever talked to anybody else, or my parents or anybody.

TS: What turned you into deciding to go for it?

RH: I guess just—nothing really happened, I just—nothing was happening, and I think that was more so that nothing was really happening. I was—I'd worked in retail. Since I did start working, everything I'd ever done was, like, a shoe store, I was assistant manager, or it was retail; you're working on the weekends, you're working nights; you work crazy hours. And you're responsible for a lot of stuff and you don't really get a lot of pay, and I was just like—I could kind of read the writing on the wall, and I was just like, "I don't really want to do this all my life." And I said, "I'm just ready for a change." Even though I did just join the reserves.

I mean, I—I don't mean to say it like I did join the reserves. I regret, to this day, that I didn't just join active duty—When I went—I've had plenty of opportunities. When I went to boot camp, [class] A school [technical training school], I am sure that I could have talked to someone along the way and said, "You know what? I don't want to go back in drilling reserves. I want to go active. But that was the whole point. The whole point of the exercise was to go do boot camp, A School, come—then say, "Is this for me or not for me?" And then I guess when I got home I got comfortable, and then I just decided I liked the reserve; I liked doing it part-time.

TS: Yeah. Oh, you said you had a brother in the navy. Was he in when you joined up?

RH: My—The brother that was in the navy was ten years older than me; so he was born in 1952, I was in '62. I know that he—I was pretty young—I was probably about twelve when he was in, so I was pretty young, but it definitely made an impact on me. Because he didn't stay in very long. I think he might have just did four years.

TS: Okay.

RH: And he did a southern tour, though, on his—he was on the USS—I can't think of the name of it right now. But he did a tour down in South America, so the pictures he brought back were pretty cool, and his travels and adventures. And I know that that definitely stuck in my mind.

TS: Did it?

RH: Yeah.

TS: What did your mom and dad think about you signing to go—

RH: They thought it was great.

TS: Yeah?

RH: Yeah, they thought it was—they both were really happy, they were so proud. My dad was very proud, because he was a marine, my stepdad was navy. There's a kind of cool story about my stepfather, though, because his mother actually—he was in during—he was

actually in during Pearl Harbor; he was in the navy. And his mom got a letter saying her son—you know they come to the door, knock on the door. "We're here to—We're so sorry to inform you that your son has died in Pearl Harbor." And she started laughing; just hysterical laughing. And they're like, "She's really—She's really wrecked."

And she's like, "No, my son called me this morning. He's in New York. His ship's in New York." His whole ship, not just him.

TS: Right.

RH: But the whole ship. So that'll tell you how crazy things were during that time period of Pearl Harbor.

TS: Sure.

RH: They couldn't even—They didn't even know who was who, and who was where, and ships, where they were or nothing. But I would do anything to have gotten my hands on the telegraph; that message. I'd love to have that—own that. I'd probably have it framed on the wall.

TS: Yeah. That's an interesting story. You joined in '84, I think you told me, right?

RH: Yes.

TS: April of '84?

RH: That's correct.

TS: And then you had to go to boot camp. What was that like? You went to [Naval Training Center] Orlando [Florida]?

RH: I did. All women went to Orlando back then.

TS: Okay.

RH: Men went to [Naval Base] San Diego [California] or [Naval Station] Great Lakes [Illinois] or Orlando. All the women—They didn't have as many men—as many women going in, so it took us forever to get our eighty-some girls.

TS: Together [unclear].

RH: To a group, yeah. We didn't—Not every guy's group—you had a sister company and brother company, but you might have three brother companies because that's how many—that's how—that's the different—there was in the number of men and women that went in the military. And then eventually, later on, I think it was in the nineties, they got rid of Orlando and they got rid of San Diego, and now everyone goes to Great Lakes.

TS: Oh, is that right?

RH: Illinois. Yeah. I don't know if you knew that.

TS: I don't think I did know that.

RH: So yeah.

TS: So you go—

RH: It was pretty neat.

TS: I forgot to ask you, did you end up with the navy because that recruiter called you, or did you think about the other services as a possibility.

RH: Not then, I did not.

TS: You thought about the air force earlier but—

RH: I did.

TS: —you just thought—You just wanted to go in the service?

RH: I knew I was smart enough to go in the air force, and I even tell people to this day—to me, I'll rank them, and I'll go—and I do—I know—if anybody hears this they're going to probably come and choke my neck—but I've always told people, "If you can go in the air force, go in the air force."

TS: Why do you think that?

RH: I just think it's more technical. Back then in that day, and even probably—maybe not so much now, but back in the day I just thought it was more of a technical field; you'd get a better job in the civilian world if you ever got out. And even—I've told people, I go, "I would try—" And now I pretty much—I say, "I would go air force or navy. Go air force or navy. You might be on a ship, it could be a little safer—air force could be a little safer, and I try to steer them; I try to steer young people, I really do, from going in the army or the marines. I just do. I just think it takes a certain kind of person to go in the navy and the air force. I never really mention the Coast Guard very often, unless someone just really doesn't want to do any kind of traveling overseas, because most of the time in the Coast Guard you're not going to do any of that.

TS: Right. Well, tell me about boot camp, then. What was that experience, for you, like?

RH: Boot camp. I loved it, because coming from playing sports all the time, I was actually—gee, guess what the job they gave me in boot camp. I was the athletic petty officer. So when we had the Olympics and we had different things, I ran all the physical—anything

that we did for PT—physical training—I ran it.

TS: You were a little older, too, then.

RH: I was twenty-two.

TS: Right.

RH: Yeah. A lot of the—

[Speaking Simultaneously]

TS: Than most of the girls.

RH: A lot of the girls were eighteen, nineteen, twenty, twenty-one. Yeah, I was one of the older people; one of the older ladies to go in.

TS: Older ladies? [chuckles]

RH: Older ladies.

TS: Was it difficult for you at all, in any way, having basic training?

RH: I'm sure I was probably a little homesick, but not really.

TS: No?

RH: No. No.

TS: Was this the first time you'd been away from home for any period of time?

RH: I had went to—In my junior year of high school, I did a Tale of Two Cities [educational travel program] with my high school; I did London [England] and Paris [France]. And none of my family went just—So that was really my first—and no, I've never really been homesick. I think I got more homesick when I went on the A School, because I didn't get to come home. I went straight from boot camp right to A School. I remember making more—I made phone calls from there. I would call my brother or I would call—"I miss you guys." But then you start making friends and that kind of dissipates; it just disappears.

TS: Right. It takes time to get used to it.

RH: Yeah. I didn't—But no, I didn't find anything like the work—the school work or anything—we went to school. I didn't find any of that hard.

TS: How about the swimming?

RH: Oh, no, I was really—I was a good—We had a—We used to have a place up on Smith Mountain [Lake, Bedford County, Virginia].

TS: Yeah?

RH: Yeah. So we'd—We all knew how to swim.

TS: That would have got me.

RH: Really?

TS: [chuckles]

RH: I heard a lot of people—We—I—Actually, that was part of the athletic petty officer; that was part of my job. I had to take the girls, and I thought, "This is going to be a really cool job: athletic petty officer." Blah, blah, blah. If I'm up front and I'm leading and I feel like I don't really want to do anything, I just go to check on somebody and stop PTing. But no, then I found out I had to take all the people that couldn't swim, and I don't know why folks would join the navy and couldn't swim, but we had seven—

TS: A lot of them did, I heard.

RH: Yeah, we had eighty-eight girls and seventeen couldn't swim.

TS: Yeah, I've talked to a few of them that had said they'd never tried to swim.

RH: Just, I think I'd have went in another service. I just don't think I'd feel like taking a chance. But they didn't really go to the ships back in the day.

TS: Right.

RH: I just still thought that was always odd. So anyway, it was my job, and I found out that now I'm going to lose an hour of sleep every morning or whatever I had to—

TS: You got to get up early?

RH: We had to get up earlier. So I'm marching them in the dark to go to the pool, and it's dark the whole time we're there.

TS: Right.

RH: And it's kind of chilly even though it's Orlando; it's early, early, early, in the morning. I did graduate in July, so I did go in the warmer months of the year.

TS: Right.

RH: But we had seventeen of them, and they had to do—all I had to teach them to do was to float on their back for five minutes. That's it. But I did—I went ahead and showed them how to dog paddle, tread water; just whatever I could do, if you needed to.

TS: To give them some confidence?

RH: Yeah, I mean, yeah, that's exactly what you're trying to do, is you're just trying to build their confidence; that no matter what happens in any situation, just don't lose your cool, just get on your back and start breathing, and someone will come save you.

TS: [chuckling]

RH: Hopefully.

TS: Is that the navy motto there?

RH: I don't know but that's—I mean, really, that's about all you can do—

TS: Yeah.

RH: —is just stay calm.

TS: Stay calm.

RH: Stay calm.

TS: Well, now, when you signed up, did you know what job you were going to have?

RH: I remember when I sat in MEPS [Military Entrance Processing Station] in Charlotte, and that's where they processed me for the State of Nor—for this area, is I went to Charlotte, North Carolina, to medical, and I remember setting there, though, and someone—"What job do you want to go into?" And I remember I didn't know. But I did the day I got asked, I knew, but I'd already put some thought into it.
 And someone said, "Go into communications."
 So I went into communi—That's what I did. I said, "I want to go into communications."
 And we actually had—In my Reserve Center we have a local SEC group—security group unit—where all the CTOs [Cryptologic Technician, Communications] or the CTAs [Cryptologic Technician, Administrative], CTRs [Cryptologic Technician, Collection]—all the cryptology technicians merged. They had a unit here so that guy was all about—that recruiter was probably all about trying to—
 And going back to—I know we're jumping—But going back to your question earlier about—"Well, why did you join the Reserves?" Well, the Reserves were top

heavy, so they were pushing this program called Sea and Air Mariner Program, and it's because they didn't have any E-1s, E-2s, E-3s, E-4s, in the Reserves. They were very—

TS: Top heavy, you mean they had too many high-ranking people.

RH: E-6 and above. E-6 and above.

TS: So they needed lower ranking.

RH: They wanted lower ranking folks.

TS: Gotcha. It was called Sea—

RH: Sea—S-E-A—Sea and Air Mariner Program.

TS: Okay.

RH: And I'm probably one of the few people in it that ever stayed in this long, and I don't think that was there intention. And then probably I'm one of the few people that ever made the rank of chief.

TS: Right. What was the goal of it?

RH: It was just so they'd have lower folks to do—worker bees, I would—I call E-5 and below—I call—Actually E-6 and below, I call the worker bees.

TS: Right.

RH: E-7s, E-8s, and E-9s are more like middle management. And even warrant officers. And then you have your enlisted—your officer ranks is more higher management. That's how I see it, in making an equivalent to the civilian ranks.

TS: Sure.

RH: The civilian world.

TS: I think that's a fair way to look at it, although I don't think some of the E-6s are going to agree with it. [chuckles]

RH: Well, depends on if they're senior E-6, and then you go, "Well, shame on you. Hurry up and make E-7."

TS: That's right. [both chuckle] True. Where'd you go to your train—

RH: A School?

TS: —you're A School at?

RH: Okay. I went to—Left boot camp in Orlando in that July, and then I went to Pensacola.

TS: Oh, Pensacola, right.

RH: Pensacola, Florida.

TS: And so, what did you learn there?

RH: I was actually an R brancher, and R brancher would learn Morse code, and I did really well until I got up—I had some hearing problems, we found out later. I did pretty well in letters and numbers, but when it got up to really—

TS: The tones?

RH: —really, really, fast—and you know you have to be behind. You're hearing something and then you're going to type it way behind. I did pretty good. I got up to, like, eighteens, but I had to get off twenties for letters, and you had to do twenty-five numbers. I did twenty-five numbers, I just—I never could get off to twenty. So instead of just sending me home as a failure—and I had some—my hearing issues and stuff. They were just like, "We're going to offer you—You could be an O brancher or an A brancher, and O brancher—

TS: Say the difference between.

RH: CTO is a—I think a CTO did more—well, Rs were Collection. Os were—they worked with the teletypes and they deal with a lot of the machinery. They did—They're gone now. They're actually merged; the Os went in to N, which is more like networks, like computers.

TS: Okay.

RH: And that kind of thing. They did—That's sort of what they were involved in.

TS: You're talking about the third digit, right? The CT is the Cryptology Technician, and the A stood for—

RH: A stood for—I went—I could pick A, and I picked A, which is Administration.

TS: Right. And then the O would stand for Operations?

RH: Operation, yes.

TS: And then what was the one that—

RH: I think it was either—it was Operator.

TS: Operator, okay.

RH: Cryptology Technician, Operator.

TS: Operator.

RH: Cryptology Technician, Administration.

TS: Oh, so like more hands—

RH: Cryptology Technician—Just different.

TS: Gotcha. You went into—

RH: The I brancher would be the linguist.

TS: The I.

RH: The I would be language, like for you. If you were navy that would be the equivalent to what you did.

TS: I see, okay. Now, you're A is Ad—

RH: And a T branch. You also had a CTAT—CT—

TS: CTAT?

RH: CTC—CTT. That's why we're having problems saying it. CTT, CTR. One of them was Collection, like they had on headphones and they would collect it and type it into the computer, and the T brancher would do it with a stick[?] they'd just use a pencil.

TS: Yeah.

RH: And they'd do the Morse code or whatever. Whatever they were working on. But I remember having to learn Morse code and I thought that was really cool. I thought that was very interesting.

TS: Do you remember it? A little bit?

RH: A little bit. Didi-dot-dit-dit. Different things will come up and I'll go, "Wow. Okay." Or something on TV will pop up and I'll go, "Oh, that was SOS [International Morse code distress signal]," [both chuckle] or something like that.

TS: Right.

RH: But I hate that I didn't get through that, but I'm kind of glad I didn't go O because O, they completely got rid of that. It did go to N later, but they made the Os, like, literally leave the Reserves.

TS: Oh, okay.

RH: I don't know about active duty, they might have offered them something else, but the Os where I was at—because I had a guy that got out and then later he come back—he come back as something else.

TS: Something else? Retrained?

RH: He was CT but he was something else. But they didn't even—they just dropped the hammer on them, and that would have been me. If I had went O I would have been gone.

TS: Right.

RH: But I went A. And I just thought at the time—I thought—When I was sitting in Pensacola, Florida, I thought to myself, "What could I use in the civilian world, because I'm going back to civilian world fulltime."

TS: Right, you know you're in the Reserve.

RH: What is R and T—What is any of that going to do for me, and I just thought to myself, "Nothing."

TS: Right.

RH: "So I'll go into A," which still goes along with my two-year degree, which was business. To me, it's falling together.

[Speaking Simultaneously]

TS: Right, exactly. It seems to fit; it's a good fit.

RH: It's fitting together, exactly. So I went into A.

TS: Yeah, it does sound like a good fit.

RH: And I guess my spirits were down a little bit, but—

TS: Sure, because you didn't get through what you had originally tried.

RH: Originally gotten through. And I'd been in—I'd been there a long time. I mean, I'd been in it a good six months or longer. And then they offered that to me, and the school wasn't as long. But anyway, I went into that, and then I ended up graduating top of my class, so that made me feel better.

TS: Oh, that was a nice—

RH: I was the Honor Graduate, which there's a bad side to that too, because if you graduate top of your class, you got automatically promoted to the next paygrade. But you got to remember, I got to boot camp, I'm an E-1. Everyone's equal; everybody's even in boot camp. When you leave boot camp, if you have a two-year degree or whatnot—or higher—you leave as an E-3. It didn't matter if you had a bachelor's or nothing, you left as an E-3; is the highest you could leave there.

So I left boot camp as an E-3, get to Pensacola I'm a big old E-3, I'm twenty-two years old, things are cool. I'm legal to drink, which I think we could drink anyway, over eighteen.

The next thing was—I graduated top of my class, and then they didn't give it to me.

TS: Why not?

RH: They said I was a Reservist.

TS: Oh, you had to be active duty?

RH: That's what they said, but.

TS: Yeah.

RH: I still got the nice honor—I got the pin set, and I still got it, I just didn't get the advancement to E-4. That would have been kind of nice. They were trying to get people at the lower end, and here I'm coming in.

TS: Oh, that's right; you've got all these stripes.

RH: Maybe that played a part in it too. I don't know.

TS: Maybe it did. That's interesting. Okay, so you come back home—come back to Greensboro—right? Oh, no, wait, where'd you go?

RH: Yeah, my family came down for graduation.

TS: Okay.

RH: Everybody came down. A lot of family came down. They really enjoyed everything. My family actually took—My mom and dad came down early, and they had, like "Mommy

and Daddy Night," and they took out all my buddies that didn't have any parents or family there.

TS: Oh, that's nice.

RH: They took them—everybody out. Drove, paid for everything, took care of everything. I thought that was a nice memory too.

TS: That's a nice gesture.

RH: Yes, it is.

TS: Yeah.

RH: So I left there and we came back to North Carolina and I started—I graduated in February of '85, and then I came back, and I—actually, I think I started drilling in March of 1985 at the Reserve Center, it's called Triad [Armed Forces] Reserve Center in Greensboro. It's right off the [Piedmont Triad International] Airport exit, on Interstate 40.

TS: What I'd like to ask you about for the reserve training is, how do you think it changed from '85 to, say—not even going to today, but maybe post-Gulf War? Was there anything that changed? Because I know, like, during the Gulf War there were a lot of reservists, that was the first time there was a big call up in that way. Was there a change? Or was it the same?

[The First Gulf War occurred from 2 August 1990 to 29 February 1991. Codenamed Operation Desert Shield for operations leading to the buildup of troops and defense of Saudi Arabia, and Operation Desert Storm in its combat phase, it was a war waged by coalition forces from 35 nations led by the US against Iraq in response to Iraq's invasion and annexation of Kuwait]

RH: I didn't see a big impact in '90, '91 with Desert Shield, Desert Storm.

TS: Okay.

RH: They did not want people in my unit, which blew my mind, because I just knew them—like, "Man, I just bought a house and my dad's not doing good," which he died in 1990, and I'm thinking—Actually, he died in '91. But my dad was sick, I just bought a house. I said, "This really wouldn't be a good time for me but—" and I just started a job in 1988 and I'd only been there a couple years.

TS: Okay.

RH: At Bristol-Myers. I worked for—It's [unclear] Tech Incorporated, but it's a Bristol-Myers

Squibb [American pharmaceutical company] subsidiary. Anyway. I thought this wouldn't really be a good time for me, but I was really shocked not one person from my unit got recalled.

TS: Really?

RH: And we all had Top Secret clearances. And back then, not everybody had Secret—Top Secret.

TS: Right.

RH: You just didn't have one. And today, everyone in the military has a Secret, or a Top Secret. You have something or you're not in the military. Secret is good for five years, and it's just a national check. It's a national check. And then the Top Secret goes a little bit more in depth. Actually, the Secret's good for ten years, I'm sorry. Secret's good for ten and the Top Secret's good for five.

TS: And then just gets renewed?

RH: It gets renewed. About your four and half years mark you'll start working on the next one. You don't—You definitely don't ever want it to run out.

TS: Right.

RH: You don't want it to get right to the end and you haven't even got the new one started.

TS: Right.

RH: And they just go back. Like, for me, when I got my first one, I didn't even know they were going to do that. And so, I remember in Pensacola, you're over on one side of the building, which we call the non-class side of school, and then once you get so—you progress so far into the next—it looks like you're going to graduate or it looks like you're going to do well, you pass over to another side of the building, which is where you get your clearance, that's where they—They've already been working on your clearance, but you just might not have known.

TS: Right. Your background check and all that.

RH: You didn't probably know that that was exactly what's going on, but yeah. I remember my mom getting a phone call, going—I called her at home and she says, "Yeah, there's been people here, and they're talking to your neighbors, and they're asking questions about you. And they been to your high school." They st—They went back to me—with me, like, all my life. I was twenty-two so they went my entire life.

TS: Right.

RH: Like, a lot of people, they'll only go back to they're eighteen, but they went back for me; they went all the way back. I think that's what they did back then.

TS: Yeah.

RH: And then when you renew it they don't go all the way back again, they just go back to the last time they did the—

TS: To the last time it was checked?

RH: Your last age, or wherever you left off, and they pick up from there and go forward. I've had quite a few of those in my thirty-two year career.

TS: I bet. Okay, nothing changed from the Gulf War. Did it change after 9/11?

[The September 11, 2001 attacks, or 9/11, was 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]

RH: Absolutely. That's what I really want to emphasize here, and I'm glad you brought that up, because the point is that everything changed. They took almost everyone in our unit. They wanted everybody that had Top Secret clearances, and even Secret. But everyone in my unit still had Top Secret and they wanted all of us.

TS: Yeah?

RH: And so, I remember a big group going—they wanted six to go to NSA [Naval Support Activity] and—not so much out of my unit, these were—this was at—throughout our whole theater of the United States. But they needed, like, I think it was eight people to go to Hawaii, six to go—this was right after—two weeks after 9/11 I left—and they needed—and then they wanted people to be—to go, I think, Fort Gordon, Georgia. And it was certain places they wanted folks to go back then.

And so, I really wanted to go to NSA, I wanted to be on a travel team. I wanted to go to—I wanted to go places. I wanted to go—Wherever they went, I wanted to be on the travel team; I would have done anything. But I was just an E-6, I didn't have a whole—a lot of voice about it. But anyway, I ended up going to Hawaii. My job[?] really felt sorry for me, until I told them where I was going.

TS: [chuckles]

RH: They gave me a big going away party, and my boss made sure she told me, she's like, "Well, we felt sorry for you, until you told us where you were going."

I said, "But yeah, [unclear]."

But the funny thing is it's literally two weeks after 9/11. I remember—I was at

work when 9/11 happened, and I remember looking at the first building. And we had a big TV set in one of our rooms, and the first plane had already hit and we started hearing about it. I said, "I always thought, like, a two-seater plane would hit the World Trade Center. I always wondered if that ever happened. Somebody trying to get too close; accidents happen."

And so, I walked up to the conference room. I said, "I'm going to walk up to the conference room and check it out." About the time I walked in the second plane hit the second building and I was like, "That's not an accident." And I don't know who was sitting next to me, standing there, but I looked over at whoever it was and I said, "God bless those people." I said, "I'm so gone." And I was, two weeks later.

TS: Yeah.

RH: I'm flying when nobody wants to fly. I'm going and nobody wants to go. And I'm the one person that got stopped in Greensboro; they wanted to check my luggage.

TS: Oh, yeah?

RH: And they're like, "You weren't supposed to be doing this."

And I'm like, "Where's your supervisor? Because if I'm on orders, I'm the one you're not supposed to detain, especially right now. I'm supposed to get where I need to go." But yeah.

I remember Greensboro—I remember the Greensboro airport being blocked off. You couldn't be dropped off, you had to park in the parking deck and then walk over. I remember that. And then I remembered I got interviewed walking in, from the local news station. I've never seen it.

TS: Yeah?

RH: I don't have a clue.

TS: What'd they ask you about?

RH: Where was I traveling to? Where was I going? And I mean, I kind of just said but I didn't say.

TS: Right.

RH: I said, "I'm in the navy. I'm leaving. I'm going to Hawaii." I just acted like it was just no big deal; I'm going. But my orders for that was for forty-five days, and that was from—that's through navy orders. That wasn't a re—presidential recall ["Presidential Reserve Callup Authority"?] or anything. It's just we need people right now to man some positions so we can get some of our active duty people moving. And so, we just took over. That's what we do in the Reserves, we take over for active duty so they can move on to somewhere else.

["Presidential Reserve Callup Authority" is a provision of a public law that provides the president a means to activate, without a declaration of national emergency, not more than two hundred thousand members of the Selected Reserve and the Individual Ready Reserve, for not more than four hundred days to meet the support requirements of any operational mission]

TS: What was that like, then—I mean, the environment, working after 9/11?

RH: In Hawaii it got scary real quick because you're like—again, there like—everyone's like, "Oh, you're in Hawaii." And we stayed at the Hale Koa Hotel right on Waikiki Beach. For forty-five days I'm in a hotel—four-star hotel, and that's great. But two weeks after we were there we had an anthrax scare. Remember anthrax was a big deal; powder substance in envelopes were being found here, there, and everywhere.

[The 2001 anthrax attacks occurred within the U.S. over the course of several weeks, beginning on 18 September 2001, one week after the September 11 attacks. Letters containing anthrax spores were mailed to several news media offices and two Democratic U.S. Senators, killing five people and infecting seventeen others]

You're already scared to death of it, and then we get there and two weeks later—we had been there two weeks—and you're on an island, it's not like I can drive off. We're on an island so it's plane or boat; that's how you're getting off this island. So they had an anthrax scare and it's, like, two blocks away from our hotel. They tested it right there by the van on the property, like—whatever. "It's anthrax." Well, then they came back later and said, "No, it's not. That was a false alarm. We retested it. It's not." But then you're like, who's lying and who's telling the truth here?

TS: Right, which one's right?

RH: Yeah, so you're still—you're still scared, you're still scared. But we went ahead and did our mission. It was a great opportunity. I made a lot of friends and we did a lot of good things. I worked in a couple of places. I worked in [unclear] and it was up in the mountains, and I also worked in Pearl Harbor. So you would alternate working one week one place and one at the other, but you still stayed where you lived. The one in the mountains was harder to get to; you're a lot further away.

TS: Well, I know because of your clearance you can't really say what you did, but can you say what you would put on your résumé for a civilian job; like, how it would relate to a civilian world kind of job?

RH: Well, it's still real blasé. It's real plain what we say, because I did sign an NDA [non-disclosure] Agreement; for ninety-nine years I wouldn't talk about anything that I've ever

dealt with.

TS: Right.

RH: I mean, a lot of times I just—I mean, my whole career, the things that we did the next five years on active duty, we—from that day forward, for the next five years, I mean, a lot of what we dealt with was getting information to help the guys in the air and on the ground, and that's how I tell people.

TS: Right.

RH: That's what I tell people; that I wasn't directly—One time I had someone tell me I wasn't a veteran.

TS: What?

RH: And I said, "I might say I'm not a veteran, but I'm not going to let you tell me that I'm not a veteran." And they're like—Because their mentality was, their dad was probably World War II, or they have boots on the ground or boots in the jungle or boots in the sand, or whatever. That had to be your veteran, okay? And I said, Well—" This was at a table with twenty people, and so that wasn't the time for me to sit there and fight. You got to pick when you're going to pick your battles.

So I had an opportunity. I knew we'd take a break in the action. I pulled that individual to the side and I said, "I see where you're coming from. I kind of can think like you do, but," I said, "to be honest with you," I said, "it wouldn't work if we didn't have everybody. Someone's loved one is out with a rifle or whatever, he's fighting. His wife's back home feeding their kids and taking care of the family on the home front, and whoever pays that individual—the wife—if that didn't happen, and the loved one out there fighting is worried about their loved one back home, that's not a good thing."

TS: Right.

RH: And then I said, "Then your loved one, wherever they are fighting," I said, "they're being fed by somebody that's cooking food for them." And I just used those simple examples, that none of this would work. It's all a puzzle and it all fits together and we all have our jobs to play, and if we all—I tell this analogy all the time: We have a garden, and you have your row, and I have my row. And if we hoe our row, we will have a good garden. You know what I'm saying?

TS: Yeah.

RH: We all have a job to do and we all have our responsibilities, and if we do it—that's why we're the greatest fighting force in the world. That's why we are the way we are. Now where do we go to from there? I'm sorry.

TS: No, it's alright.

RH: But I told her. She said, "You know what? I'm glad you said that, just because now I look at it a whole different way. You're absolutely right." And then from then on I fixed one person.

TS: That's right.

RH: Can't fix them all.

TS: And then she'll fix somebody.

[Speaking Simultaneously]

RH: Maybe she'll fix somebody.

TS: Yes.

RH: But I told, I said—And then I told her, I said, "Well—" This is actually on one of my evals [evaluations], so if I walk in the other room and I'll bring it in here. It's unclassified. I could get you to read it.

While I'm in England—that was my next thing, was when I went to England. I don't know if you want me to jump that far ahead.

TS: Sure.

RH: When I left Hawaii I came home for two weeks real quick, and then I went to—I got presidential recall January of 2002, so I got to [Naval Station] Norfolk, Virginia, where you're processed. I stayed there for about a week, and then I came back to Greensboro, and I flew out of Greensboro for [Royal Air Force] Menwith Hill station, United Kingdom. It's near—Flew into York, lived in Harrogate, England. It's right in the middle of the dells[?] [a small secluded hollow]. I'm there for the next eight months. We had—I was there—two weeks seems to be a magic number for me. We were there about two weeks. And when we got there it was funny because you got a A brancher, you got some Rs, and I think we had all kind of mix of people. We had six—It was six of us, and none of us knew how to work the equipment. Not even the Rs and the Ts that should have.

TS: Really? Okay.

RH: Maybe the Rs and whoever. But—And none of us knew how to work the equipment and we were—

TS: Was it newer or older than what you were used to?

RH: I don't know. I really couldn't tell you. We just weren't familiar with this type of

equipment. I could guarantee you that whatever we had in the Reserves was older.

TS: Okay.

RH: This was probably newer equipment to be honest with you, because we had old stuff in the Reserves. And we were embarrassed to say we didn't know how to work the equipment, and we worked for—here's the hard part—we worked for a civilian, and he just didn't want anything—he wanted to send us all home. We hadn't even been there two or three days and he's just like—we've already been set up in apartments, we've got rental cars. We've started, like, okay, we're on this process, and he just wanted to [unclear]. He was madder than hell and he just wanted all six of us to be out of his face and gone; "You're of no use to me."

TS: Right.

RH: "You can't do it."

And we're just like, "Well, just give us a chance and show us."

And then we had a senior chief there—[Cheryl Smilenage?]-Cheryl Highten[?] now—and she went on—she was a senior chief, a E-8 at the time—she went on to make E-9, and then later on made warrant [officer], and then went on to work for—She's just a really cool girl. And actually, if it hadn't been for her—I'll put this on the record—I would have never made chief, because I finally found the right person to help me, to mentor me, to get me to where I wanted to go. I just want to give a plug for Cheryl.

TS: [chuckles] That's good.

RH: But anyway. So we hadn't been there—and then they started—some of the junior people—it was all mixed again—marines, army, navy—and they just all started showing us how to work the equipment, and every one of us it just like, boom, "Yeah, we can do this. No problem. We got this."

But two weeks in, I'm working a second shift, like 3:00 to 11:00, and I—what we were doing again was we were helping the troops gather information for troops on the ground and in the air for them to do their job. Okay? And I'm very proud of that. Even though I never carried a rifle, I know that I can—I helped someone that did. And that's what I live with every day, knowing that I did that part, and that part's a part of the puzzle that makes it all work.

But anyway. I had a, "Mayday, mayday, mayday [distress call]." Very faint. It was just, "Mayday, mayday. Mayday."

And I was like, "Holy crap."

And then you're listening in one ear, and you're listening to things live in both ears, okay? And so, you're just listening, you're changing frequency, you're just jumping around, you're doing your thing. You're just thinking, nothing going on. And then all of a sudden you have something like that happen.

And so, you're recording everything, so I already listened to it. See, everything — you're taught that everything—if I had to make a message and have it on the president's desk in five minutes, I have to be able to do that. It's just the way it is. So you're used to

doing things in a very quick fashion. So I listened to it really quick, like twice, and then I got my supervisor over. Now, remember, I'm an E-6. My supervisor came over, he's a marine E-5. [both chuckle] So it's just me and him tonight. That's all. It was just the two of us.

TS: Right.

RH: So I said, "Here," handed him my earphones, and I said, "Listen to this."

He's like, "As long as I've been here I've never had that happen." He goes, "Let me call down the hallway. They're doing a similar mission. Let me find out if they heard anything."

So he called down the hallway and they didn't—they didn't hear anything. And so, you're thinking you're the only person on Earth that heard this. So he's like—But in the meantime, I'm already working on my message, what I'm doing, latitude, long[itude]—the whole thing. I'm getting all my information together, the time—so I'm going ahead and putting my message together, boom, send. I waited around about an hour—hour or so—after my shift. And see, we carpooled, so other people depended on me for a ride, and vice versa.

So I was like—He's like, "Just go ahead, let's all leave. The next shift's come in, we've passed down. We'll see you tomorrow." That was so hard to go home.

TS: Yeah? Because you don't know.

RH: It was so hard. I know I didn't sleep a wink that night, worrying and thinking about everything. So the next day I asked whoever I rode in with, I said, "Can we go in to work an hour early?"

TS: [chuckles]

RH: "Can we go into work early?"

And they're like, "Yeah. Let's go."

So we went in an hour early, and I found out—they're like—As soon as I walked in they knew I wanted to know, and they're like, "He ejected. He got picked up. Good job."

TS: Excellent.

RH: And everyone I've talked to, that I have mentioned that to—it's not many, very few, only a handful, mostly family—and they're like, "Have you—Did you meet him? Do you want to meet him?"

And I'm like, "No, I don't want to. I don't." I might now, but I didn't then. I was just like, "I was just doing my job."

TS: Right.

RH: Again, it goes back to the whole evolution that we all do our own job.

TS: Right, and sometimes in that kind of work you're this cog and you don't get to see the whole picture, and you don't know what the end result is of your actions, right?

RH: Right.

TS: And that's a big part of it, where you have to compartmentalize—this is what I have to do, this is my focus—and you can't look at the big picture.

RH: Right.

TS: Does that make sense to you?

RH: Right. Yeah. Yeah. Absolutely. That was probably one of the biggest things that probably ever happened in my life, and I don't talk about it. I just don't. It's not classified. What I just talked about is not classified at all.

TS: Right.

RH: What little bit I said; the little details about it. But that was a big deal.

[Speaking Simultaneously]

TS: Very rewarding, though, I'm sure.

RH: Especially from being a A brancher. I was an Administration person, but that's why I said about my entire career I worked in operations. All my ATs[?], when I went to Hawaii, when I went to Korea, when I went to Japan, London, all the places I've been to, they were all Operations; I did all Ops.

TS: Was there any place you went in these places you just described that surprised you in a particular way?

RH: That's a good question. Well, Korea and Japan; I can't remember which one I went to first. I think I went to Japan first. But Asia was something. I actually have some Asian influences somewhat in my house—more so when I had my house—but it was always my dream to go to Asia. And then when I went, I don't want to go back. [both chuckle] One is the food. When you have eyeballs looking back at you, you have a tendency to go, "Um, I think I'll just go back and get me a steak back home or something." But the food—

TS: Was there food that you did enjoy there?

RH: I have to say that even though I was kind of a picky eater as a kid, when I did go in the

navy, I did—I enjoyed local beer, local wine, local food. I just say, "When in Rome, do as the Romans."

TS: Right.

RH: Don't—And I still do that to this day. If I travel—and I do travel a lot—I go to Mexico or wherever I go—I want to try the local fare, I want to try the local beers and the wines, and the local things going on.

TS: Yeah.

RH: Get involved in that.

TS: But there's things that you can say you like and things that you can say you don't like about that local fare.

RH: One of the reasons—like Korea and Japan—it's not like I was shocked by anything that I saw, but the food wasn't really my cup of tea. I'm sure I lost a few pounds while I was over there. I probably need to go back on a trip back over there.

TS: [chuckles]

RH: But anyway, that's another story. But I loved the culture, I loved the history, I loved the Buddhas, and I loved—and it's just like in England though, but when I got done with—when I got done with England, and all the times I've been to London—four or five times—well, three or four—and then when I lived in England for a year almost, and then went to Germany for three months, I was like, "If I never see another castle, it's okay."

TS: In Germany?

RH: Either one.

TS: Or England, right.

RH: Because I was in the United Kingdom when we—we went up to Edinburgh, Scotland, and we went to London. I went to [The Championships,] Wimbledon [tennis tournament]. So there was a lot of highs. There wasn't really many lows. There were hardly—very few lows or disappointments, because I took advantage of—I took advantage of everything that I was given.

I traveled all the time on my time off, and even my family came over when I was in England. I think I took seventeen days leave, and I coordinated their whole trip, from them flying over and coming over. We spent so much time in London. Then we went up to—Then we did the Eurostar [high-speed railway] and went underneath the English Channel, and we went to Paris, and they're like, "Why didn't we spend more time in Paris instead of London?" Told them all, "Make sure you bring an umbrella. Make sure you bring raincoats." They show up in London, no raincoats, no umbrellas. First place we

have to go is to go shopping, and that's all it did, probably the whole time, was it rained.

And then we did the Eurostar and I think we spent, I want to say, nine days in England and then seven—six or seven days—and they're like, "Why didn't we spend more time in Paris?"

TS: It's almost equal, but yeah.

RH: Because we got over there and the sun's shining and it never rained. It was so pretty. And all—Everyone in France was just so amazing, and I've been there a couple times and I've always had a great time in Paris. I think it's great. But when I did *Tale of Two Cities* in high school, and so when we crossed the English Channel—we drove and took a bus to the channel, and we crossed on a ferry to the English Channel. I remember sitting on the boat and you couldn't see the hori—you got to a certain point where you couldn't see the shore and you were bouncing around. I can honestly say I've been across the top of the English Channel, I've been underneath the English Channel.

TS: Nice.

RH: So that was kind of cool.

TS: Well, when you were talking about different cultures that you've been to, and you think about living in Greensboro, what are the major differences that you see, and some of the similarities?

RH: That's another good question. Not a lot of similarities, really, in life, and, like, say—my first AT was Iceland. How different is that? You don't have any alcohol in the country.

TS: You don't?

RH: The only alcohol is on bases.

TS: Is that right?

RH: So the funniest thing in the world is seeing an Icelandic person getting drunk. There's nothing funnier, because they're going to end up on the table, okay? But all the hot water springs. They don't have any hot water heaters like we do; everything is generated underground; hot water springs. I remember them telling me, "If you hit a sheep—If you're driving around touring, you hit a sheep, you got to pay for the sheep, and the wool it would have made for five years." So you just try to make a point not to run over anything.

TS: Did you ever hit any?

RH: No. No, no, no, no, no.

TS: Oh good.

RH: But when my—when my spon—I left New York at ninety-two degrees and I went to Iceland, and my sponsor met me with a parka, with the fur around the head.

TS: Right.

RH: I said, "What have I gotten myself into?" And then they had—you had to—you had to take a—they had rope going from building to building, or wire or something you had to grab ahold of it and pull yourself to the next building because the wind was so strong.

TS: Right.

RH: And the wind, I remember looking out the window one day, and it was like a trash dumpster, and it was just rolling along like it was a tumbleweed. You're like, "God, I hope it doesn't run across a car and just cru—"

TS: Probably would.

RH: It probably does. I went to a—I remember this—I went to a softball game, and they would pitch way outside, in front of the person, and just hope it would come in.

TS: Because of the wind?

RH: The wind was so strong.

TS: [chuckles]

RH: That was a very—That was my first time, my first trip, I'm twenty—I was probably twenty-three when I went to Iceland. That was my very first trip in the navy—in the navy reserve—for two weeks.

TS: What do you think you've learned about having traveled around the world and seen different cultures? What did you bring back with you? Do you want me to pause it for a minute?

RH: Yeah, can you?

TS: Yeah.

[Recording Paused]

TS: That's alright. Okay, we took a short break but—

RH: We're back.

TS: —Robin's going to answer the culture question.

RH: Yes. Well, my main thing is that I love how people can—you go to different places and there's different kind of pe—Italians and Icelandics and whatever—but it's just the same thing everywhere you go, it's still family, even though things are a little different. But I love the vertility—Sorry, I can't say that word.

TS: Versatility?

RH: —versatility of different cultures; like, bringing different people together. I've always, even when I was young, I just couldn't understand the whole black and white thing. I never have. I still can't quite figure it out. Because we all bleed red, and we all should be treated the same, and it just—it's always bothered me. I just can't get it, and I just always hate if anybody ever looks at me because I'm not like that. I'm just—I just want everyone to be treated equal.

But that's really what I take about—take from all the places I've been to, is that we're all the same; we're really just all the same; we just all trying to get through it. We're all just trying to get through this thing called Life, as Prince [Rogers Nelson] [American singer, multi-instrumentalist, songwriter, and record producer] would say.

TS: That's right, yeah. Rest in Peace.

RH: He passed away yesterday, we're bringing that up in our interview.

TS: That's right. Well, is there something that you think that you might have learned, that if you hadn't been in the navy you maybe wouldn't have been open to it?

RH: You're asking some really great questions, and I probably sometimes wish I could think on them a little bit, instead of just reacting. But the navy's, like, the best thing that ever happened to me. It's the—Jill Klutz[?], thanks a lot. And I really mean it.

TS: [chuckles]

RH: Sometimes sarcastically. But no, it really does. I never had any children, and now I'm fifty-four years and I mentor these young people, and that's why it's hard for me to retire and give it up. I don't know what's going to happen when that happens, but—go on to the other phase of my life. But there's—No, I mean, it just—it opened a lot of doors. I mean, I've met so many people that have shaped my life and guided me, and now I'm doing—I'm returning the favor. I guess that's the biggest thing that I've got out of it.

But I've not—I know we talked about it a little bit in—when we turned off the recorder. I am a little bit nervous right now, and one thing was, I was extremely—remember that throwing up the first three days of school?

TS: Okay.

RH: Okay, well, evidently I knew, probably from a early age, that I was not your typical person to get up and do public speaking. I don't think I had a lot of confidence, and I think even to this day I fool a lot of people by acting like I'm a leader. And maybe I am one, but I've probably got a lot of people fooled. [chuckles]

TS: Yeah. What you're projecting on the outside may not be what you're feeling internally?

RH: Sometimes it's not, no. But it has gotten over years. And I definitely attribute that completely, utterly, to the military. I remember being in high school and, oh my God, I didn't even want to read my little section—you know it was your turn to read the section in the book?

TS: Yes.

RH: I wasn't even listening. When they—I knew what section was coming up and I'd be practicing my section.

TS: The whole time?

RH: But yeah. I never wanted to get up and do public speaking, but it's something now that I don't really have a big problem with. It doesn't matter. I work—I think I do a lot better if it's a small group though. I mean, if it's ten of us in a room, I feel like I will get more done than if I'm speaking to a thousand people, or a hundred people, or something like that.

TS: That's an interesting way to look at it, too, because it's more of a nurturing group with ten, right? You can touch each of them.

RH: Yeah, exactly. But I guess that, for me, is that the biggest thing I've got from the military, is just my confidence. I guess it'd be the number one thing I'd say, would be my confidence and—my confidence in myself. And then as you—That's just the military way, though, is you get—is you progress. It's just a wonderful system. And the thing about the military is they don't care if you're a woman, a man, or black or white or purple or green; you get advanced. In the civilian world it doesn't work that way. Unfortunately, it's a lot by looks and who you know, and it just can't work that way in the military. You take a test—You all take a test, all the way up to the E-6 ranks, and it's based on that. It has nothing to do with your gender or who you are or what you are or nothing. It's just—You're just a piece of paper.

TS: Right.

RH: But you're all equal piece of paper. Does that kind of make sense?

TS: Yeah, it makes sense.

RH: Okay.

TS: I was going to ask you a question about with gender, then. When you went in in '84, and now you're still in the Reserve, how did it change, in your personal experience, for women in the navy? It's a pretty broad question.

RH: No, that's a pretty—that's a great question. I know this is going to sound shocking, because it shocks everybody, but I've been in thirty-two years this past April, and I've never spent any time on a ship. So that's the big thing that's different. You could—If I had gone on active duty I would have gone to sea; I'd of had to. But being in the Reserves, it never happened. Especially with the type of job I did, being a CT, it never came up.

About three years ago I got to go to the USS *New York* and I got to spend the night on a ship, and it was probably right up there with one of the highlights of my life.

TS: Yeah.

RH: I choke up.

TS: Is that because you felt like that's the navy, being on a ship, or it's something—

RH: Yeah, it is, because I think I've got—I've heard a lot of people say, "You've never been to sea?" Or, "What ship were you on?"

And I'm like, "I wasn't on a ship."

TS: That's like in the air force; "What? You didn't fly planes or—"

RH: Yeah, that kind of goes back to "you're not a veteran." People just don't understand that it doesn't have to be that way.

TS: You do other things.

RH: But yeah, I think sometimes I—that kind of goes back to my regret over not staying on active duty. I think I would have gotten a lot more opportunities to do really cool things in the world; to experience them.

But that night on the USS *New York* was really special. It was special anyway because the *New York* was the reason I went on active duty. It was part of New York

TS: Right, the attacks.

RH: —and the other plane crashed in the Pentagon.

TS: Right.

RH: But we all mentally—first we all think of the Twin Towers when we think of 9/11; that's the first thing our thoughts go to. And so, kind of like that was the steel. The steel from that ship was from the Twin Towers. Part of—And then they've got all these memorials on the ship that you have—you can take pictures of, and it's actually the steel from 9/11,

from the Twin Towers. So that was just an emotional trip. It was really emotional.

TS: Now, this happened after you had been at the Pentagon?

RH: Yes. Oh yeah, this was just a couple of years ago. We took some chiefs up there that—chief selects that had made chief—and we took them on a trip up there to get their uniforms in the uniform shop, and we made a few connections. And we'd done this before but we'd never hooked up and actually spent the night. We'd go up for a day and come back.

TS: Yeah.

RH: One year we went up and we just went to a ship—and we went to two ships—and we just visited for the day, and then we came back. Their chief selects and our chief selects got together and did some stuff, and then we talked with the other chief that were on board the ship.

TS: Like a day trip?

RH: And then the next year we planned it, and someone had a connection and we stayed in chiefs' barracks, and got to stay on the ship and eat and sleep for one night. It was, like, a twenty-four hour period we were on the ship. So it was a great—it was just a great opportunity. I'll never forget that either. That was the highlight of my life. One of them.

TS: Yeah.

RH: Then another time I was in a PSD unit—a Personnel Supply unit [correction: Personnel Support Detachment]—and this is probably one of the other highlights—I want to make sure this gets in the interview—but I was the only other khaki[enlisted]. I had an officer lieutenant commander, and it was me, the next person, and we didn't have anybody else. We had her lieutenant commander, I'm an E-7, and then we had E-5 and below. There's no E-6, and you always have E-6s in unit because they help—they help the officers and the middle people—the chiefs. So she calls me, she goes, "Tag, you're it."

And I go, "What do you mean, tag, I'm it?"

And she goes, "Well, tag, you're it."

And I go, "Well, explain."

So she says, "Well, I'm being recalled to active duty so, tag, you're it."

TS: [chuckles]

RH: And I go, "Well, I can do anything for three months. Two to three days in the Reserve is two days a month.

And she goes, "No, they're not sending anybody to take my place." So the next fifteen months I was the officer in charge of the unit.

TS: Where was that at?

RH: This was in NAS [correction: Navy Recruiting Station] Greensboro.

TS: Okay.

RH: And it's like, you were a chief and you were able—you go from being an E-6, and nobody probably cares what you think, but then the next day you pin on your anchors and you're an E-7 and everybody loves you to death and they want to hear what you got to say. It's amazing.

But then just take it up a notch; that now you really do have some power. It's just—It's a power thing. It's not a power thing in a bad way, it's a power thing in a good way, if you use it to do good.

TS: Right.

RH: A magic wand, let's get some good things going. One of the things is I got to send people to all kinds of schools that they wanted to go to. I sent two of my—Two of my guys, I sent them to Hawaii, and they took their wives with them. So they went to do a mission that they needed to do, and their wives got to go, too, and they got to go spend a week in Hawaii. And one of my guys, he's from Greece—his mother and father lived in Greece—and I sent him to Greece and he got to see his family and he was on a mission. So that's just an example. I mean, that's just a very brief example of things.

TS: But it's a way that you can connect with your troops, right?

RH: Absolutely. And then they think the world of you. It's not just always finding something bad. You're actually working for something good. But then I had, like—throughout my career, I had, like, seventeen Sailor[s] of the Quarter, Sailor[s] of the Year, and that's—you're going the extra mile, because it's going to make a big deal in their life as they get advanced.

TS: You mean the people that were under you got that?

RH: Yes.

TS: Okay.

RH: And so, I always had a reputation that everyone would come—some of the other units would come ask me, they're like, "Do you have anybody this time?"

TS: [chuckles]

RH: Because they didn't want to go up against me, because they knew that the only reason I would ever put in a package was if I thought they would win. I didn't want to do it if they wasn't good. They'd have to be really good. I didn't want to do it. So people—Some people would come by my office and knock, "Hey, you got anybody this quarter?"

And I go, "No."
"Okay, okay good."

TS: Well, it's really interesting, because the way that you talk about being mentored, and then mentoring the other ones later, it sounds like that's a powerful thing for you. I mean, powerful in the way that it's emboldened you to help others in ways, maybe, that you were helped. Or even not helped, maybe.

[Speaking Simultaneously]

RH: Again, we go back to this way back when. I had no one. I don't—I just—I don't blame anybody either.

TS: Right.

RH: I just—I just don't think—A lot of times—My brother that was in high school with me—a little bit older—he kind of like—he was like a scoundrel, sort of. He just—He might be known to smoke a little pot [marijuana] or drink a little bit or do—and I think a lot of sch—a lot of teachers, when they saw me coming, held me in that light.

TS: By the standards of your brother?

RH: They held me in that st—And I couldn't be more different. I was a preppy—My senior year in high school I had perfect attendance.

TS: [chuckles] Nobody does that, Robin.

RH: I know. Well, I didn't get—there's another side to that story too. My mom was so cool, and everybody come to our house. Everyone always stayed at our house because my mom was so cool. We were the house that all the kids wanted to come to because we had so much fun. But she'd write me notes. I'd just go to homeroom and check in and then I'd leave.

TS: [chuckles]

RH: So yeah, I had a perfect attendance, but my mom always knew where I was when I was cutting class. She just wanted us to always be honest with her, and she did—it's not like—we knew she was our mom, but she was just a cool mom.

TS: Right.

RH: As long as you—if you were—if you didn't go out drinking and it's 3:00 in the morning, she really did mean it when she said, "Call me, I will come and get you." And she meant it. She was not going to fuss at you or yell at you or anything. She will come and get you

and bring you home, and that would be the end of it; you called her. Because once she argued with you or fussed with you, that would have been the end of that.

TS: Then you're done.

RH: Yeah.

TS: Well, let me ask you—

RH: Yeah?

TS: The way you chose to mentor others is maybe a strong part because you didn't have mentors.

RH: Yeah.

TS: Except for the one that you said came later that helped you become chief.

RH: Yeah. It was a lot later. It was, like, in my—God, I didn't meet Cheryl until—I'd already been in the navy nineteen years.

TS: In your field, are there a lot of women, comparative to the men?

RH: It was probably more men, but we had our fair share of women.

TS: Fair share?

RH: Yeah.

TS: Did you have women, though, who were in positions of leadership?

RH: No. No.

TS: Maybe that's one reason you didn't have the mentors.

RH: No. I will tell you that—and again, I'm never ever going to point fingers. Everything works out the way it's supposed to. But I remember I got really upset sometimes because, let's say your top three people in your unit get to early promote, or they get the good evals, and I'd always be right there at four. But I'm up front doing admin, and I'm doing evals, and I'm doing chief stuff, I'm an E-4, E-5 and I'm doing E-7 work, I'm doing officer work—I'm the admin officer, I'm the training officer, the training chief—I'm doing everything. I'm running around. Everybody knows who I am. I know everybody's kids. I know everything about everybody. But I'm not in the back in operations, okay? And so, it would always be here's these top three people, and most of the time it would be guys. But most of the time, even one of those would get promoted, you'd think, "Okay, my turn. I'm going to run—I'm going to the top third spot, right? And work my way up.

TS: Right.

RH: They'd get somebody else in operations, and that would person would be—and you'd be like, "What?" You kind of had your hands in the air. And I have to be—And I've told this story—And I'm the type of person that if I can't say it right now—I'm not scared to say it—but I've told people many times—I just told the story yesterday to someone at reserves—I said, "If I hadn't left here, I'd have never made chief. I'd have never made E-7."

TS: Right.

RH: Chief's a big deal in the navy. I mean, I don't know—I know you're air force, but a chief's a big deal.

TS: I'm learning, Robin, I'm learning.

RH: No, no, no, no, no. But it is a big deal in our—in the navy. I don't know about the air force. I don't know what E-7 means in your group.

But I was too busy getting my degree, it really wasn't a priority early on. Like I said, my dad died in '91 with cancer—stomach cancer—and then my grandfather died in '95. My brother who was thirty-eight, Danny, he was an alcoholic, and he died—he went into a coma on Christmas Eve and died on New Year's Day. And then my mom died in '97. I graduated with my four year degree on May the third, my mom died on May 27. But she knew it happened. She didn't get to come because she'd already had a stroke. She had a brain tumor and it was a category five, and they gave her six months to live and she lived about two months. But she knew it happened.

But like I said, I was the first person to ever go that far in my family. And so, I hope I have inspired my nieces and nephews and stuff. They've all gone on—Some of them have gone on to get degrees, and I hope that they knew it was possible, you know what I mean?

TS: Sure. I definitely do.

RH: But I told them, I said, "If I hadn't left—Then I left and I just flourished." I mean, I was already flourishing but I was already put on a peg[?].

TS: Because you went into the operations side when you left?

RH: Right. Because when I was in my unit I did admin stuff. When I went off on two week trips, or when I got activated from presidential recall, I was working in operations. And that did help me, because here's a CTA, an administrative person, but they're going off and they're doing—I went to Hawaii and did operations, forty-five days. Then I went to England, I did a whole different mission and learned a whole new equipment and become a supervisor. And I was there eight months doing that.

Then I went to Germany for three months. Totally different operation. I can't talk

about it, but we were doing a whole different mission. Did that. It was a two man operation for three months. It was a really cool experience.

And then I left there and I went to Washington D.C. and I was [jewel badged?]. I worked at the FBI [Federal Bureau of Investigation], which was the beginning of homeland security, and the name of that—the name of that was National Infrastructure Protection Center, and it was at the [J. Edgar] Hoover Building.

TS: Okay.

RH: But I worked with a two star admiral; Admiral Plehaw[?]. He was very good to me.

[Speaking Simultaneously]

TS: How long were you there?

RH: Well, I was in D.C. for one year, and I worked at both places. I handled some things for them at the Pentagon, and then I'd come over to that building and do some stuff there.

TS: The Hoover Building? The FBI Building?

RH: The FBI Building. And then I had a badge for the FBI Building, but then I had a badge to get in the Pentagon, and the badge for the Pentagon got me in almost anywhere. Because I—They would send me anywhere, I was one of their carriers. I would take things and bring them things. Again, I'm just an E-6 right then, so I'm still a young un'.

TS: They were using you to courier and things.

RH: I would go pick things up at the White House, and anywhere they wanted me to go. They had buses and you just go get on the bus and you'd just go, and you'd do that. I had a golf—I had a cart—I had a golf cart at the Pentagon.

TS: [chuckles] Yeah?

RH: So I knew every elevator.

[Speaking Simultaneously]

TS: That's pretty neat.

RH: I knew—When my family came up to visit, and we went on a Sunday, there's not many people there, and I'm taking them around to the Pentagon, and my uncle looks at me, he goes, "Are you not lost yet?"

And I went, "Not possible." Because I learned every shortcut. Because it's—A lot of people don't know this, but it's like—you know how you have tall buildings? Well, this is one of the widest buildings in the world.

TS: Widest. It's the rings?

RH: It's seventeen—It's one of the trivia questions I ask people—It's 17.5 miles a corridor, and there's five loops. And the more important you are, is the further you're out in the loop. So my boss was a SES-4 [Senior Executive Service, Level 4 Pay], which is equivalent to a four star general. He was a civilian. Here I'm back with civilians again.

TS: Right.

RH: I wore civilian clothes because of where I went and what I did. I didn't wear my uniform, and that was kind of—I had to go out and buy some dress clothes.

TS: Yeah. While you're at the Pentagon—you kind of alluded to this before we turned the tape on—about your experience being there after the attack and seeing it, kind of, put back together.

RH: Rebuilt.

TS: Yeah. What are your thoughts on all that?

RH: Even a year later there were still—That whole—That section of—That whole section of that octagon was still plastic, and I remember I drove by there all the time. It was pretty far away from where I was at. I was facing—I was near [Secretary of Defense] Donald Rumsfeld's office; I wasn't too far away from him; a couple of corridors down. Which I actually got to meet him and that was a pretty big deal. That's another story. We had a Make-A-Wish Foundation, and so I got invited to go.

But we faced the Potomac [River] and the Washington Monument. We faced that direction, [in which?] [unclear] we got bombed, was from the highway. So it's the opposite side from where I was. So of course, I didn't just walk over there. If I was driving around in my golf cart—in my little cart—and we would—I'd go over there quite often. But I remember when it did, in my year that I was there it got finished.

TS: Did it?

RH: Because I remember going down to the stained glass. If you ever get to go up there and you get an opportunity to go, I highly recommend it; the chapel that they built. It's part of that entrance into that section, is a chapel dedicated to the people that lost their lives, and to the military and whatnot, what happened.

But a lot of people I worked with had a lot of stories. One guy I worked with was a army—he was just a little baby—and he told me he—it took him a while for him—me—we got really close over the period of a year, but we used to go out and have a few beers and whatever, and he would open up about it and he'd break down crying. Because

he—It happened, everyone evacuated the building. See, we're on the opposite side of what happened, he's out there running out there trying to—"Who can we pull out? What can we do?" Everything's on fire, everything's destroyed. But he told me stories all about—I felt like I was there because his detail was so vivid.

TS: Right. He had a visceral remembrance of it.

RH: Exactly.

TS: Yeah. I do want to finish your time that you were on active then. You went to Key West after that, is that right?

RH: It was part of that whole deal. I just never really took a break. So I did a year of presidential recall in '92, and then it went into a second year of presidential recall. It just—It extended. It never ended, but it just kept—like, I have—one of my ribbons is in the reserve for ten years [Armed Forces Reserve Medal?], but on that ribbon you have an M for mobilized. If I had had more than one mobilization it would have a two to the right of that. Well, I don't have any. All of mine—

TS: Oh, I see, because it was continuous.

RH: All of mine just ran in together.

TS: I got you.

RH: Which I haven't quite figured out. Anyway, so three years presidential recall, and then I went to—I picked up ADSW [Active Duty for Special Work] orders to Key West, Florida, for a year, to work for Joint Interagency Task Force South. And what we dealt with down there was—trafficking in drugs, really, is what they—their main mission was stopping drugs from coming in from South America to this country. But, of course, we're doing—we're dealing with information that has to do with bad guys; espionage, and trying to hurt our country. It's all together, you're doing the same thing, but that [unclear] mission, that's what our real mission was.

TS: Interesting, okay.

RH: And so, I had to pick up orders to get that. I had a friend that lived there, so what I always—I'd always kind of jokingly said, "If I ever get orders down here—" So I found orders. Actually, Cheryl Heighten[?], she found them and she showed them to me, and I said, "Oh, yeah, I think I'll try to get that. They probably won't ever pick me." They actually wanted an E-5, they didn't want an E-6. They probably didn't want an E-6 because they were scared they'd make E-7.

TS: Oh, right, right.

RH: And then what? Well, anyway. So they did take me, and they take you for a year, because

it probably takes six months to train. And then they're like, "Well, we want to get our money's worth, so I had a year. And so, when I was there a year I extended for a second year, which I'm sure they were happy about, because they got two good years from me, from working with them. And my main job was, then—I'd gone back to a different hat again, so I was there to handle clearances for people that worked there, and people that are going to South America to do their jobs. So I handled my own section of the alphabet. Like, there were three of us, so somebody had A through G, and someone had H through—and somebody had the third part of the alphabet. And there was one civilian, she had one section, and then I had one section, and then there was another CTA—I was still a CTA—and she was a E-5 and she had one section. She was active duty.

TS: Okay.

RH: Then we had a sergeant first class. We had two other civilian—four other civilian females. It was four civilian females all together, and then one sergeant first class, army, and then me—I was a CTA-1—and then another CTA-2, and then that was our office.

And so, while I was there, I'm like, "While I'm here I might as well get my—" I don't know if you—NECs [Navy Enlisted Classification]? Like, you have your job, maybe in the air force, but then you have—you might get specialized in something, and you might go to school to learn how to do that better. Well, while I was there I said, "I want to get my 9190," which is security specialist, and that's my NEC, 9190. So I got—worked on that. Some of that is on the job training, and then some of that is actual—on the computer, having to do classwork courses. So I ended up getting that before I left. And then I also picked up chief before I left.

TS: Oh, you get it?

RH: Yes. And I'm sure my boss wasn't too hap—I mean, I think she's probably happy because it was at the end of my two years.

TS: Right.

RH: So I was on my way. Now, if it had happened a year before, it probably would have been a different story, but I don't think a whole lot was different. But I did have to go through induction, and I was away from the office a little bit there, for about forty-five days.

TS: Right, for that period at the end, right?

RH: It went for, like—Yeah—It went for a little bit. It's not, "Okay, go do this for a week and come back."

TS: Was that one of your most rewarding experiences?

RH: Yeah. I used to tell people that—I used to tell them, like, "Well, if I ever make chief, it'll probably be the second greatest thing that's ever happened in my life, aside from me getting my degree from High Point University, because I worked full time, I was in the

Reserves full time, I was traveling, I had a house, I had four cars; I had a whole big life, and I'm trying to go to school at night to finish and get my degree. Which I started it during the day, and then I finished, I was at night.

TS: Yeah.

RH: But no. No, no, no, no, after those forty-five days. And you're on an island, you can't really hide. But it was tough. But I wouldn't trade it for a million dollars. I wouldn't want to do it again, but I wouldn't trade it for anything in the world. And I wish everybody could do it.

But the day—My aunt and uncle came down—that's the only people that came down in my family—but the day they came down and pinned on my anchors, I'm like, "Whew. This is—" I earned them.

TS: Yeah?

RH: Yeah. And I was like—And I will tell people, that's the greatest accomplishment I ever had.

TS: Yeah. I don't think I've talked to anyone who's become a chief that doesn't feel that way.

RH: You have a few people that don't go through it, but I really hate that for them because you truly—it's—you're black-balled [rejected] the rest of your career and it kind of follows you. They don't think it'll follow them and they don't realize how big the world is.

TS: If they don't actually go through it?

RH: Yeah. Most of them end up—like, we've had it happen.

TS: Yeah?

RH: But most of them go back. They'll realize their ways and they'll go—the next year they'll go through.

TS: Oh, okay.

RH: They might say—

TS: So they choose not to?

RH: They'll say, "I can't do it. It's too hard. I don't want to do it." They'll come up with excuses—family, my job—we will bend completely over backwards to help anybody get through anything.

TS: Right.

RH: But if you just keep coming up with excuses, and excuses, excuses, and then they end up quitting, and then they'll think, "I'll leave here and go to the next command," but it stays with you.

TS: Right. It's attached to you.

RH: Most people, it's nothing that's too hard. If I can get through it, and I was forty when I went through it.

TS: Yeah. Well, that's really cool. I'm going to ask you a couple things that are general questions. Well, I have asked you some things like that. What was the hardest thing that you ever had to do, either emotionally or physically, in the navy?

RH: Well, chief was emotionally and physically really—

TS: Chief? That was the hardest?

RH: It was the hardest. I mean, boot camp was hard, but I was already in really—

TS: Good shape. You weren't forty.

RH: I was in good shape. Yeah, but I think it was mental because, I mean, chief's induction and boot camp were sort of the same thing. Induction for chief is sort of like boot camp for—it's sort of boot camp for chiefs.

TS: Yeah? There you go.

RH: In boot camp they break everybody. Everyone's—They want everybody to be a zero; we're all on the same playing ground—flat playing ground; everyone's equal. And then after that, it's up to you what you do with it, but when you go into boot camp, take away your clothes, take away pride, take away everything, and then they rebuild you, but it's rebuild you all the way up together. I don't know if it was like that for you in the air force. But that was the hardest. None of the other stuff, even traveling, none of the jobs, they were never—

TS: Did you have a favorite place that you liked?

RH: Greece.

TS: Greece?

RH: Greece. The island of Honya[?].

TS: What was so great about that?

RH: It's just so beautiful.

TS: Yeah.

RH: You're on an island. Greece was—Athens was pretty, but it wasn't like—We went to a little restaurant, and we went in and the lady was so cool. She's like—When you walk in they have lunch, it was up on a—we were up on a—this time we were up on the side of a mountain, and she takes you back into her kitchen and she lets you—big old pots on the stove, and she just opens the tops and let you look over in the pots.

TS: To see what's in there?

RH: Unless you look at what's in the pot, and then you just point and tell them what you want. Then you go get your beer and go sit down at the table. And the other one was on the ocean, and the water was so blue, there was no way you could take a picture and show or even tell anybody. It's in my head. But we were just sitting out there—We ordered some food and we're sitting out there having a drink or a glass of wine. And then there was, like, these little kids over here playing in the ocean; they were butt naked and nobody cared. It was just so laid back; so relaxed atmosphere. But everything—I loved everything about Greece. That was my—And people ask me all the time, "What's your favorite place?" And I go—

TS: What about your least favorite then?

RH: Least favorite. I don't have any least favorites.

TS: No?

RH: No, they're all good in a different way. I don't really have a bad one.

TS: That's a great answer, I think. Now, what about, in a general way, how do you think your relationships with your supervisors and superiors were, both men and women? How would you characterize your experiences? You were in a long time.

RH: I know.

TS: If they changed, you can talk about that.

RH: They changed because women became more supervisors. [chuckles] There you go. We became bosses.

TS: Did that make a difference?

RH: Yeah. I mean, I've told you a few examples of when I was in my unit and I just kept—I felt like I just kept getting overlooked. I mean, you know what? We don't hear their side of the story.

TS: Right.

RH: You're only hearing my side.

TS: You were kind of framing that though about them being on operations and you being in admin. Did it have a gender issue?

RH: I always kind of wondered if it did not have a little something to do with—

TS: Gender?

RH: Because in my little time period there, it wasn't ever the girl—it wasn't girls. A couple of girls had already made E-7, and then both of them made E-8. But then it's like, during my little timeframe, it was al—it was guys; the guys. So I can't—

TS: Oh, so you mean later women were making—

RH: In my little timeframe, when I was going, these were my mentors; these two had already kind of did their thing. But they were—Again, those two people were in ops too.

TS: Okay.

RH: That could have helped them. So I wouldn't say—

TS: Maybe a combination?

RH: I don't think it probably was male or female in the case of that. Even the guy when we were in England and he wasn't happy with us, I don't think that nothing—that had any—he just wanted people in there that knew what they were doing, and we didn't. [chuckles]

TS: That could do the equipment, right.

RH: Exactly. Exactly.

TS: Did you ever have any kind of experience with sexual discrimination or harassment?

RH: Yeah, I've had sexual harassment. I haven't thought about that in a long time either. I had a—I had two incidents that happened. They were with the same person. One was when I made E-6. Normally what you do, and you probably do this in the air force, is you get in front of the whole unit, and these are the ones that made—that got promoted.

TS: Right.

RH: And we never really did ours in a drill hall. We would do ours in our own little facility, in our own classroom. We did our own thing. Anyway, I made E-6, and back in the day—have you heard of tacking on?

TS: Yes.

RH: So you know about hitting someone in the arm?

TS: Yes, with the actual pin, right?

RH: And that tacks it on. No, it's your fist.

TS: Right.

RH: A tack on is your fist.

["Tacking on the crow" refers to the practice of punching the arm of a newly-promoted Petty Officer, a practice now in disfavor due to past abuses]

TS: Oh, tack on, okay.

RH: That's a tack on.

TS: Some of them, when they have the pins on the—

RH: Well, they probably went into your—

TS: Yeah.

RH: Yeah. That's probably part of it too. Because I've heard stories of sailors on ships way back in the day, and they would put their arm against a pole—they put the new person's arm against a pole—a newly promoted person—they'd get up on the top bunk and they'd come down on their arm against the pole. They probably broke it. Probably—And see, what you're doing is you're damaging government property.

TS: Right.

RH: That's why they used to not want you to go out and get a sunburn. You were go—damaging government property.

TS: What happened when you made E-6?

RH: He—They were all in line, and they were all coming through and shaking my hand, and some of them would act like they were going to hit me in the arm; like, they'd go and they'd tap me; like, just tap it. Anyway, he came through there—and he was a police officer, he's six foot five [inches], he probably, like, two [hundred] twenty-five [pounds], ain't nothing but muscle—and he acted like he was going to hit it, and then he's going to

tap it, and then he ran back and he actually hit me. And I didn't know what was going on. And there's a whole room of officers and chiefs, and warrant officers, and en—it's a whole room of people—like thirty people—and nobody saw anything. And I was just like—And then I didn't realize until later, but I went into shock, because I did whatever, and I don't even know where I was at. I didn't even know where I was at hardly. And I know that I somehow went down the hallway and I walked outside—and this is when we used to have an XO—CO and an XO—at the command. We don't have anybody but a CO now. But anyway, he walked by about the time I walked out our door, and tears started streaming down my eyes; no control, don't know where it came from. And he's just like, "What is going on? What is wrong with you? Get in my office." He took me up front and I was just like—I was probably babbling; I probably didn't have a clue.

TS: You were probably still in shock.

RH: I'm still—I'm in total shock.

TS: Right.

RH: So I told him what happened, and then he gets with the—he gets with the officers of the unit and command and everybody said they didn't see anything. We're like, "Really?" Sort of like, "Really?"

But then he got dealt with, because obviously—well, the next day, my arm had my handprint—had his handprint in my arm, and his ring on his finger.

TS: Oh. Imprinted?

RH: My whole arm was imprinted, bruised, in my arm.

TS: Oh my goodness.

RH: So I never forgot. He's right. I never forgot when I made E-6. You're right. Same guy. Might have been maybe a year or two later or something, we go to Hawaii. We got to share a car. I get there first. I get into the room—I get the car, I get the room. He's on his way out there, from my unit. No problem. "I'll come pick you up at the airport." I said, "In an hour or two I'll have you on the beach with a Mai Tai in your hand. Got you covered." Because I've already got everything worked out, right?

So I pick him up, we're driving back, and then—so we're walking—I got him checked in, we're all going out. We had some drinks and stuff. It was just me and him. It might have been somebody—one other person. But anyway, he, like, tells me that night he's like, "We just going to shack up for the next two weeks and then nobody will know." And it's just that kind of thing. It happened quite often; that happened quite often.

TS: Yeah?

RH: Things like that. I was just like, "Hell no, I ain't going to shack up with you, crazy fool." But he hit on me all the time. And he hit on me. He hit on me and then he literally

hit on me, and then he—yeah, verbally hit on me.

TS: How did you handle it?

RH: I just handled that one myself. Because the old story used to be "what happens on missions, stays on mission." It wasn't any point in running and telling anybody. He made advances to me. It wasn't like he just said that and that was the end of it. He—Little innuendos. We worked together every day.

TS: Right.

RH: But I just dealt with it. But a lot of times, you just have to do that.

TS: Were you ever in a position where—

RH: You couldn't?

TS: No, but I mean, like, when women are coming to you and telling you about their experiences where you then have to help handle it for them.

RH: I've had a couple situations that things have happened or been said and we'd have to just—you just have to write things up. "Okay, let's go to a room, let me write everything down. Let me grab another female." I always tried to do things—Even if I couldn't get another female, I'd get a guy, because I always wanted it to be not just me hearing this.

TS: Right.

RH: I just really believe in the two-man integrity on a lot of things.

TS: Yeah. What about for discipline, then, men or women? Like, when you have to go through disciplinary procedures for whatever, was there anything that ever struck you as a difficult one? You don't have to say specifics.

RH: No. We've had them. Especially being in the chief's ranks. A lot of times we have a chief's board that they can come to, and it's the first—like, they may get warnings about things, like finan—different things in their life; it could be marital, could be a lot of things, financial, it could be situations that happen. We're the first board that they're going to come in front of, and we always hope that hopefully we'll scare the bejibees out of you and we're going to straighten you out.

TS: Right.

RH: We always hope, and that we can—but then whatever our recommendation is to the commanding officer, they might have to go to CO's board to—so we just—

TS: And sometimes they do, right?

RH: We do. We have to say—And then some of them will do it private, it'll just be in his office or in a room, and then sometimes he'll want it to be in a drill hall in front of the—he'll make the whole command come in there. Horrible. You're the only one front and center, patting your hand, and everybody else is just watching.

TS: What kinds of situations would be the one like that?

RH: How far out would it get to get there?

TS: Yeah. How far would it be to get—

RH: Disobeying orders, of any fashion. You just keep disobeying them and you're being wrote up, and you're being wrote up, and you're just—it's not—it's time for you to go.

TS: But that almost seems to me like if it's out in front of everybody, where that's happening, right—

RH: It's near the end.

TS: It's near the end, but it's also they're making an example out of that.

RH: They are, exactly. Exactly.

TS: "This is what's going to happen to you."

RH: Right.

TS: Okay.

RH: And maybe it's a scare tactic, but it might work. It might straighten somebody else out that's got a problem. Maybe they're hitting on their wife or spouse or something, and maybe it'll make them trigger something and go, "You know what? I need to ask for help."

TS: Right.

RH: When I do clearances, the number one people—reason people lose their clearance was because of finances. That was the number one reason. Here, I'm an active duty guy and I've gone off to active duty to do this, and then normally I pay the bills and I wrote the checks. All of a sudden my wife had to take over ownership of that. That's the first thing out of their mouths: "Well, I used to do it and now my wife does it."
"We can't help that. I've got to pull your clearance. You're done. You can't even do your job now because you don't have your clearance."

TS: Yeah.

RH: So I can send someone home and they can probably get it straightened out, but you're done for right now.

TS: Oh, wow, okay. Well, you've talked about some of these already.

RH: Okay.

TS: Did you have any heroes or heroines in your time in the service?

RH: Well, that lady we were talking about, the E-9 that I got to meet.

TS: World War II veteran?

RH: Yeah, she's been around a lot. But she was the first E-9 in any service.

TS: Oh, is that right?

RH: She never knew it. Me and her were friends and we corresponded in email; Anna Van Darian. I think that's her name. I hope I didn't butcher it up too bad.

[On 16 December 1959, Anna Der-Vartanian became the U.S. Navy's first female master chief petty officer; this made her the first female master chief in the navy, as well as the first female E-9 in the entire U.S. armed services]

TS: We can look it up.

RH: I can send you—I have stuff on her, I can send it to you. But she was an amazing person, and I'm really honored—honored, honored—that I had got a chance to meet her.

TS: That's really neat.

RH: She was definitely one of—right—way up there.

TS: Let's see. Here's some of the cultural things. When you joined in '84, there was a policy not to have any gays or homosexuals in the military. But then came "Don't Ask, Don't Tell" during the [William Jefferson] Clinton Administration, and that was repealed by President [Barrack Hussein] Obama. What are your thoughts on that whole homosexuality in the military issue?

["Don't Ask, Don't Tell" was 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 person from military service. "Don't Ask, Don't Tell" was repealed 20 September 2011]

RH: Well, I'm gay, and I was gay all the whole time I've been in. They didn't know I was gay because it was basically "don't ask, don't tell."

TS: And your clearance, too.

RH: But even before that—Oh yeah, I have no idea, because I'm sure they could have found a lot of things.

TS: Did it make you nervous?

RH: They could have probably—Oh yeah, all the way back to A School. I'm in A School and I'm like, "What?" I would have never gone into that if I had known I had to have a Top Secret clearance. I didn't know that I had to have a Top Secret clearance until I'm in Pensacola.

TS: Right.

RH: He didn't make that clear way up here early on. Because I wouldn't have even wanted a Secret. I would have just tried to probably gone in and not—did something else and not did that. I went in to communications and that's what did and that's what happened, and I'm, like, just shocked that—It only come up—You know what? Honest to God, it only came up one time, and that was when I was in Key West and it still wasn't—

TS: How did it come up?

RH: My investigator.

TS: What happened? What year was that? Two thousand and something?

RH: Let's see, I was there 2—I left there in—

TS: Five.

RH: This was probably around 2004ish. Two thousand—Probably 2004. Yeah. So I remember him interviewing me under the picnic table outside. We were right along the water. I remember sitting outside and he brought up—he goes, "Well, you have a friend here, Tony. He's gay. You have a friend here and he acts a little peculiar.

And I went, "Really? He seems fine to me." And I never would take the bait; I never took the bait. I never swayed, and this was before "Don't—" this was—no, if I'd have said, "Yeah, he's gay and so am I," I'd have been packing my bags that day.

TS: Right.

RH: And you just don't know. I've had a lie detector test through NSA, and they—back in the early days they asked you—it wasn't no beating around the bush, it was, "Are you gay? Are you a homosexual?"

And you just went, "Nope." And you just went, "Nope. Nope. Nope." I've lied on numerous pieces of paper. I had to. I mean, I didn't have a choice because I didn't know what I was getting into at the time.

But I've had friends that were railroaded [officially bullied and harassed out of the military]. I can tell you some really—I can tell you stories. Some girls—friends of mine that were on ships, and they'd wait for them to work twelve, fourteen hour shifts, and then bring them in and then interrogate them to the point where they would have told you anything if you'd have let them go to sleep.

TS: Right.

RH: And then I got one that lives five minutes from here. She'd probably be an interesting view because she was actually on a ship.

TS: Yeah, she would be great to talk to. Did you feel like you were hiding? You had to.

RH: Yes.

TS: But you're also Reserve, but you're doing active duty time too. When you're working your regular civilian job—

RH: Nobody knew at my work.

TS: Nobody?

RH: No, I've hid all my life.

TS: Yeah.

RH: All my life.

TS: How did you feel—

RH: I don't even feel right—It's even hard for me to do this. I've only gotten good at this in the last—believe it or not, in the last—Actually, my girlfriend right now, we've gone to the—we had two navy balls that we've gone to together.

TS: Good for you.

RH: And I never did that.

TS: Yeah? And how were you treated?

RH: Everybody—By then, everyone kind of knew, and they've been around them a little bit so—and slowly I've incorporated—

TS: It wasn't like you just showed up one day with a girlfriend.

RH: Yeah, exactly.

TS: Right. But when they repealed "Don't Ask, Don't Tell" and that whole process, and you're still in, how did that affect you personally and emotionally?

RH: With them saying it doesn't matter anymore, that kind of thing?

TS: Yeah.

RH: I just never thought—I can speak for a lot of people that I've talked to, we never thought it would happen within my timeframe of being in the military, but of course, I have been in a long time. [unclear] plenty of time to happen. But a lot of us never thought it would happen in our lifetime. Like, the marriage thing—civilian, I never thought that would happen in my lifetime. Not—I never. And most people that I—I've gone to lots of gay weddings in the last three years, and nobody—

TS: Nobody ever expected it to happen.

RH: No, nobody thought it would happen in their lifetime that was probably forty or older. I'm sure younger people believe in anything, like we used to. [chuckles]

TS: The argument, then, is for against, because there are some people who still are resisting it, would say, "I don't want to go in the shower and have a woman looking at me," along those sorts of lines. How would you respond to them that have a difference of opinion?

RH: Well, can I give you an example?

TS: Yeah.

RH: Because I am in a little bit of a position of authority, being a chief—to this day, like, we'll have PT, or do any kind of physical, and we'd go to the locker room. I won't go in there. I go do something else. I go to my office, I'll go do work, and then when I think it clears out, then I go in.

TS: Why do you do that?

RH: Because I don't want to put anybody in a position. Because most people do know, now, that I'm gay.

TS: Did you do that before?

RH: Yeah.

TS: Did you?

RH: I did.

TS: Just to avoid conflict.

RH: Well, yeah, I never wanted to put myself in a position where they probably thought it but never really, like, open—and I never wanted to put myself in a position—Even as an E-6 or below, I didn't want to put myself in a position where I have someone, maybe, that's saying, "Oh—" throwing some sort of accusation at me. I just didn't want to put—So that's just being smart, in my opinion.

TS: Right, like not burning bridges?

RH: Right. When I was going through chief induction I didn't really care because we were cleaning up and we were doing whatever. I didn't care what you were doing, I'm just trying to take care of me. But no, we all showered together and whatnot.

TS: Right. Right.

RH: But I did—And I still do that though. It's kind of funny you brought that up, because I still do that to this day.

TS: Well, you get into a habit.

RH: Well, even with my other fellow chiefs, I don't even go in there when they're in there, and we're even—we're equals. And I won't—I just let them—We only have three showers, but I—if a big group of people PT, I just kind of, like—"Go ahead."

TS: Right. Well, now it's the norm for you.

RH: Well, yeah, and it's like you said, I've spent my whole life—I've spent my whole life—it's terrible when you're a gay person because you're so—I was so close with my brothers and my mother and my family, and then when I crossed over that threshold, that went right out the window. They probably didn't know what the hell happened to me.

TS: What do you mean?

RH: You're not open, you're not close with them anymore. You don't talk about your personal life, because that is the last thing they want. I tried—My mother didn't know when she died in '97. I tried to tell her, she didn't want to hear it.

TS: Yeah.

RH: I was at her house one night, and we were having a conversation about something else that I don't want to bring it up right now, and I said, "Well, this is a perfect opportunity." I said—But my stepfather was in the other room and I didn't want him to hear it, so I just—he already knew. They both knew, they just didn't want to talk about it. I said, "Will you step outside with me on the back porch? I got something I want to tell you." And she wouldn't go. So I never—I never—She never saw it come off my lips.

TS: Yeah, that's hard.

RH: She knew; they both knew. Because my mom was really sick and in the hospital, and my dad—my stepdad met me at the house. He met me coming right across the floor as fast as he could come, and he come right up to me and he says, "I know who—I know what you're doing and I know what you're up to." And he says, "If you don't straighten out I'm going to tell your mama. I'm going to tell your mother."

TS: Right.

RH: And then I had my brother one time in a restaurant—We were in Reidsville, and this was the little town of Reidsville, North Carolina, okay? Redneck little Reidsville. We're in a restaurant, and it was kind of restaurant/bar, and it was the old—it was us older kids were out, okay? There wasn't any parents there. Anyway. And a girl came in—beautiful blond headed girl; beautiful long blond hair. I mean, I didn't know her know her, but I knew her and I knew she was a les—I knew she was gay. Anyway, and she walked in, as pretty as she—he's like, "If you're ever like her, I'll kill you."

TS: Really?

RH: Yeah. My other two brothers are dead, and this is the one that's still living. But we've never really got to talk about that, and it probably won't ever come up.

TS: Maybe. You never know.

RH: Well, at one time he said—he had one daughter and he says—I never really got to spend a lot of time with her growing up because I found out that he didn't want her around me because I was gay. But then I said, "That's okay, because I bet you a hundred dollars, when she gets eighteen she's going to come find me," and she did.

TS: Did she?

RH: Yes.

TS: That's good.

RH: She's getting married in October.

TS: Excellent.

RH: She lives in Virginia Beach. But she did come to find me and we did spend a lot of time together.

TS: Good. We'll, switch to combat; women in combat.

RH: Yeah, I hoped we could touch on that a little bit.

TS: Because now, I mean, they're opening up jobs in infantry, and the women that just passed the [Army] Ranger course. In the navy, I'm not as familiar with what they're opening up in those fields right now.

[In August 2015, First Lieutenant Shaye Haver and Captain Kristen Griest became the first women ever to successfully complete the U.S. Army's Ranger School at Fort Benning, GA]

RH: Well, submarines.

TS: Oh, submarines, right.

RH: And that was huge.

TS: Haven't they done that for a little while?

RH: But that's only—that's, like, a year or two. It's fairly new.

TS: It's fairly recent? Okay.

RH: It's fairly new, yeah.

TS: Well, they've got the SEALs [U.S. Navy's "Sea, Air, and Land" Teams]. Have they opened up SEALs?

RH: I don't think they have. I think that would probably be one of the last things to go—that they would probably let go.

TS: What do you think, though, about all that? Is there any job that women shouldn't do?

RH: Well, I get frustrated when you hear people say, "Well, they're going to change the standards."

TS: Right.

RH: That just—And again, it's a physical issue. I've got something on my Facebook [social media website] page right now, it's got a girl on there that had to do a twelve mile—she's a captain in the army—she did a twelve mile hike with her pack, and she gets all the way, literally, between here and the door and she keeps falling down and nobody—you can't touch her, because if you touch her that ruins the whole twelve miles. And so, everyone just rallies around her, says, "Come on! Let's go! Let's go! You can do this!" And she'd fall down, and she'd get up. She'd fall down, and she'd use her gun to help her get back up. Evidently, she had already had some serious hip or knee issue on one side. But she crossed the finish line. It was amazing. But that's going to be what ends up happening, and unfortunately, I think, they're going to have to change the standard just a bit. Either they're going to have to have one for women and one for men, or they're just going to have to—a pack that's not going to be as heavy. I'm not really sure, but I just—I just feel like something—Look at the WNBA [Women's National Basketball Association] and the NBA, they don't use the same ball.

TS: Right.

RH: It's the same hoop, by God, right?

TS: Right.

RH: But the women's ball's smaller.

TS: When did they change that?

RH: I think it's always been like that.

TS: Really?

RH: It's a little bit smaller ball. A different color. I think it's a little bit smaller because women's hands are a little bit smaller.

TS: Well, do you think, then, there's some jobs women should not be able to do in the military, or in the navy?

RH: I really can't think of anything that they shouldn't or couldn't do, because I'm sure if the right person comes along and they pass the—whatever's requirement—mentally, physically—I think they'll probably be able to do it. They should have the—

TS: If they qualify; if they meet the standard.

RH: Yeah, they meet the standard, I think they should be able to do it. I can't think of anything, because most—I don't care if it was the SEALs, or even the Blue Angels; I don't care. Why is there not a female—I'm not sure—Actually—

TS: There has been one.

[In July 2014, Marine Corps Captain Katie Higgins became the first female pilot to join the Blue Angels, the U.S. Navy's flight demonstration squadron]

RH: There has been one, I do know about that, but not enough; not enough. We need to change that.

TS: Yes.

RH: And people of color. I just want to throw that out there, because we're all capable if given the opportunity. I don't think a lot of people thought I would have ever come as far as I have, and I'm sure I surprised a lot of people. On my Facebook page, I'm sure I've surprised a lot of teachers. There's been a few that really stood out, that were good, but I really didn't have—my oldest brother Neil was great. He tried to teach me how to play golf when I was twelve, and I said, "That's a good [unclear]. I don't have time for that." And now I love golf, but I just wish I would have listened to him. Hardheaded, I guess.

TS: Well, how do you think your life's been different because you signed up for the navy in 1984?

RH: I definitely would have not ever—I would not have met all the people that I've met, and I would not have got to travel to all the places I traveled, I mean, more than anything. And I did use the GI Bill to go back to school. And to be honest with you, at first I didn't, because when I went back to get my bachelor's—when I got my associate's my parents paid for that, and then when I went back to get my bachelor's I worked at a company, [unclear] Tech Incorporated in Greensboro, and they paid for school a hundred percent; a hundred percent. Tuition, TI-85 [graphing calculator], books, everything. Notebook paper. Anything, a hundred percent.

[The GI Bill provides educational assistance to service members, veterans, and their dependents]

TS: That's great.

RH: "We'll do your GI Bill paperwork, and what they won't pay, we'll pay."

And I was just like, "Well, why in the world would I want to do double paperwork? Why would I want to do all this red tape? I'll just let you take care of it all."

And then I was in school for about a year, and I talked to somebody, they're just like—I said, "Well, I was told that I couldn't get the GI Bill because I'd have to do the GI Bill and then—"

They're like, "Abso—No. You're entitled to the GI Bill, you earned it, you get it." So they back-paid me for a whole year.

TS: Oh, they did?

RH: From the beginning.

TS: Oh, wow.

RH: So I got one flat check. And I had just bought a house and didn't have a stick of furniture, and I went out and bought some furniture and bought some stuff for the—what I could, and at the time that was probably a lot, in 1990.

TS: Yeah, I bet.

RH: But that's what I did with that. And I did get the GI Bill.

TS: You're still in, so you don't have any—with the Veteran's Administration.

RH: Me, personally, with contact with them?

TS: Yeah.

RH: Not other than helping other people, and I told you I did the Color Guard to open the VA in—over there. But I have a couple of friends that work there, and a couple of people wanted to get me more—they wanted to get me in the system because they're like, "You're getting near the end." I'm fifty-four, I'm getting closer to being sixty, I'm getting closer to my benefits kicking in.

TS: Sixty's not that close yet. [both chuckle]

RH: It's just a number anyway.

TS: That's right.

RH: No, I know that. And so, I really don't—I belong to a lot of veterans assoc—I really am. I love my veterans and I'd do anything I can for them. Especially the World War II veterans, getting anything that they deserve.

TS: You talked about this a little bit, about which service you'd recommend, but what would you say to a young women today who came up to—which probably has happened—

RH: It happens a lot.

TS: —what kind of advice do you give them about going in?

RH: I think the military is a great place, and I said it's not like it used to be; it's really like a Fortune 500 company. They really do want the cream of the crop.

My best friend is a Reserve recruiter, and she can't even take anybody anymore that's, like, right off the street. Used to be you could come in—it was a different program than the one I was in but it was equivalent. If you were equivalent—If you did this in the civilian world, they moved it—they'd come in, they'd bring you in as—almost like an E-5. They'd bring you in as, like, an E-4 or E-5, right off the street, with no boot—no nothing. And they'd send you to, like, a little two-week boot camp thing in the summer. You'd go and do this little quick boot camp thing. They don't even—I think that program's long gone, because now they just want the cream of the crop, even in the military. Especially in the navy. I don't know about the other services. But she won't even look at you unless you have prior service. She'll take anybody—army—she'll take anybody. But it really helps if you are prior military.

TS: What would you say to a young woman yourself?

RH: Going back, thank you. I'd be like, "The military's great." I said, "But—" I don't say just go look at the navy. I say, "I would go talk to a different—a few different recruiters." And I usually never really do mention Marine or Army. I say, "Go talk to a Coast Guard, because maybe you might just want to stay in the United States and do this or that, and protect this country, and that's a whole different way to feel about it in your heart." And then I said, "But then talk to a navy recruiter. Go talk to an air force recruiter. See—Take the ASVAB [Armed Services Vocational Aptitude Battery is a test administered by the military to determine qualification for enlistment and aptitudes for the Armed Forces]." I said, "There's even a test—there's a book out there—you can get it from the library, you don't even have to buy it—it strengthens your ASVAB scores." And I said, "And then see what they have to offer you. Shop yourself around just like if you were going out to go get a job at—anywhere, and then see what fits right for you." I said, "You'll know it. Come and ask me. Let me review it over with you, or your parents or your family, and get a second opinion. Reach for the stars."

TS: That's great. Being a civilian and a reserve you may come in contact with this more, but do you think there's anything civilians that have never had experience with the military—that you would want them to know or understand about what it's like to serve in the military that they may not understand or that they may not appreciate?

RH: I—Sorry.

TS: Misconceptions, I guess, in some sense.

RH: Well, they all assume that you can shoot a gun. That's the first and foremost. They all just assume that everybody in the military—that my drill weekends are spent—I'm marching somewhere and I've got a pack on, and I'm doing a lot of physical activity. And they don't realize I'm just going and sitting at a desk; that's basically what I do all weekend.

TS: Right.

RH: And they don't—"What? That's all?" They go, "What time? Don't you do it—have all

night long? Don't you go out in the woods?"

I go, "I didn't join the Army Reserves or the National Guard, I joined the Navy Reserve." But I said, "It just starts—My day starts at 7:00 and it finishes at 4:30 and whatever. It's just a normal work day for me." That is definitely—That's a great question, by the way. It is a misconception, and it really does depend on what service you're in.

We had a few air force reservists in my unit one time, and theirs were really odd, because they would drill, like, six days straight, and then they wouldn't come—you wouldn't see them again for six months.

TS: Really? They get it out of the way?

RH: They just get their drilling out of the way and then you wouldn't see them again. So the air force reservists is totally different from the navy, it's totally different from someone else, I'm sure, or the marines.

TS: That's true about the different cultures of the different services.

RH: Exactly.

TS: It's like the navy is foreign to me, generally.

RH: Right.

TS: [chuckles]

RH: Remember what I said when I got activated and I had to go in and I had to go, "I'm going to Hawaii"?

I had to sort of mumble it because my boss is just like, "What'd you say?"

I said, "I'm going to Hawaii."

TS: That's right.

RH: We felt sorry for you until we found out where you were going. I went, "Okay." And then I'm in Hawaii in that room and I got two queen size beds. I'm calling back home, "Does anybody want a free trip? You fly to Hawaii, you got a free place to stay."

TS: "You got a place to stay" Did anybody take you up on that?

RH: Nobody. Not one person. Not even my family. Nobody wanted to fly.

TS: Really?

RH: Nobody wanted to go anywhere.

TS: Is it because of the time period?

RH: 9/11.

TS: 9/11, yeah.

RH: Where were you at? I'm sorry, I know it's my interview.

TS: [chuckles] On the day that happened, I was in a little suburb outside Detroit, Michigan, at a friend's house who'd been in the service. So yeah, that's how I—She woke me up and I think she said, "We're at war. Get up;" think were her exact words.

RH: Right. Do you remember how quiet it was? Because, see, I lived here. I didn't live far from here. My house was maybe—we could get to my house in about ten minutes. But I remember standing in my front yard, and I'm in sort of a flight pattern. The airport's right here behind us. And I remember thinking, "Boy, I don't ever remember this ever." Not a plane in that sky.

TS: Well, I'll tell you off tape my experience, but yeah, because this is your interview.

RH: Okay. What else you got for me?

TS: What does patriotism mean to you?

RH: Oh, wow, everything. When I leave my job I don't want anything. I just—I've been there twenty-eight years, I just want to go. But for the navy, I have gone back and forth, like, do I want a retirement ceremony, do I not? But you come to terms—you know what a funeral's about. It's not about the deceased. It's about the loved ones and friends and family and neighbors you leave behind having closure. Same thing—Same concept for the military. I know that I—after all this time—I'm going to have to have closure. I'm sorry, I know that's not quite what we were talking about.

TS: No, it's interesting.

RH: Part of that is tradition, and the patriotism comes in with that. You know I do navy funerals, and I would do those for free. I would do them if they didn't pay me. And there's a lot of organizations—I don't know if you know this—that are like Honor Guards that show up with us and they do the—it's really not a 21-gun salute; that's what a lot of people think.

TS: Right.

RH: But it's—they shoot three rounds of three, and there's a whole reason why that—you take the three and you put it inside the flag; there's a whole reason for that. But I'm so about tradition in the military, and I think that comes with your patriotism. It goes sort of hand in hand. We're teaching people now things that you might not have learned until you got to the E-6 going to E-7, but we're trying to teach it now at a lot younger—a lot sooner. Anchors Aweigh [official song of the U.S. Navy], they teach that in boot camp now.

They just—That's something they have to learn. That's the chief's song. That's our song. You have to know it.

TS: Yeah.

RH: But you have to know all the other services' songs too. But patriotism means everything to me. My family, in every war that we've ever had, especially when there's been a national defense ribbon [National Defense Service Medal], we've had somebody.

TS: Yeah.

RH: And we wouldn't have had anybody. Like, my cousin and I were Desert Shield/Desert Storm, but he retired from the air force as an E-8, and he and I were the same age. So this last time, if I hadn't been in, we wouldn't have anybody. And I was the only female—And I'm the only female. But we've had someone in every war.

TS: Keeping the line going, then.

RH: Yeah.

TS: Yeah.

RH: We trace back to, like, 1632 or something. But we've always had someone in our family. But I think it still all comes down to my dad's uniform; that marine uniform.

TS: Checking that out.

RH: Yeah. If we're coming up on a closing on this, it had to have been something with his navy—his marine uniform; it must have affected me.

I'll tell you one more story real quick. My fiftieth birthday, four years ago, my cousin, she's about the same age as me—Amy—she lived in—she grew up in Indiana. Well, she moved to Raleigh, and we still really hadn't quite got to hook up or anything. Well, for my fiftieth, my aunt invited her so it was a surprise. She shows up and I'm happy just to see my cousin.

TS: Right.

RH: On my Hamilton side. So she shows up, she's got this big white box. And so, big beautiful white ribbon on it and everything; a big white box. And she goes, right off the bat, "I want you to open my present right now."

And I go, "Okay." I really didn't want to open presents because I was scared I'd start crying at certain presents, okay, and I'm fifty.

TS: Sure. Right.

RH: So I open up the present, and it was a garrison cap and it had a marine emblem on it.

TS: Aw. So you started crying I'm sure.

RH: I did. [chuckles] Which I'm about to do right now! But anyway, I used to have it laying right over here. I think I was like—I'm scared it's going to get—start getting real—further dustier than what it is.

TS: Right.

RH: So anyway, she goes, "I know that this was your dad's garrison cap from when he was in the Marines," because the other three boys went in the army. So we knew for sure. She said, "Your dad's stuff got mixed in with my dad's stuff." And she said, "I've been meaning to give—I've been meaning to mail this to you forever." And so, anyway, I opened up the flap of it and it had—my dad didn't have a middle name, so it was "E. Ham." I told you earlier off mic, but Elmer Hamilton was my dad's name. So it had "E.Ham." in the hat and I said, "There you go."

TS: That's it.

RH: Whew, I started crying, I was so happy. And then I have a garrison cap. I had it on when I walked in when I saw you today.

TS: Yes.

RH: It's laying over there. So when I get—When my days are done and I'm ready to hang that up, I want to take his and mine and have them, probably, cleaned.

TS: In a shadow box.

RH: And I want to put them in a little shadow box, like, [it's a little depth on it?], that will hold his Marine emblem and mine. And something I never really paid attention to until she gave me that, was I really looked at the emblem—and if you ever look at the emblem, it's the world, but what's right—what's it on top of?

TS: The eagle?

RH: An anchor.

TS: Anchor, that's right; it's the anchor because they carry you.

RH: And I said, "Isn't that something?"

TS: [chuckles] Yeah, I forgot about that.

RH: That was probably a good place if we do end it. That's probably a good place to end it, when I got that on my fiftieth birthday.

TS: We'll end it right there.

RH: Okay.

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

RH: Probably lots of things, but I think that's going to have to do it for today.

TS: Alright. Well, Robin, it's been my pleasure. Thank you.

RH: Mine too. Thank you so much.

[End of Interview]