

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

INTERVIEWEE: Tasheera Farrington-Nichols Marshall

INTERVIEWER: Therese Strohmer

DATE: 9 July 2016

[Begin Interview]

TS: Today is July 9, 2016. My name is Therese Strohmer. I'm at the home of Tasheera Marshall in Cameron, North Carolina, to conduct an oral history interview for the Women Veterans Historical Collection at the University of North Carolina at Greensboro. Tasheera, how would you like your name to be on your collection?

TM: Tasheera Farrington-Nichols Marshall.

[Recording Paused]

TS: Go ahead and start. You had said that you were born in San Jose.

TM: Yeah. I was born [13 June 1983] at Santa Clara Hospital, raised up in San Jose area of no—of California. To my knowledge, I'm from the Bay Area. My parents are also from California—my mom's from San Diego and my dad is from the Oakland area—and they went to college and met there at San Jose State University. And so, I was raised around San Jose State University for the first few years of my life. My parents were both in Greek organizations. My father was a Phi Beta Sigma [Fraternity] and my mother was a Delta Sigma Theta [Sorority], and today my husband is a Sigma and I'm a Delta. So college life was a heavy influence, instilled in me at a early age, so growing up I knew that I was going to college. It was kind of like—just the thing you did; the next step.

TS: Yeah. That was kind of a good, strong value in foundations as a young girl?

TM: Yes.

TS: And then you said you had one sister?

TM: I have one sister, she was born in 1988, which is about four and a half years younger than I. And it was around that time my father enlisted into the service.

TS: Oh, okay, around the time that your younger sister was born?

TM: Yes.

TS: So you're still a young girl then, four and a half.

TM: Exactly.

TS: Do you have any memories of that time?

TM: I do. I remember our first duty station—or his first duty station, to my knowledge, was Monterey, California.

TS: Oh, yeah. What was he doing in Monterey?

TM: I'm not sure. I believe he was in the infantry.

TS: Okay. Was he at Fort Ord?

TM: He was at Fort Ord.

TS: Okay.

TM: Yes, so my sister was born—she's from Monterey, is what we say. But I do remember the house base—base housing in Monterey, and when my sister was born, and I do remember going to school, and catching the bus sometimes, and sometimes walking, and going to the babysitters; I do remember that.

TS: You remember those kinds of things? It's a real pretty area.

TM: It was gorgeous. Now that I'm an adult. I'm like, "Wow, that was a nice set up for the young parents." And my dad at that time was going to basic training. Now that I know this—

TS: Right.

TM: —he was doing his basic, and all his AIT [Advanced Individual Training] training, so he was gone; I remember that.

TS: Your mom was home with the girls?

TM: Yes.

TS: Did she work outside the home?

TM: She did not. When I was in—when I was in college—when we were hanging out in college, yeah, my mom did work, I remember that. I look back and see a lot of pictures; she was pretty active.

TS: Yeah.

TM: And then she was a stay at home mom, I remember that as well. And then she picked up work here and there. And after my sister was born she was pretty much a stay at home. But we moved to—My dad got stationed in Fort Lewis, Washington around—

TS: Tacoma?

TM: Yes—Well, it's around Tacoma, but it's in Fort Lewis, Washington. I think it's called Joint—JBLM or something like that.

TS: Okay.

TM: Lewis-McChord. [Joint Base Lewis-McChord]

TS: Right, they changed that name.

TM: And that was after I had gone off to college when they changed that. It was Fort Lewis.

TS: Yeah, it was Fort Lewis. Now they have a different name.

TM: Yeah, when I was growing up. I'm trying to think of the year. It would have had to have been '89. It had to have been sometime—my sister was just two and I was about six [unclear].

TS: Did you stay there for a while, then, in the Fort Lewis area??

TM: Okay, so my father got stationed and we moved up there, and what he did was—what do you call it?—Not a branch. He changed his MOS [Military Occupational Specialty: job title] a couple times during that year—he was there decades—and he took hardship tour [a tour at any overseas duty station where command-sponsored dependents are not authorized], so he would go away for a year for family stabilization, and that's how he had us stay so long in one place.

TS: Okay. So he would take little, one year tours?

TM: Yes.

TS: And then come back?

TM: Yes, and deployments, and then come back. So he was gone a lot, but we remained in the Fort Lewis area for the duration of his career.

TS: Okay. What was it like growing up on an army base?

TM: Okay, so we were on an army base for—I remember in the fifth grade moving off the army base to Tacoma, Washington, and then I finished elementary through middle school through high school in Tacoma, Washington.

TS: The whole time?

TM: Yes.

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

TM: A couple things I did for fun are, when I was younger, I would go to the skating rink on post, of course, and I had a few parties there. Those I remember vividly; those were kind of cool. And then the rec [recreation] centers, they had a lot of activity that was available on post for the kids.

TS: Right.

TM: My mom continued to put me in gymnastics and little things to keep me active; summer camps.

TS: Oh, nice.

TM: And then when we moved to Tacoma, my mom—there was some rec centers; my mom would take us there for the summer. More so me because I was older.

TS: Than your younger sister?

TM: And then—Yes, and then my sister would have to tag along at some point with me. [both chuckle]

TS: Are you going to public schools in that area?

TM: All public schools. Yes, I went to—I was pretty lucky, I went to middle school and high school all at the same school.

TS: Oh, you did? Okay.

TM: So I didn't have a lot of moving around like typical army kid.

TS: Yeah, that's unusual, really. Did you enjoy school?

TM: I did.

TS: Did you?

TM: I wasn't, like, the best student as far as academically, but I was average.

TS: Did you have a particular subject or teacher that you really liked?

TM: No.

TS: No? [both chuckle] Not at all?

TM: I used to think I liked history. All the way through college I used to think I liked history.

TS: What'd you like about it?

TM: I just enjoyed, kind of, seeing through other people's eyes; just how I felt. Why it kind of interested me was, like, people's perspective; people actually lived, and I can't believe got this way.

TS: Right. What kind of things were you thinking, "Why were they thinking this?"

TM: Yes, so history, even from early civilization on to different cultures, that interested me as well. And dress; the way people would dress interested me, and the different protocol. That's a military word but I couldn't think of a regular one.

TS: That's a good word. [chuckles]

TM: The way they do things. And why do they—And their technology was different so I can just imagine why they would think such things today are silly.

TS: Give me an example of something.

TM: Like, before electricity.

TS: Okay.

TM: So say the queen living in a dark, dungeinous [sic] castle, you'd think—Disney, where they've got walls and everything, but you look back in history at paintings or what have you, and you're like, "Well, that's pretty dark and dank and damp, and that's not really lavish."

TS: Right, not so glamorous as you would think.

TM: It's not so glamorous. So you have all these servants, and they're probably gainfully employed trying to keep you warm because you're the darn queen so you need hot water baths and everything.

TS: Right.

TM: But what about everybody else? What about peasants where—I would go that deep into—just in my imagination when it comes to history.

TS: Right. You had a big curiosity about it, it sounds like.

TM: Yes.

TS: As a young you, you said that you had instilled in you from your parents that you were going to go to college, right?

TM: Yes.

TS: Even as a young girl.

TM: Yes.

TS: When did you start thinking about, "Well, this is what I want to do? This is the college I want to go to," or, "This is the kind of career I want to have?"

TM: Well, that's a good question. As far as the, "This is what I wanted to—" as far as a career, that probably was known a little early on. I would try to do Junior ROTC [Reserve Officers' Training Corps] in high school, and my dad would be around and he'd be like, "No." [chuckles]

TS: Really?

TM: When recruiters would come—you know how they come to your school and they're like, "Yes, sign here, you can do so much."  
I was like, "You hear that, dad?"  
He was like, "No."

TS: He didn't want to go in the army?

TM: "You need to go—" Yeah, he was like, "You need to go to college."

TS: Okay.

TM: "We can talk about the army another time." [chuckles]

TS: Really?

TM: Yeah.

TS: He really wanted you to get your education?

TM: Exactly. Or not do it the way he did it. And he was like, "Yeah, I did the army but I didn't commission. I didn't do the army—I mean the officer side;" he was enlisted.

TS: Okay.

TM: But with me going straight—according to the recruiter—going straight in, as a young person you can do college later. My dad was like, "No."

TS: No. Got it. Did you have an interest in any particular field?

TM: No.

TS: Not really?

TM: And so, that's another part of it; it was just too soon. Then she was telling me about all the cool jobs. And because later on in my career I did do recruiting, I laughed the whole time because I remember the lady trying to tell me all this stuff. [chuckles]

TS: Right.

TM: And I just did not know what the heck I was talking about. But my dad did, so it was good to have him there; they came to my house.

TS: Right.

TM: So, yeah, he saved me. [both chuckle] So I was always kind of—aspire to do some type of military service.

TS: Okay, so you had that, kind of, in your mind?

TM: Yes, I did, even going—so the way I got to college is a little different. I was trying to get away from my parents, so I wanted to go as far away as I could.

TS: Where did you end up?

TM: At Saint Augustine's University in Raleigh, North Carolina. And particularly, it's a historical black university.

TS: Okay.

TM: A HBCU, so historically black college and university. And that just goes to show about how much I really like history, too, because I'm from the Seattle-Tacoma area of Washington state.

[Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCU) were originally founded to educate students of African-American descent]

TS: Right.

TM: And the way I got exposed to there's such a thing—because I really didn't know; they really don't put them in history books in middle school and high school, that there is such a thing. Well, at least back then, that there is such a thing—that these colleges were founded by, of course, white people for African-Americans—for black people—so that they could have opportunities to go to college. Once I found out about this I was like, "Oh, that is so cool. I've got to go see about this." So I went to college fairs.

TS: Okay.

TM: So I went to—My mom exposed me to a lot of things, so I went to college fairs in Seattle, and they had all of the large universities, so I had an opportunity to go there. But then I went to these other little college fairs, they're really smaller—they have smaller colleges and everything—so that's when I was exposed to all these circle of black colleges, and they looked so cool.

TS: Yeah. That really put in your mind that this was maybe more of a route that you wanted to go?

TM: Yes. For sure.

TS: When did you graduate from high school?

TM: I graduated in 2001.

TS: Two thousand one. Okay. When did you end up going to the college that you were talking about; Saint Augustine's?

TM: I went in August of 2001, and that was my freshman year of college. My parents, they all came with me. We knew some people in North Carolina, we stayed with them. And I was like, "Oh, this does not look like the brochure." [both chuckle]

TS: Then you're like, "Wait a second," right?

TM: Like, "I know my parents will not leave me here." And, yes, they did.

TS: So you're in college; you're in the ROTC program.

TM: Yes.

TS: You get a stipend, right?



TM: Not at that time just yet.

TS: Not yet?

TM: I just took it as an elective course.

TS: Okay.

TM: You get a stipend once you sign a contract at some point.

TS: Okay. When did you do that?

TM: In 2000 and—

TS: Two?

TM: The end of 2001, I ended up talking to another recruiter and he kind of enlisted me.  
[chuckles]

TS: He kind of?

TM: It was supposed to be a simultaneous membership program contract, but once I went in 2002 to Fort Jackson, North Carolina—Fort Jackson, South Carolina—at the—

TS: Right. For your basic training?

TM: Yes, for the basic training. At the reception, the liaison guy tells me that I need to go home or go change my contract all the way straight through, because there was some glitches in the paperwork. So I ended up just going straight through. I missed about a semester of college, and I just went straight through, so I was gone a good nine months.

TS: Nine months.

TM: I was enlisted at that time.

TS: Did you go to Fort Jackson and then your AIT [Advanced Individual Training]—

TM: In Aberdeen [Maryland; Aberdeen Proving Ground].

TS: —altogether during this period?

TM: Altogether.

TS: So the recruiter, instead of really putting you in the ROTC program, he just enlisted you.

TM: Yes.

TS: Oh, okay. What did you think about what you were going to do to finish your college, then?

TM: Yeah, I had to do a new plan. I was just enlisted into the reserves; I'd known that already. At the time the guy explained it to me, I had to—you only have a few minutes. They just sit you down, and the formation is waiting on you, so you're thinking about all these things. I had to make a phone call real quick to my mom, let her know. And she was like, "Absolutely not." But I was eighteen and I got to make my own decisions.

I was like, "I'm not going home, because I've been here for a couple weeks and it's actually been crazy, so I doubt I will come back." So I said, "We're just going to do this." And signed it, and it was okay, because when I got back I was able to go back into school as normal.

TS: Okay, because you're in the reserves.

TM: Yes, as normal.

TS: Okay. So you just have to do your weekends and your two weeks.

TM: Yes.

TS: You're in the reserves, you're going to school. When you went through the basic and you went through your AIT—you said at Aberdeen Proving Ground, right?

TM: Yes.

TS: What was that in? Did they assign you a field when you signed up or did they assign it to you in basic [training]?

TM: They assign you a field when you sign up. You take an ASVAB [Armed Services Vocational Aptitude Battery; test administered by the military to determine qualification for enlistment in the Armed Forces] test, and then they give you a list of jobs, and they kind of tell you what they are, but you really don't know. And because I was in ROTC program, and the ultimate goal was to commission at the end of my graduating from college, I was going to be an officer, so they were like, "It doesn't really matter what you do at this time because later on you're going to be an officer." So I didn't know what the job was, I just picked one, and I'm going to basic training. And for me, being eighteen years old, it was just like a fun camping trip.

TS: Really? In basic training?

TM: Yeah. I didn't think of it—when I'm en route on a bus there, all the way to where I'm sitting, talking to this guy, it just seemed, like, surreal; it was just kind of a game.

TS: Really?

TM: [chuckles] So it wasn't—really not that big a deal.

TS: How was basic training for you then?

TM: It was fun.

TS: Fun?

TM: Yes.

TS: Was it emotionally or physically challenging at all?

TM: It was—No.

TS: No?

TM: It was maybe a little physically challenging but I was athletic.

TS: You were pretty fit?

TM: Yeah, I was pretty fit. The challenge was just making me faster and things like that.

TS: Building you up to be a little stronger in certain skills and things like that.

TM: Yeah.

TS: Sounds like you might have been used to the routines from your dad's experience.

TM: Exactly. Exactly. So it wasn't—Break you down, build you up type of system, but I didn't have any issues in the self-esteem area, in the physical fitness area, the discipline area, so I got a lot of good reviews from my drill sergeants, and they treated me the same, of course. I'm not saying that I was, like, the valedictorian. I got cussed out like the rest of them, but just my reaction was different, so they would let me know that.

TS: Like you were handling things well.

TM: Yes. They gave me little one-liners like, "You got it."

TS: [chuckles] Just little tiny seeds of positive, right?

TM: Exactly. Instead of cussing me out more. So it was just fun for me.

TS: Okay. So when you were in the reserve unit in North Carolina, right—

TM: Yes.

TS: —you told me you were at the 535th MP [Military Police] Battalion, Garner, North Carolina.

TM: Yeah.

TS: Just close to Raleigh.

TM: Yes.

TS: And so, you're doing your weekend duties and going to school. In this reserve environment, how was that? What did you think about that experience?

TM: The experience was great at the time. Because I enlisted, it was a little different that way. I was glad I was kind of exposed to that side first because I got a promotion. Because when you go to basic training, even if you are a cadet, you're a private. They're going to call you a private. If you came in and medical and you're a specialist or something, you're a private there, so don't even go there. [chuckles]

TS: Right, right.

TM: So that was kind of funny. And so, when I got to my reserve unit I was put in a motor pool. I had a platoon sergeant and a team leader—somebody that was over me—and so we had a reporting system, had to stand in formation. Being on that side of formation where you really don't have any responsibilities, they made me key control, or person over the keys. So they gave me a little responsibility.

TS: Right.

TM: Thinking back on it, it's funny. But very little responsibility. I'm glad I got to see that part of the army.

TS: So is it they give you a little responsibility, you do okay.

TM: Yes.

TS: And then it's building up over time.

TM: Exactly. So my first promotion was to the rank of specialist.

TS: Oh, wow.

TM: Yeah, I got one promotion. I came in already three ranks higher because of my college experience, so they say.

TS: Okay.

TM: And then I got a promotion, so that was an experience too.

TS: Yeah.

TM: And appreciated my platoon sergeant. Once I commissioned, he's the one that did my first salute. I invited him to do my first salute because he really did good by me. But once I did get the contract with the ROTC, I was a cadet. So I had to move from being a part of the group, the enlisted club, and they treated me so differently when I went over to a cadet.

TS: Did they?

TM: Because I'd hang around with officers.

TS: Okay.

TM: Yes. I had to shadow them.

TS: Give me an example of how you were treated differently.

TM: Okay. Because it was so blatant.

TS: Okay.

TM: So it was—I just literally—at one point I was in the formation at the—[and then my?]]—Okay, so we have a formation when you line up. I was in the crowd, and then I had to go to the back with the officers in the next drill. So everybody who would talk to me, like, at lunchtime and social times, didn't really talk to me. They talked to me but they would be really short. They can't just stand around having a conversation. I was like, "I'm the same person." Apparently you're not.

TS: No.

TM: You have to—somebody to be more respected. But I was like, "I'll take less respect if you guys would just talk to me normally."

TS: But they wouldn't do it?

TM: No, because of who I had to hang around with now.

TS: Oh, because now you're with the officers.

[Speaking Simultaneously]

TM: I had to shadow the officers.

TS: "Oh, are you going to be reporting back to them about us?"

TM: I don't know.

TS: Maybe. Yeah.

TM: Exactly. I was "the other" now; I was, like, on the other team.

TS: Right. Now, in the reserve unit you were in, what was the makeup of the people within that unit; men, women?

TM: Of cour—Well, not of course, but if you didn't know, there was always less women.

TS: Right, right.

TM: [chuckles] Yes.

TS: Some units have a lot more than others though.

TM: This one didn't.

TS: No?

TM: Well, it wasn't—Okay, it wasn't 50/50 but there were a lot. There were a lot of people that I can identify myself with. There were ser—there were sergeants, sergeants first class. I don't know if I saw a master sergeant or a sergeant major female—

TS: So some role-models that were women?

[Speaking Simultaneously]

TM: —but there were some higher-ranking women.

TS: Were some of them black, or were most of them white, or was there that kind of mix too?

TM: The unit was predominately black.

TS: Okay.

TM: So the MP unit, and it was a reserve unit, so I think that had a lot to do with the demographic too.

TS: Okay.

TM: But on the officer side, there was a couple —there was a few good black officers there.

TS: Female and male?

TM: Not female, but male. And at some point—well, towards the end of college, I—my husband and I—he wasn't my husband at the time—but we became pregnant. [chuckles]

TS: Right.

TM: So at that time I got to—I didn't get to, but I decided to move away, and then when I came back—I moved away; I went home to—back to Tacoma.

TS: Okay.

TM: And then when I got to Tacoma I was like, "Why am I here?" So I had the children, I brought them, and went to—back to my reserve unit, and they had a high-ranking lieutenant colonel—female—who was a black woman.

TS: Okay.

TM: And so, the way that everything turned out—I guess I'll go into that story—but before going into the story, I'll let you know that she's the reason that I ended up commissioned and I ended up still serving in the military and being an officer.

TS: Yeah? What's her name?

TM: McKeller[?]; Lieutenant Colonel McKeller[?]. And she's on all of my office paperwork because I really appreciated her and respected her. I don't know where she is now. I should probably seek her out.

TS: What was it about her that helped you get on this track for being an officer in the army?

TM: Well, I was—Okay, got it. I'm back now. So after becoming pregnant, I was treated so differently by the ROTC program. The ROTC program was like, "Well, you can't commission now because—" And yes, it was my senior year, it was a Wednesday when they told me that I couldn't commission. The commission was on Friday and my graduation was on Saturday. And so, all this happened so quickly.

TS: Wow. Just kind of out of the blue?

TM: Just out of the blue. They were like, "You can't—" Just because they found out this little piece of information. And then—Because it was so out of the blue, I was like, "Okay." At that point can make a decision to fight and I—

[Dog barks] [Extraneous conversation redacted]

TM: —so you have a decision to fight, and I am a fighter and everything, and resist [and report?], or you can just take care of yourself and your new-found child.

TS: Right.

TM: And this is my first child so I didn't know what to do.

TS: That was before you had twins, right?

TM: Those were the twins.

TS: Those were the twins, so you had two—

TM: Yeah, but I didn't know that at the time.

TS: Oh, because you were just pregnant.

TM: I didn't know nothing at the time. I mean, it was so new, and it was crazy. I was like, "Well." It's not something I publicized either.

TS: Right.

TM: So I was, like, this is a complete violation of all of my privacy, and it's a complete betrayal. So you don't—all this is going on, I had family in town. In fact, my mother was there when he delivered the news, and I was like, "Okay." So processing, I got up and I left. Later I found out my mom gave him a piece of her mind. And I was like, "Oh, good. They deserve it because it was unnecessary."

TS: Why was it that they said that just because you were pregnant you couldn't be commissioned? Was there some—

[Speaking Simultaneously]

TM: Exactly. [unclear] say you can't get commissioned but it does say that you can't go to training, so I believe they made the decision on their own that, "She can't go to training,



she doesn't need to commission." Nothing was ever discussed with me, it's just that—I mean—

TS: They just made this decision.

TM: I've been in their shoes now, so sometimes you just make a decision because you can.

TS: Okay.

TM: No discussing it with me or anything; they just made a decision on my behalf that I can't train so I don't need to commission. But by making that decision, I'm out of the security that I thought I had; everything that I had worked for for four years.

TS: Right.

TM: I had no insurance, no income, no anything. Hence, the decision when I went back to Washington, I was like, "Let me go home. Just somewhere where I get grounded—Where I can get grounded and regroup." But in that meantime, I did graduate just fine and everything, but no commission. I didn't really make contact with anybody at the ROTC program, and eventually forgot all about them. So I was kind of—

TS: Wanted to forget all about them.

TM: Yeah, I wanted to for—I tried my hardest to forget all about it.

TS: Just make sure I got this right. So you were pregnant, your family comes to see you graduate.

TM: Yes.

TS: A couple days before you're supposed to graduate, they say, "Oh, you're not going to graduate because you're pregnant."

TM: Yes. Not going to commission.

TS: I'm sorry. You're not going to be commissioned because you're pregnant. And then you're like, "What?" So at that time, then, you go back to Washington, you have the girls.

TM: Yeah—Well, in between the time I found out I'm having the twins, and I'm sick—I'm really sick—and then my husband and I are not married. So he's working and taking care of me. I had a home; I owned a home.

TS: Right.

TM: And we were just sitting around, because I couldn't really work because I was so sick. And at that point, I'm talking to my parents and thinking of how my parents are. They

probably had the discussion—[both chuckle]—It was just like, "You need to come home."

TS: Right.

TM: And I was like, "Okay. Why not?"

TS: So you do that. You go back.

TM: Then I go home.

TS: You have the twins.

TM: I have the twins. I'm on my dad's insurance, luckily.

TS: Okay. Because you're underage?

TM: Yeah, still in college.

TS: At what age were the girls when you went back to North Carolina?

TM: They were three months old.

TS: Oh, really young.

TM: I got back on a plane and went home. I had a home.

TS: You went back to your home in North Carolina.

TM: He wasn't my husband, but it wasn't like he was absent.

TS: Your partner, right?

TM: Yes, so I was like, "Why am I here?"

TS: Yeah.

TM: Because I was in a situation.

TS: Right.

TM: Just didn't know. But I got a chance and grateful for my entire family, they helped me out. Especially once you know you're having twins, and then once the twins are here, you're like, "This is a lot." So I got a lot of support there.

TS: Okay, now you're back.

TM: I'm back.

TS: Go ahead and go to the point where this lieutenant colonel helped facilitate your entry as an officer.

TM: He didn't help anything. I was contacted by—

TS: Well, you talked about a female who helped you.

TM: Yes. Once I got back I was still in the reserves. You never get out of your contract for that. So in Tacoma I was drilling as well. Or I knew somebody who—

TS: Would put down time for you to drill.

TM: Not going to say that on tape. But, yeah.

TS: Right.

TM: So anyways, I'm still in the reserves and actively drilling; in good standing. So when I get back I still have to go to drill. And that's when she was there. She—I had—like I said, there were other African-American males that were the higher-ranking, and so I told them what happened. They're just looking at me like, "Oh, you're not pregnant anymore."

TS: Right.

TM: And, "How are the babies?" And I'm just answering, and I'm just different; I'm just different now. And they were just—

TS: A little more guarded?

TM: I was telling people—Exactly. I was telling them, I said—And, matter of fact, I'm disgruntled, so I was like, "No, I'm not going to commission. Why? Why would I be in a system that doesn't want me," type of verbiage.

TS: Right.

TM: So he's like, "Okay."  
     And I remember we're standing in line at the buffet, because the unit gets to go eat at the Golden Corral for their lunch. And he walks over with Lieutenant Colonel McKeller[?], and she just looks at me and said, "You need to take the commission. You earned the commission. You need to take a commission. Period."  
     And I was like, "Well, at least somebody cares." I was just—And she was higher-ranking, so she kind of was the alternate to that other lieutenant colonel.

TS: Right.

TM: And female, and somebody that I could look up to. And so, I did. No, I received a phone call one day and it was the ROTC program and they were saying, "Would you like to take this commission?" It was a new guy in there, and he was all upbeat and like, "Hi, yeah, this is Mr. Allen," is his name. "Would you like to take this commission?"  
And I said, "No," and hung up.

TS: Really?

TM: He called back in a different tone.

TS: [chuckles]

TM: Similar to Lieutenant Colonel McKeller. He says, "Are you doing anything else with your life? [both chuckle]

"No."

He was like, "And do you have your daughters?"

I was like, "I sure do."

"Yep. Sorry about that."

"Yeah, I'll take my commission." And I was, within two weeks, commissioned.

TS: Of you coming back?

TM: Yes.

TS: Really? Okay.

TM: Yep. Not within two weeks of me coming back, this was two weeks of his—

[Speaking Simultaneously]

TS: Two weeks of the phone conversation.

TM: —phone call to me, letting me know that I—the unit needs me to commission, pretty much. I didn't know that, but once I got back and I was commissioned, I got attached to the ROTC program.

TS: Okay.

TM: To Cadet Command, but I was actually in the army at that point; commissioned officer.

TS: Okay. This was around—What was the commissioning—

TM: Two thousand six. This was June of 2006.

TS: Got it.

TM: Now I'm on the other side of the cadre, so the—what do you call it?—the staff of the ROTC program. And I find out how it really works, and they needed me to come back because they have no explanation for whatever happened to me. And I'm on their roll.

TS: Right.

TM: So they've been asked this whole time, "Where is she?" And so, when I got back in there I find out—and his name is Mr. Allen, he was the admin guy.

TS: He's a civilian.

TM: Civilian. And so, he was like, "Yeah, they had to report about you every month. Matter of fact, every week."

TS: Really.

[Speaking Simultaneously]

TM: He said it got crazy.

TS: So they were getting questions, probably.

TM: Yeah.

TS: Well, that's interesting.

TM: I said, "Oh, okay. Well, I didn't know any of this."

He was like, "You had—By regulation, you had only a window of six months to—"

TS: To get your commission.

TM: Yeah, to come back and commission. Within that six months I had to take a PT [physical training] test and everything, so that's why I took two weeks to actually get the commission. But everybody there was so helpful. It was crazy. When I say "everybody," the other sergeants, and they were getting all my stuff together, my paperwork, and everybody was really helpful. But to find out it was because—They probably felt bad. They were like, "They had to report you every week."

I was like, "Oh, I didn't know that."

TS: So they had to make things right.

TM: They did.

TS: Did you feel like you were treated fairly?

TM: Do I actually feel like I was treated fairly? I just feel—I mean, I was disgruntled for a long time, and even upset with that particular couple of people. It was a lieutenant colonel and it was a major.

TS: Right.

TM: And I just didn't understand why they made that decision. It took years.

TS: Do you think it had a lot to do with the pregnancy, then?

TM: It had to do—Yes, with the pregnancy, but also I think that there was some—I don't want to say bias, but just knowing somebody just doesn't like you.

TS: Okay.

TM: And we had a couple clashes in the ROTC program with—Okay, so there I was the only female, and all other cadets were males, and I remember we had a group project, and the lieutenant colonel called me—I'm a senior, doing my senior activity—he called and he said, "You guys aren't doing your group project."  
I was like, "Are you calling the other guys? Because we are not doing our group project." I'm like, "I actually did my part, if you didn't know, so call them."  
He said, "If you don't do it then you're going to fail."  
I was like, "Well, I guess we'll just all fail." Here's the thing. I knew we weren't going to fail because he wouldn't fail the guys.

TS: Right.

TM: I mean, we just had a clash at that point. So he got that little bit of information—this is how I envision it—I don't know what he felt because I've never spoken to him since, but he got that bit of information and he just was like—I think he sees that as a golden opportunity to show me up.

TS: Oh, okay.

TM: So I went and looked at—went to his office and he was telling me all this stuff. He slipped me a piece of paper and it was a memo—that's how we do things, in the memo format—and it just said, "We're not going to offer you a commission at this time," or something. "Take care of yourself and your child." And I just read this—matter of fact, I might submit that to you guys. [chuckles]

TS: Yeah, I know.

TM: Because it's illegal. But I read it a little bit, and that's—He didn't even speak to me. I just had to sit there and read it.

TS: Wow.

TM: And I looked at him, I was like, "Okay." So that's why you couldn't quite make a scene or anything like that because I didn't want to give him the satisfaction.

TS: Right.

TM: I was just like, "Okay."

TS: That's amazing. I mean, terrible, but just an amazing story. The whole process of how you got to finally be commissioned.

TM: Yeah, it was—it has been—or had been, because now I'm a completely different stage in my life so it's—I'm over it. But I have seen Mr. Allen since coming to Fort Bragg; he still works out here and he's at Fort Bragg somewhere. We met up at lunchtime and we were reminiscing. We always talk about that because I had to thank him because I was like—my life would be different.

TS: That's right.

TM: I would have these kids, and I would probably struggle a lot more, because the benefits—

[Speaking Simultaneously]

TS: It would be a lot different, right?

TM: The benefits were totally different.

TS: Let's talk about how your career went while you were on active duty as an officer. Okay?

TM: Yes.

TS: You said you had to go through a leadership course.

TM: Leadership course. And they only had that leadership course for about three years or less. I guess it was like a pilot program. It was called Basic Officer Leadership II[?], and they sent you to—they sent us to—prior to going to our—what do you call it?—Basic Officer Leadership course, so the first course you go to and get your branch training, and it's infantry training, so as soon as you [unclear] place, and it's a program for about—I think it was six weeks.

[Basic Officer Leadership Course II (BOLC II) was a 6-week common block of instruction. It is an operationally relevant program that produces more capable, confident, mentally agile and adaptable leaders through an emphasis on field craft, small unit leadership and the Warrior Ethos. BOLC II was discontinued at the end of 2009, and as of 2010, any required training has now been merged into BOLC B (formerly BOLC III)]

TS: Okay.

TM: And you just go through tactical training, and you go through sticks—we call it sticks training, so you go and you shoot and you capture. And everybody goes through the same training. They had to do that, I suppose, because we were at war. [chuckles]

TS: Right.

TM: This war in Iraq and Afghanistan.

TS: Right.

TM: So they were training up the officers and making sure they—

TS: They had those skills.

TM: Yes.

TS: I'm trying to see how old you were when 9/11 happened. You weren't even twenty yet.

[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]

TM: No, I was nineteen.

TS: Was your father still in the army then?

TM: My father was still in the army. We served under the same war campaigns.

TS: Okay. What was your reaction as a very young woman to that attack?

TM: To the attack? Oh, I woke up in my dorm room, and the TV was already on so my roommate must have turned it on, and I was staying in the bed, and it was like, "What in the world?" And at first, you're kind of getting ready for class. [chuckles]



TS: Right.

TM: Because you're just looking at it and you're like, "What am I supposed to do?" And it's an East Coast thing so it's kind of like, "I don't know anybody," so that wasn't an instant thought in my head, like, "Who do I know that's in there?"

TS: Right.

TM: And I didn't realize this until I get dressed, and I think I did go to one class before all classes were cancelled. So I'm walking out and I'm seeing different reactions from the students, because we're from all over, in college, and so some people were like, "My cousin was in there."

And I was like, "Shut up."

TS: Right.

TM: And people were from there and they lived down the street. They're worried about their family members. And I was, like—go back and look at the news again, and I was like—because when I woke up they had just hit, so it didn't fall yet.

TS: Right.

TM: The [World] Trade Center.

TS: So throughout the day you're absorbing—

TM: Yes.

TS: —the reactions of other people's feelings about it.

TM: Yeah.

TS: And then as it unfolds, you're understanding the severity of it.

TM: Exactly. Especially, like you said, being so young, you just don't understand the severity.

TS: Did you worry about your dad having to—

TM: No.

TS: Not at that point?

TM: We're a patriotic family, so it was like, "You've got to go serve, and you've got to go to war, and that's what you have to do." It's kind of like, "Good. Go get them," type of reactions about that. So I ended up commiss—not commissioned, but enlisted after 9/11.

TS: Right.

TM: And so, my mom was worried.

TS: Yeah.

TM: My mom had choice words. That's probably why Lieutenant [unclear] didn't like [unclear]; my mom had some choice words. Once I made that phone call, like, "Hey, I'm changing the plan. I'm going in."

And it was a two-minute conversation, hung up the phone, and she went back and she was like, "How could you guys do this? She came to college," and this and that.

They were like, "She made her own decision."

TS: Right.

TM: So she was a little disgruntled, but I—Yes, I—intentionally, I knew that it was a possibility that I could be deployed now that I went straight through.

TS: Right.

TM: At first I thought it was okay, because when you do a split option you—what's supposed to have happened is I went to basic training, come back for summer, go to school—and then at the end of the summer go to school, and then the next summer I go to AIT [Advanced Individual Training (AIT) is where enlisted soldiers go after basic/boot camp to learn the skills for their MOS (Military Occupational Specialty/ job)].

TS: Right. But that's not how it worked.

TM: That makes you non-deployable.

TS: Right.

TM: And so, I was deployable.

TS: Because you hadn't gone through your AIT.

TM: Yes.

TS: Oh, okay. Interesting.

TM: Yeah, it just so happened that I did[?] deploy I would be in on my drill days for the reserves and they would be calling out people that are going to go. And I was never on the list.

TS: You just never got called?

TM: Never got called.

TS: But you could have been.

TM: Yes, I very well could have and I was ready. My mom would ask all the time. I was like, "Yeah, I'm going. Darn right I'm getting out there and get some of this[?]." So it didn't happen for me.

TS: Pretty patriotic in that sense.

TM: Right.

TS: Tell me about your first assignment. And I'm not even sure how to pronounce this place in Virginia. Eustis?

TM: Yeah. Fort Eustis [Joint Base Langley-Eustis, Virginia].

TS: Eustis, okay.

TM: Fort Eustis was a training.

TS: Oh, it was a training too? Okay.

TM: It's a training too.

TS: Oh, for your transport.

TM: Yes. So my family remained in North Carolina, in Raleigh. So I go to training and I get dropped off by my husband; it's about a three hour commute. So every weekend they would be up there; my daughters. By then I had three.

TS: Okay.

TM: Yeah. When I got pregnant with my third daughter—this was after my husband and I got married; we got married in 2006, and the twins were about eight months, I believe; six or eight months. And then I called my third child my honeymoon baby because I became pregnant again. And it was funny because now we had a female lieutenant colonel, and now she's my boss. I'm not a cadet, I'm a lieutenant, so I'm going in there and I'm kind of talking to her, and her reaction was, "Okay, you're not the first person that's ever been pregnant."

TS: [chuckles]

TM: Well, I'm shocked. I'm traumatized by that first time.

TS: Right. You don't know.

TM: I was like, "Am I going to get kicked out of the army?"

TS: Right.

TM: She's looking at me like, "Now, calm down. You're not the first person who's ever been pregnant." She literally said that.

TS: Yeah.

TM: I was like, "Oh, okay." So that was different. It was normal—Well, not normal. It's tough being pregnant in the uniform.

TS: Right.

TM: Yeah, it's tough being pregnant in the uniform. By the time I'm back in Fort Eustis I have the three, so she's the baby, and all three of them would come visit me on the weekends so it wasn't—I didn't get to do the partying like my peers.

TS: No.

TM: Even the ones with families, their families were too far away and my husband was down the street so he would drive.

TS: Right. [chuckles]

TM: Every Friday.

TS: Yeah.

TM: So we would spend family time.

TS: Your first assignment, you got to go to Germany.

TM: Yes.

TS: And you went as a family?

TM: I went by myself.

TS: Okay.

TM: Most of the times when I'm on the new assignments, I had at that point gone by myself first.

TS: Okay.

TM: Then secure some housing and the car and then they came over after. So he packed up our home and the movers and everything and then they would come.

TS: And then they'd come a little bit later?

TM: Yes.

TS: You're at K-town, Kaiserslautern.

[Between 1950 and 1955, Kaiserslautern, Germany developed into the largest U.S. military community outside of the United States. It was also referred to as "K-town," a term coined by the American military population who had trouble pronouncing the name]

TM: Yes, Kaiserslautern.

TS: In Germany. And you said you were with the 39th Transportation Battalion. Is that right?

TM: Yes.

TS: And you had a couple different units during the three years you were there that you served?

TM: Yes.

TS: You want to talk about your experience at the first unit? You can say what it was.

TM: Sure. So once I got [unclear] into reception in Germany, the funny thing is I was re-routed at the airport; they have a reception unit at the airport. I think I thought I was going to—what is that? I forgot. Starts with a "B," in Germany.

TS: Bremerhaven [Army Airfield]? [note: perhaps TM means Breitenwald Training Area?]

TM: Close.

TS: Okay.

TM: It's close to that name, yeah.

TS: Bremerhaven. I can't remember. Up more to the north?

TM: It was a little more north. It was only about a few hour drive.

[Speaking Simultaneously]

TS: Yeah, kind of by a port?

TM: Yes. It was pretty. And, yeah, it had a little moat kind of thing.

TS: But you didn't go there.

TM: I wish I could remember the name.

TS: We can look that up.

TM: The orders said that. So when I got there I was telling them and they didn't even say a bunch—They just put me on a bus and told me when it was time to get off, and I was like, "This is not that place."

TS: Right.

TM: It was crazy.

TS: So you were reassigned and you didn't even know it.

TM: Reassigned to Kaiserslautern, Germany. Got off the bus, and it's just such a confusing situation, but—And for me, I believe it was like a Saturday or Sunday, and something had happened where it's not a normal reception day. The bus just arrived. They did a really good job of getting—I had a sponsor. They took me over to the 21st Theater Sustainment Command [Ramstein, Germany].

TS: Okay.

TM: And that's the big, I think, two-star general headquarters.

TS: Headquarters?

TM: Just a little—They're all in the same place. Anyways, I'm over there and I'm just a lieutenant, and they're like, "No lieutenants are supposed to be here." [both chuckle]

I'm like, "What do you want me to do with that information?"

So I was there for about two days and then they sent me down to 39th Training. I ran into a lieutenant colonel and he really was like, "No." He was an African-American as well, so he was like, "This is a set up. You have to go because you need to get experience."

TS: Right.

TM: And think about it. I'm a little behind, now, the rest of my peers by the way that I have entered into my commission.

TS: True.

TM: And was assigned to a staff assignment and then the training. I'm a good year behind.

TS: Right.

TM: So he was like, "This is not going to be good for your career. You need to go down to a unit and get some experience." I arrived to 39th and the battalion commander—I remember his name vividly because he was one of my favorites. His name was Curran[?]. His name was Lieutenant Colonel Curran. I think he probably made colonel before—and if he got out or not, but Lieutenant Colonel Curran takes a look and he's just like, "You're going to go and be the Rear Detachment Commander for the 15th Trailer Transfer Detachment. And then you'll get your experience there. Once they get back you'll be responsible for in-processing them, and then you'll take over from the commander—their commander, and just be the commander."

TS: Okay.

TM: And so, that's how they were going to get me to where I needed to be.

TS: The experience level.

TM: Exactly. So that's why I was with the 15th Trailer Transfer. And I did get a lot of experience. He threw me in line with the rest of the commanders.

TS: Yeah.

TM: The real commanders; people that had large companies. Trailer Transport company was really small. It was just a detachment so it was really small.

TS: How many people were you supervising or commanding?

TM: It was a little under thirty.

TS: Oh, okay. That's a pretty good size to start.

TM: It is, and then especially when you had the transition. So once we get back from a deployment, a lot of people were going to leave, so they [plussed up?] up the unit where the people were leaving and replacing them so that everybody's there at one time. It was crazy with just the different moving pieces.

TS: Right.

TM: But it was pretty exciting, and made it through a lot. I ended up paying for some equipment. Don't know how.

[Speaking Simultaneously]

TS: Out of your pocket?

TM: Yes.

TS: [chuckles] Okay.

TM: So when you talk about experience, this is the things I'm thinking they're talking about I need to know and learn.

TS: The mistakes at a smaller level.

TM: At a smaller level.

TS: And then bigger down.

TM: I did; I learned a lot. [unclear]

TS: Okay. I can stop it for a second.

[Recording Paused]

TS: Okay, here we are. We're coming back. So you've got a house full of children this morning, right?

TM: Yeah. My niece and nephew are here for the summer. Five kids.

TS: You're a captain, you can handle it. No worries. So your first command experience, you talked about a couple mistakes you made.

TM: Yes.

TS: What are the most memorable moments that you had in this kind of experience in command?

TM: Well, the most prominent thing in a command is the connection, kind of, that you make with the individual soldiers. They had a myriad of problems. [chuckles]



TS: Right.

TM: Not problems.

TS: Sure they do.

TM: Situations you have to solve and it's your responsibility.

TS: Like what? What kind of things were you trying to solve?

TM: Okay. Marital problems. Family problems. Money problems. These things would come up and it is your—I remember—Okay, my most memorable event; it just hit me. I had—It was Christmas timeframe and I had two soldiers, one came up with a Red Cross letter and needed to go back to the States because his—somebody in his family had passed away. So he couldn't really go. We had to get permission from the battalion commander; Lieutenant Colonel Curran[?]. So he talks to me and then he also talks to the soldier. And I don't know the significance of this but he talks to the soldier. And they get granted—because with the emergency leave, if you overseas, then the army will pay for it.

TS: Okay.

TM: Here in the States, he'd just go on your own.

TS: So you pay for it out of pocket.

TM: You paid for it, especially if they're not immediate family members, and in this case it wasn't immediate family members. So the lieutenant colonel was being nice by paying for him and his whole family to go back to the States, essentially.

And then at the same time I had another soldier—they were both—they were both sergeants, they were E-5s—go to the United States as well. So when it's time for them to come back, neither one of them come back. So the first—the guy who had the family emergency was told to come back by me. I had to write it down and the lieutenant colonel walked me through it and everything.

TS: Right.

TM: And the lieutenant colonel specifically spoke to him and told him that he must come back. He just made a decision not to come back. And then, so I'm getting yelled at—not yelled at, but I'm getting talked to because it's my responsibility, and it's hilarious because it's like, "I can't control this grown man in the States right now and what his decisions are. But, whatever, I have to act like—"

TS: You're accountable for this soldier, right?

TM: I—Emailing him, like, "What are you doing?" Just emailing him. I'm speaking stern. I didn't put my caps on yet.

But when he replied with, "I had to stay because I have to be by my mother's side," or something, I went to all caps on him.

I said, "If you don't get back here right now—" because he missed his flight and everything. So, anyway, all that gets worked out, he gets back.

The other guy needed—he—I don't know if he got delayed or he didn't have enough money to get back. I don't know. Either way, they all got back at the same time, and we were all in the colonel's office and the sergeant major's office, and I remember sweating. And I'm not even the one in trouble, but it was just intense.

TS: [chuckles] Yeah.

TM: He had this red carpet—my lieutenant colonel—in the headquarters office. He had this red carpet and, I mean, it was—what do you call it?—UCMJ [Uniform Code of Military Justice] proceedings, so we all had to stand in position of attention. I'm on the side. They had to knock on the door, come in, and they both got reduced in rank.

[The Uniform Code of Military Justice (UCMJ), is the foundation of military law in the United States. It was established by the United States Congress in accordance with the authority given by the United States Constitution in Article I, Section 8, which provides that "The Congress shall have Power....To make Rules for the Government and Regulation of the land and naval forces."]

TS: Did they?

TM: Oh, my gosh.

TS: How long were they absent without being authorized?

TM: Oh, okay. Not long. They were back within a week.

TS: A week.

TM: Here's the issue. The issue with the first guy, he was told to come back so he had no excuse. It was blatant disrespect. It was Absent Without [Official] Leave. It was all of that.

TS: Right.

TM: And it was his own—And I looked down because there's nothing that I could do. I don't understand why he decided to make that decision and he didn't have a good excuse.

TS: Right.

TM: Besides that his mother was hurting. So the colonel was good and so was the sergeant major—good at their jobs. He explained that to them; he didn't get belligerent or anything. He was just like, "This is your doing. I specifically told you, you made that decision," and there are many of us who have to make those same decisions. So he was—showed me how I was to proceed because I had to do it myself the next time.

TS: Right.

TM: These were field grade Article 15s [non-judicial punishment for minor offenses]. These guys are getting the big stuff. I wasn't—I didn't have authority—company grade—to take rank from a sergeant.

TS: Right. Could you take pay?

TM: I could take pay. And take time.

[Speaking Simultaneously]

TS: Extra duties. That kind of stuff.

TM: Extra duty. So this was a level that they—now that I know a little better—they had to have their rank taken, so that's why everything was kind of taken off my—from my level anyway.

TS: I see.

TM: The sergeant major, he was like, "No," because he's just more experienced. He knew what to do. The other guy, I felt bad because he just—If the other guy—the first guy hadn't messed up, the other guy probably would not have got his rank taken.

TS: Lost some rank, right?

TM: But you have to treat everybody the same, so when he rolled in I'm standing there still, and he got his rank taken away. I was like—And they were nicer—the tone—to him. They were just like, "You should have had the money to come back. It was irresponsible in the first place, and maybe you don't deserve the rank." [chuckles] I was like—Oh, it was—It was a lot.

TS: So Lieutenant Colonel Curran[?], he kind of showed you some leadership skills and how to handles these kinds of situations.

TM: He did.

TS: So he was like a role model in that way. And the sergeant major?

TM: The sergeant major as well. Everything he predicted—because I had to talk to him one time—because sergeant majors probably outrank everybody up to major.

TS: Right. [chuckles]

TM: In your head[?]. So they operate that way.

TS: Right.

TM: He disregarded a couple of my commands, so I had to call them—No, I actually told the lieutenant colonel and the lieutenant colonel's like, "You can handle that." [both chuckle]

TS: He wanted you to handle it on your own.

TM: I loved it, because I was like, "Oh, okay, yeah. By the time they [unclear] me I'm going to call this guy." I was on the phone with him; it was after hours, I was at home. I cleaned up my whole house talking to him.

TS: [chuckles]

TM: He's schooling [instructing] me. And everything he said came to pass. He told me a lot about my soldiers, and I was like, "No, that's a nice guy. No, she's cool." No.

TS: He was right?

TM: Everything he said came to pass, about what would happen to them. So they both kind of educated me and put me on the path that I still use, and throughout my years I had to do my own Article 15s and I wasn't that—that guy who was a jerk.

TS: Right.

TM: I sat there and I walked them through it and gained more respect for it. I never had anybody break down. I never had anybody lash out during these proceedings because they kind of knew.

TS: So they had the expectations, and they understood the consequences, because you kind of laid it out as it went along.

TM: Yes, as it went along.

TS: [unclear] that you learned along the way. That's really a great story. Also about the sergeant major, schooling you on your soldiers.

TM: Schooling me. He schooled me. And it was hilarious because I wanted to hang up and he just kept trying—I think he did that on purpose too.

TS: Yeah.

TM: But he was a good guy. It seemed like he wasn't—the sergeant major—the way he walked around, the way he hollered at everybody, but talking to him on the phone he was pretty laid back.

TS: He knew how to handle the soldiers.

TM: He did. And there are reasons for the protocols that—a lot of them are written and some unwritten. As far as formations, as far as PT [physical training], as far as ceremonies. That's the kind of stuff that you think is a waste of time but it's not.

TS: Right. Really great. Those are great stories. In your next unit that your assigned while you're in Germany, you said you went on deployment to Iraq. Want to talk about that?

TM: Yes. They needed a commander for this unit, and I think I just fit the description, so they threw me into this unit for this—

TS: It wasn't your regular unit?

TM: It was time for me to leave the 15th anyway.

TS: Okay.

TM: So for a career progression. And it wasn't Lieutenant Colonel Curran[?], it was another battalion commander, and he made the decision that it was the—a good time for me to go and take over a unit and deploy.

TS: Okay.

TM: Which is the truth. I was—I made captain at that time and I had to take troops.

TS: Okay. Which unit was that?

TM: That was the 635th Movement Control Team.

TS: What kind of stuff does that unit do?

TM: That unit is a tracker—like, tracking for movement and equipment through—we didn't have any railway operations, so just flights and truck movements. So we tracked that in and out of Kuwait.

TS: So you're doing the tracking? You're not actually doing the moving, but you're doing the tracking of the movement?

TM: Yes, no movement—no moving. We were just in transit visibility; we're providing in-transit visibility.

TS: I see. So you're saying, "This is here. This is here?"

TM: Yes. At all times we're able to know where these equip—where these shipments are.

TS: Okay.

TM: And that was through—what do you call it?—RTV [Real-Time Video] systems that we had, scanners that we had.

TS: Okay.

TM: We would have to actually count, verify, and then enter them into the system. Multiple systems.

TS: Is that like using GPS [Global Positioning System] tracking?

TM: It is. Yes.

TS: Okay. Well, that's really interesting that that's how that's handled. How long were you with this unit before you had to deploy?

TM: I was sent to the unit for deployment, so not long.

TS: For deployment. So you had to prepare them and yourself to go?

TM: Yes. Well, the unit commander before me, she was still there, so they were being prepared—they were being trained for deployment. There's a process that you go to—like a specific little camp—I say camp—I've been removed from active duty for a while. [both chuckle] Yeah. So I did get to go with them to a lot of their training, even though I was still in the 15th because I had to out-process there.

TS: Okay.

TM: And that's when I had to pay some money for some equipment. I was like, "I don't know what this equipment is."  
They're like, "That's the point. [chuckles] You should know."

TS: Yeah. "Here you go."

TM: I was like, "Gosh, I don't even—" I just paid for these com—it was some computers and printer system. So I was like, "I'll just pay for these and I don't even have them. Like, I wish, at least, I had them in my house."

TS: Yeah. [chuckles]

TM: So anyways, I out-processed there, trained up a little bit with them and got to know them that way, and pretty much we were deployed and got to know each other a little more. But that's the time where I think there was a volcano in Iceland?

TS: Oh, okay.

TM: So we were stuck in Germany—on our deployment—for, like, a week or so.

TS: Because you couldn't get out because of air travel.

TM: Because we couldn't fly.

TS: Because of all the volcanic material in the air.

TM: Yes, in the air.

TS: When you finally got to Iraq, what's your first wave of, "Oh, my gosh, I'm in Iraq?"

TM: Well, you go to Kuwait first, and Kuwait stinks and it's hot. That's your first wave. It's like, "Ugh."

TS: It's funny you say that because a lot of the women that I talk to that went to Vietnam, the most potent memory they have is the smell.

TM: Yeah. I can imagine it, [to be honest?], that's natural fertilizer. But that's the same thing, I guess, in Kuwait. It just smells like natural fertilizer.

TS: It's really strong?

TM: Like Port-a-johns [portable bathroom stalls]. They've been there for decades.

TS: Yeah.

TM: It just stinks there really bad. And it's hotter than Iraq.

TS: Hotter?

TM: Yes.

TS: How long did you have to stay there?

TM: We were there a week.

TS: Okay. Just to prepare.

TM: Just in-process into theater.

TS: Okay.

TM: Into the Operation Iraqi Freedom.

[Operation Iraqi Freedom was the code name for the 2003 invasion of Iraq which lasted from 20 March to 1 May 2003]

[The Iraq War (March 2003-December 2011) was a conflict that overthrew the government of Saddam Hussein in Iraq. The war began when the United States invaded Iraq due to concerns that the country was manufacturing and harboring weapons of mass destruction, a claim that was later proved erroneous. Iraq's support of the Islamic extremist group al-Qaeda, who were behind the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks on the United States, was also a factor in the war.]

TS: So then you go from Kuwait to Iraq, and where did you go to in Iraq?

TM: Went to COB [Contingency Operating Base] Adder in Iraq, and then I was in control of COB Adder and Basra [Iraq].

TS: Basra?

TM: Yes. Which was another little, smaller COB right next to the border of Iraq and Kuwait.

TS: Okay.

TM: So I had to split up my troops.

TS: Is it a base or is it a camp?

TM: Oh, this was a base. We had everything on it.

TS: So all the facilities, for dining, the recreation, and stuff like that?

TM: Yes.

TS: Pretty big?

TM: It was well built up by the time I got there. What was that? Two thousand and—

TS: Ten, you said, I think.



TM: Two thousand ten, it was well built up since 2002[?]. I was spoiled.

TS: Were you? What was your experience like there? Describe a typical day.

TM: Okay. A typical day, we had CHUs [Containerized Housing Unit], and because I—which was a containerized unit to live in—so because I was commander I did get my own. A couple times there's some female soldiers that got bunked with me, but they were quickly reassigned somewhere else.

TS: Okay.

TM: But I believe I was deployed there—I had two other female soldiers and then one ended up leaving early.

TS: In your unit?

TM: In my unit. So I had the one other female soldier. A lot of times we had to partner up for things, which was good for her, because I had my own vehicle and it wasn't supposed to be like that. I think my first sergeant just set up that I would have my own vehicle so I wouldn't bother anybody. No, I'm just kidding. [both chuckle]

TS: So he got you set up.

TM: Yeah, he got me set up, but we had limited resources, so I would have to pick up—shifts—we had twelve hour shifts—so during the shift changes I would pick up some of the soldiers, take them down to our—what do you call it?—control point. So we were in charge of a couple control points, but there was some other unit, I think State Department, and some other type of units that had another control point. That was the ones where the combat soldiers would be going in—convoys would be going in and out of.

TS: Okay.

TM: The other part was where the equipment and transportation was to enter and exit out of. I didn't have anything to do with that.

TS: Not with the combat?

TM: No.

TS: But with the other one?

TM: Yes. But I would often get asked what's going on over at the other gate, so I worked in conjunction with those units as well. And so, anyways, it was, you can say, five miles away. On post you have to—or on the base, you have to drive, I swear, ten miles per

hour, so that was a long process. I had a pretty close relationship with my soldiers through that, so we didn't have a lot of behavioral issues because we were in close proximity all the time. And I used that to my advantage. So I would listen to what the heck they were talking about so I would know, kind of, how the optempo—what do you call it?—the climate of my unit was.

TS: They called that optempo, right?

TM: No. Operation Tempo is, kind of, more of how the operation is affecting everybody.

[Optempo, operational tempo, is a U.S. Army term used to describe a measure of the pace of an operation; increases with the intensity of and number of operations]

TS: Oh, okay.

TM: But I'm talking the mental stability [chuckles] [of all my soldiers?].

TS: I see. So you stayed really close, had a meter close to—

TM: Yes, I did. My command is [unclear]. But I just wanted everybody to come back, so I used that to my advantage; just transporting them, and then I would pick up the other shift and, kind of, transport them back.

TS: They had to work in this place about five miles away?

TM: Yes.

TS: Okay.

TM: That was our operations [unclear]—

[Speaking Simultaneously]

TS: So every day you had to come and go from where you're housed to this spot.

TM: Yes.

TS: Okay.

TM: Yes.

TS: What kind of hours did you work?

TM: I worked a good fifteen hours a day. And sometimes more and sometimes less. After a while I would let my guys have a half a day off, and I would take a half a day off, so they would get, like, sixteen hours off.

TS: Off?

TM: Yeah. That was actually a big deal.

TS: Yeah. So it's, like, seven days a week?

TM: Yes. [chuckles]

TS: Here, I'll pause it again.

[Recording paused]

TS: Alright. So you're taking care of your troops. You said you had two females. About how many are in this unit?

TM: Twenty-one.

TS: Twenty-one. So you had two but one had to go back.

TM: Yes.

TS: Did you ever feel in danger? Was there any kind of incoming—

TM: Yes, we got IDF, indirect fire, maybe every other day.

TS: Really? Every other day?

TM: But it wasn't—Yes. They—It was a really large base, and so they weren't too close. There's this open field and most of the time they would hit—so you would feel a little bit of shaking on the ground.

TS: So you knew something came?

TM: There would be an alarm that went off. There would need to be a count of everybody sent up[?], and that was common on all of the bases.

TS: Okay.

TM: But some bases that were smaller, it was a little worse.

TS: How did you feel about all that?

TM: You get kind of numb to it after a while, but in the beginning you don't know what just happened. You're supposed to go and get in a bunker. I remember toward the end you don't even do that anymore. Trying to get your sleep—If you were asleep, trying to get your sleep, and if you're out at work trying to finish what you were doing.

TS: Right.

TM: [chuckles] Because it's like, "It didn't hit me," and you get numb to it. You just get immune to that kind of a situation. Luckily, we could so it wasn't—I didn't experience anything coming close enough to me where I was affected and it—but I had two soldiers who—a rocket ended up hitting their bunks.

TS: Really?

TM: Yes. So they got a Purple Heart and a Combat Action badge. They lost everything, and I remember having to—people made donations, so I remember getting them all the equipment they needed, re-tasking [to cause to perform a new task] them out their equipment, flying out toward to them—because they were at Basra—flying out to them, and that point, when I stayed in the same barrack—

TS: As them?

TM: Yeah, right. And I did. It was maybe a couple hours of sleep. Like, what if it happens again?

TS: Right.

TM: Because it actually hit them, so it was something you could visibly see, and I—

TS: They were wounded?

TM: No. They weren't in there at the time. One was in there but he—he's the one that got the Purple Heart.

TS: Okay.

TM: He got to run out. The other one was at work, so.

TS: Okay. But it destroyed all their stuff.

TM: It destroyed all of their stuff.

TS: So you had to go fly there, take care of them?

TM: Yes.

TS: Or travel.

TM: I had to travel. I flew.

TS: You flew? Okay.

TM: And so, at some point during the deployment I had to actually get them back to where we were because they were starting to get affected, mentally.

TS: Oh, sure.

TM: Just thinking about it and being alone. So I was like, "Y'all come up here."  
They're like, "No, we don't want to."  
"Okay, yeah, whatever. Yes, you do. Come up here." And I would send other people out.

TS: You had to switch them around?

TM: Yes.

TS: When you flew, was it a helicopter, a plane?

TM: Yes.

TS: How was that?

TM: Great.

TS: Yeah?

TM: Loads of fun. I like the Chinook [Boeing CH-47 transport helicopter]; it's my favorite. Because I flew all the time.

TS: Did you?

TM: My headquarters was at Balad—Joint Base Balad [Balad Air Base, Iraq], so I had to go out there as well.

TS: Oh, okay.

TM: And I flew all over Iraq.

TS: You liked that? You weren't nervous about that at all?

TM: I loved it. No. And then we also were in—I had two [C-23] Sherpa planes, which are cargo planes.

TS: Sherpa?

TM: Sherpa. Yeah, planes that were under my control, so I would get on those a lot.

TS: What's a Sherpa plane?

TM: It's S-H-E-R-P-A. All caps. It's a little plane. [chuckles] It's like a square box-looking plane. So the back comes down and you put some stuff on it.

TS: Oh, okay.

TM: It has a couple of seats along the sides; you sit there.

TS: Really?

TM: Yeah, a little Sherpa plane.

TS: Never heard of it.

TM: And we delivered little, small packages for people. So people would come in to the port, and we worked alongside the Air Force. Of course, they had a larger section because they had real aircrafts, but they put us in the back. [chuckles]

TS: I like how you say that; the Air Force has the "real."

TM: The real aircraft. Okay, I had a Sherpa plane. Don't call it an aircraft.

TS: Okay.

TM: Sherpa. And then all the helicopters were a part of the ADAG [Arrival and Departure Air Control Group]. I wasn't a commander over to the ADAG. Usually MCT [Movement Control Team] does control the ADAG.

TS: What does ADAG stand for?

TM: I forgot.

TS: Is it A-D-A-G?

TM: Yes, A-D-A-G. And those were the rotary ones. Those had a lot of helicopters. So you had three choices when trying to fly out or ship your equipment somewhere.

TS: Okay.

TM: And we were all in the same area so I flew on everything.

TS: You flew on all of them. You were never really nervous about flying?

TM: No. Flying was fun. First of all, because you're leaving, going somewhere else.

TS: Yeah. Out of the routine.

TM: Out of the routine. And then on the way back—just like taking a trip, all the way back and going back home.

TS: Yeah.

[Recording Paused]

TS: All right, we've got breakfast going. Here we go. A couple broad questions about being in Iraq. You said you got used to the kind of incoming that's happening, you liked the flying because you're doing something different. How did you communicate with home?

TM: They had this operating system, I forgot who it was run by, but you can always dial into that, get a landline and a connection to the States, and they would call whoever you wanted to call. And then we also had regular phones but we were—not to call the states—but we were out of Germany so there was kind of the same—I forgot what the phones are called off the top of my head but—army phones.

TS: Right.

TM: So you could always call the army line.

TS: Okay.

TM: And we were in Germany so we're already overseas, so we didn't have to—It's the same system, kind of.

TS: I see.

TM: Phone system. So we didn't struggle—

TS: So you were connected to that.

TM: A lot of us didn't because our families were on this side of the earth. So we called them through regular—you can dial and call in.

TS: Okay.

TM: You couldn't do it as often as you want.

TS: Right. Could you do Skyping or anything?

[Skype is a telecommunications application software product that specializes in providing video chat and voice calls between computers, tablets, mobile devices]

TM: And you couldn't—Of course. You had to do Skyping on your spare time because during the workday you couldn't just pick up the phone and call. So most people Skyped; my husband and I Skyped a lot. When the Skype was up—When the internet was up; the connections were really bad out there. And then of course they have the MWR [Morale, Welfare, and Recreation] and different places that provide computers.

TS: Okay.

TM: Phone stations, where a bunch of phones are lined up and soldiers could call. Because I think that was the thing; we were just spoiled because we were out of—we're a unit out of Germany. We didn't have trouble communicating with our families, but if you were Stateside—

TS: Like some of the ones in the States.

TM: That's why they had these phones lined up—phone centers, excuse me—and then they got different recreation centers with Skype and computers that you could use.

TS: When you think about your time in this war, if you're reflecting upon it now, what did you think about that experience? If you're trying to explain to a civilian how this experience was for you, as a young woman in a war zone, how would you depict it to them?

TM: As a young woman in a war zone?

TS: Or just a soldier.

TM: And a soldier, to sum it up, kind of, in a man's world.

TS: Okay.

TM: You have to conduct yourself a little differently. You have to be—we call it thick-skinned, so you can't be too sensitive. You're kind of—what do you call it?—kind of exposed; kind of open to target for a lot of criticism.



TS: By whom?

TM: Everybody. So it would be peers. Just people that are superiors and people that are subordinates. It's so many judgements.

TS: So you're in a middle manager position and you're under constant scrutiny.

TM: You are under constant scrutiny over everything you do. Everything's like—I've had people do this while I was talking.

TS: Roll their eyes?

TM: I'm like, "What are they doing?" And then they talk and it's no better than the way you were saying it.

TS: Right.

TM: It's just a sense of entitlement, it's kind of—It was fun for me, too, but men just act like it's G.I. Joe [line of military action figures produced by the toy company Hasbro]. They're just playing war games with their little figures. So they speak about it more confidently and more matter-of-factly and ultimately. As a female, I think about it like, this could happen, this could happen, this could happen. That is not the way you're supposed to be in the army; you're supposed to know what's going to happen. I think that's stupid because nobody knows what's going to happen.

TS: Right.

TM: So I think—

TS: You can't make a contingency plan for every scenario because you don't know what you don't know, right?

TM: You don't know what you don't know. That is the worst thing that you can say in front of high-ranking people: "You don't know? Well, you're supposed to know. What are you talking about?"

TS: Yeah.

TM: And being a female, so people will—oh, stuff like going to the restroom or something like that. You, like, deal with it. You don't tell them, like, "This is not going to work for me." Something like that. That's what I'm talking about. You just better suck it up, and their little jokes—

TS: Issues of privacy.

TM: Issues of privacy. The little jokes.

TS: Vulgarly.

TM: Vulgarly. Just—You just deal with it.

TS: Are the way that the soldiers are acting in a war zone different than the way that they act back at the regular units?

TM: No.

TS: No? No. [both chuckle] Is it just intensified, maybe?

TM: It's a little intensified.

TS: Okay.

TM: With my unit, because there weren't on and off the roads, they weren't in and out of actual combat—

[Speaking Simultaneously]

TS: They stayed on the post.

TM: Yeah. They call those "fobbits" [slang term for soldiers who rarely leave the Forward Operating Base]. We stayed on post, so we didn't have the same kind of stresses as other units would have, and other soldiers would have.

TS: That go outside the wire.

TM: Yes, that go outside the wire.

TS: During that time, did you take an R&R [rest and recuperation (or recreation)] or did you go to see any bit of Iraq? Or go back home?

TM: I went home for my R&R, and the majority of my guys went home.

TS: Went home?

TM: Yeah. And you could get a plane ticket to anywhere.

TS: Anywhere?

TM: So a lot of mine travelled. [chuckles] The single soldiers. The men, the single men, they just went random place. You have two weeks. It ends up being about a good week because of travel time.

TS: Okay.

TM: But I went to Disneyland.

TS: Oh, yeah?

TM: Yes. My kids and I went to Disneyworld—excuse me—in Florida.

TS: Nice.

TM: Yeah. But, of course, I wanted to go see my babies. But they had flown up around the same time. You don't get a date, exactly, you just get a timeframe. So they had flown up. I told my husband a timeframe, and then I met them there, and everything worked out.

TS: So in the middle of the war you go to Disneyworld.

TM: Disney. Yeah, and I brought back all my soldiers a postcard.

TS: [chuckles]

TM: I just picked up some postcards and they loved it. They felt like, I guess, they went to Disneyland.

TS: That's great.

TM: [chuckles]

TS: Is there anything that I'm missing about your time in Iraq that you'd like to talk about?

TM: Well, I had a—you know I was telling you about the Greek organization.

TS: Oh, yeah. Right.

TM: So we formed a group out there, and we got connected, and that was awesome. That gave me a good distraction.

TS: How did that work?

TM: Well, you meet somebody who's in your sorority.

TS: Right.

TM: Actually, email. Like, "So-and-so is coming and she's there and you guys need to know each other." So we started emailing first.

TS: Right.

TM: She said what unit she's at, I say what unit I'm at. So we meet, then we find others that are on the post, and then we formed a group by just putting out a flyer.

TS: Oh, really?

TM: Yeah.

TS: Cool. How many of you were there?

TM: There are actually nine organiz—Greek organizations within the Pan-Hellenic Council

[Joint Base Balad Pan-Hellenic Council, known as the Divine Nine in the United States, consists of nine historically African-American, Greek fraternities and sororities]

TS: Okay.

TM: We put out all nine, so we have a very large group. Matter of fact, I'll probably submit a photo of that.

TS: Excellent. That would be great.

TM: We wore the t-shirts and everything. So we met at least every two weeks and we just played cards, and everybody had their own resources because they're from different units. Some people were able to acquire meat; I don't know from where. [both chuckle] Grill. We had beverages from DFAC [dining facility]. And there was a store so we bought stuff from the store, and it was like a good party. We would meet at different places.

TS: Oh, that's great.

TM: Yeah.

TS: Did your sorority back in the States do anything, like send care packages?

TM: They sent care packages; they sent little cards. These are people I don't even know. But my mother, like I said, is in the same sorority, and you know she was telling all of her sorority sisters in her chapter all about me, so they would send me random cards, and it was awesome, the love that I received, and everybody doesn't necessarily get that.

TS: Right. But you felt really supported, then?

TM: I was supported, for sure. I got a lot of care packages, too, from loved ones. And my unit, I would share my care packages, too, with them. You'd get—it's called, "Mail Call," so we got one soldier who's responsible for picking up mail. He drops all this mail off, and people who didn't get mail would still get something, because I know I got so many packages, from mostly my husband. He sent me a package a week.

TS: Aw.

TM: With the random stuff and treats. So I would share all my stuff.

TS: Yeah. Well, you're the captain. You ought to.

TM: Yeah, you do. Make it a big to-do; like, "Anybody want this? Anybody want this?" And it was a free for all. But people would send—or people do send packages. Like organizations that get together and just send packages to troops.

TS: Just randomly.

TM: Those were nice.

TS: Yeah.

TM: Even I got [unclear] some of those.

TS: What kind of things would people send?

TM: Body wash. [chuckles]

TS: That was really handy.

TM: Yes, it was. It was awesome. It smelled good. It's like, "Ooo. [I'm in the?] spa."

TS: [chuckles] Because you don't, probably, take a shower all the time.

TM: Exactly. Well, you had to walk to the showers. So you don't want to just hop in the shower just because; you need a shower, that's why you go take a shower.

TS: Okay. Anything else you want to mention about that experience?

TM: That—Those were the ones that are kind of different.

TS: Okay.

TM: You're just finding some brothers and sisters or whatever; having those support groups and those kind of connections. I'm trying to think what other organizations. There was

officer—There was this one officer group that I was part of, and I think it was—what was it called?—it was—I don't think it was Lieutenant Mafia, it was something else because it was captains and below. And this other captain and I ran across there—at some meeting. He said, "We're going to do this club." And so, I would go to that too.

TS: So you had a couple different organizations.

TM: Exactly. Just the way you find support groups, and how people come together in different ways while you're in those kind of environments, is something I would like to mention to you.

TS: Yes, excellent. I think that's great. So you end your deployment and you go back to Germany, right?

TM: Yes.

TS: It doesn't seem like you're there much longer.

TM: Exactly.

TS: Just a couple months?

TM: It was time to go home. So when we go back home, I say, "Dang, I've been in Germany three years and I didn't go anywhere." So my husband and I and the children, we went to France, we went—I think twice—we went to France, we went to Italy, and we went to England.

TS: Oh, nice.

TM: And Spain.

TS: So you got to travel a little bit.

TM: Yeah, real quick.

TS: Was that near the end of your tour? Did you get any extra leave time or anything?

TM: No, we did all this in the two weeks you get on—what is it?—I guess R&R, when you get back.

TS: Okay.

TM: We did this all in the two weeks.

TS: That's a lot of travel.

TM: Yes. And there's a couple four-day weekends, so I think we went to Spain on just a four-day weekend. We did all that after the end.

TS: So you packed it all in? [chuckles]

TM: I did.

TS: That's good.

TM: Because it's like, "Three years and I didn't go anywhere?" Because you think you have time. So we travelled really good, kids too, and at that time they could probably remember a lot of it still.

TS: Some of the experiences.

TM: Yeah, they were five years old.

TS: Then you went to Captains—

TM: Career Course.

TS: —Career Course at Fort Lee, Virginia.

TM: Yes.

TS: This is in 2011?

TM: Yes.

TS: Okay.

TM: Basic stuff at Captains Career Course, but you meet more people. And those people, you're all captains there, so—

TS: It's for your particular field?

TM: Yes, for Logistics Captains Career Course.

[Logistics Captain Career Course provides company grade officers an advanced learning environment focused on staff officer planning, company command, multifunctional logistics at the tactical and operational levels, and exposure to Unified Action Partners]

TS: And then after that you said you went into Recruiting Command?

TM: Yes, I went into Recruiting Command. That was my first assignment after the Career Course, and I was a company commander there.

TS: You're in Denver, Colorado?

TM: Yeah.

TS: You said Wheat Ridge?

TM: Wheat Ridge Recruiting Company [U.S. Army Recruiting Company Headquarters].

TS: Recruiting Company. How was Denver? That's a little different.

TM: I actually liked Colorado itself, and we got to—the family—got to travel a lot to the mountains. Got to travel to the mountains and—[speaking to child] What is it?

[Extraneous conversation redacted]

TM: [chuckles] So Colorado—Now that we moved away from Colorado, I miss Colorado.

TS: Do you?

TM: They call it the Mile High City, or what have you—the air quality—but other than that it was beautiful, it was scenic. They had a—I lived in a subdivision that was nice; it had a little water slide in it.

TS: And everybody was there?

TM: Everybody was there.

TS: Okay.

TM: Notice I'm not talking about the unit.

TS: Okay.

TM: The unit was annoying, but I had a lot of good soldiers there, and it was just trying, and that's more so because of the climate and optempo—the command climate, excuse me—and the optempo of the United States Recruiting Command on its own. It's just a really—

TS: A different world?

TM: —high stress environment.



TS: Why is it so stressful?

TM: The numbers. In recruiting, you have to make a certain number, and if you don't make it—which, they don't make it. There's not a plethora of people volunteering anymore.

TS: Right.

TM: So they don't make it, nobody makes it, so it's a trickledown effect onto the little guy. The lower you are, the worse it's going to be on you to make the numbers, or else. At some point they start to threaten you, and you're like, "Really?" It can affect your entire career.

TS: Yeah. If you don't make the numbers?

TM: If you do not make the numbers. And so, that was a surreal experience.

TS: Right.

TM: And I saw that happen to various people, and I'm like—

TS: How did the people under your command do for that; getting their goal? Was it tough?

TM: Yes, it was tough. I was by the mountains, so I was responsible for mountain—mounties.

TS: So a small pool, right?

TM: [chuckles] Yeah. But still, mounties are not thinking about patriotism.

TS: No?

TM: So it's how you approach. So we had to figure out what works and what doesn't work. We had Boulder; I was responsible for Boulder, Colorado.

TS: Right, a college unit[?].

TM: Yeah, a college. And so, a university town, they have options, so they're like, "What are we doing going into the military?"  
"Don't you want an adventure?"

TS: Right.

TM: Some people are like, "Yeah, I do." Others are like, "No. It's the dumbest thing I ever heard." [chuckles] And people would spit at my recruiters.

TS: Really?

TM: Yeah. "Get out of here." Some high schools would put them in corners and stuff. I mean, right across the highway was downtown Denver, and by the post. That unit was always compared to my unit. People walking to their places—

TS: Right. Different traffic flow.

TM: Goodness gracious. So it was ridiculous.

TS: Yeah.

TM: And good thing I was good friends with that company commander. So we would all—We'd be doing the same thing, but I'd be the one getting yelled at in the meeting.

TS: Right.

TM: And I'd just sit there. And I'm just not the personality to have too much of a reaction, so I'd just sit there, like, "Really?"

TS: So for that particular assignment, the environment—not the work environment—but the actual physical environment was pretty neat.

TM: The physical environment was neat but it made me want to exit stage right the entire military. [chuckles]

TS: Did it?

TM: Yeah, it did. And for my family too. My husband, he was—he had secured a job. Loved it; the best job he's had thus far. And so, that's why I was like—To think about it, Colorado was nice. If I would have been able to have a level—more level head about it, I could have stayed in Colorado.

TS: Yeah.

TM: Just not been in the military though—or, excuse me, in the Recruiting Command. It just made it that—while it's tunnel vision to, like, "I cannot be here. Colorado sucks."

TS: Right. Because you're connecting it to the work.

TM: To the work. Exactly. And then when I think now about how our life was there, I was like, "Darn. School system was better." Little things like real life [chuckles]—

TS: Right, right.

TM: —affects your family. [When you think?] now, it's like, "Oh, that was decent. My husband could have been promoted by now," this and that, but.

TS: What did you end up doing, then, after Colorado?

TM: After Colorado I got stationed to 1st Theater Sustainment Command here at Fort Bragg. But I wanted to be in North Carolina when I got out.

TS: Back in North Carolina? You knew you were going to get out?

TM: Yes, I did. Because of the recruiting.

TS: What happened with the recruiting?

TM: Yes.

TS: Okay.

TM: Yes, I knew it was—Well, excuse me—the military had a drawdown in forces this time, so I knew I would be selected before that.

TS: You did?

TM: Yes.

TS: When they do that, do they do a lump sum thing now?

TM: Yes. They did a lump sum; that's why I'm stuck for the three years. [chuckles] You have to.

TS: To stay here?

TM: No, to be in the reserves. Remember I was on a three-year contract.

TS: I see.

TM: So I was like, "I'm stuck, because if I leave earlier, then I'll have to pay back the lump sum."

TS: Oh, okay. So you you're staying on the reserves. When you were in the sustainment command, was there anything that happened there that you wanted to talk about?

TM: No. The sustainment command was great. It was getting back into what I call "regular army."

TS: Right.

TM: Getting back into logistics as it's meant to be. So I get a little grounded, get a little more confident, because I'm back in my element.

TS: Okay.

TM: Recruiting was a different world; it's just different.

TS: If you could have skipped that.

TM: If I could have skipped that, I would have skipped that. It was just—I didn't need it, because I had already taken troops overseas, and I already got my Bronze Star. I already had my key development position—is what it's called—KD position, so I was on track with my career.

TS: You were on a good career progression.

TM: Yeah, on a great career progression. I was already a captain. I didn't need it, I just wanted a challenge.

TS: Oh, okay.

TM: And I got it.

TS: [chuckles] Unexpectedly.

TM: Oh, this is worse than war. If this is worse than war—

TS: Then you got a problem.

TM: —what are we doing here, yeah. [chuckles]

TS: What was the transition like for you when you got out? You got out in 2015, right?

TM: Yeah, 2015. The process and the way I went about getting out of the military—excuse me, active duty—is a little different than others because I was separated; involuntarily separated.

TS: Okay.

TM: I was happily involuntarily separated. [chuckles] I was so happy.

TS: Yeah. What does that mean, though, involuntarily separated?

TM: They had a drawdown, and it's called a Reduction in Forces, so it's called a RIF.

TS: Okay.

TM: And so, on my paperwork, my DD214 [army discharge form] says "RIF" on it. So then I got an honorable discharge, and it's because the army is having a reduction in forces.

TS: Okay.

TM: But the way you're notified is, because you were involuntarily relieved—something like that. So anyways, you have to be told by a general. My general was in—Kuwait or Iraq? Probably in Kuwait. And so, I had to do a VCT [correction: VTC; video teleconference] with him. And so, I get notified, "Hey—" by the general—

TS: VTC? Video—

TM: Video.

TS: Tele-something.

TM: Yeah. Teleconference.

TS: Okay.

TM: And so, the general's aide is like, "The colonel wants to see you this time." So my section chief, he's a lieutenant colonel—his name was Lieutenant [unclear]—he told him to—"The colonel wants to—the general wants to speak to you."  
I said, "Oh, I'm getting kicked out of the army."  
He's like, "What are you talking about?" Because there's buzz going on; everybody knows there's a reduction in forces.

TS: Right.

TM: They do a board, and I wasn't the only person on the board. It was just a board of all captains and majors in this timeframe.

TS: Category?

TM: Yes. So that's how they make it fair. They do a board; they review everybody's paperwork. So, yeah, I know some other people that were also relieved[?]. So there's buzz going on. Everybody knows. The captains and everybody knows the list is out and everybody's just kind of waiting. So I get told the last day, I swear, that you can get notified. You have until the thirtieth, which was Friday, of June to be notified. I was notified on the thirtieth.  
Anyway, I told him and he was just like, "You don't know that."  
I was like, "Why would the general, who is busy right now, want to speak to me?"

TS: Right.

TM: And so, he was just playing it cool. I went up, and he was looking at my paperwork and I'm—he was looking through my files. He was like, "I've reviewed your files, you haven't done anything. You're on a good career path. What do you think happened?"  
And I was telling him, I said, "Recruiting." [chuckles]

TS: Right.

TM: And he was just like, "Oh, okay. Well, good luck. Is there anything you need from me, do not hesitate—anybody gives you any problems, don't hesitate to contact me."  
I went then to the battalion commander—the battalion commander—me and one other guy were on the list in our command.

TS: Okay.

TM: He—Later on some majors were also let go. But he was like, "Anything you need." And sure enough, that was how it went. I got—He treated me very well on my way out.

TS: Good.

TM: I got a reward—award ceremony and stuff, so.

TS: Nice.

TM: My exit was pretty good.

TS: Smoother than your entrance, right?

TM: It was much smoother than my entrance, yes

TS: Yeah. Were you disappointed that you were on the list?

TM: No. I wanted to leave.

TS: Not at that point?

TM: And in Colorado I had made so many decisions. I was like, "I'm going to North Carolina because I'm getting out. I would like to buy a house," and we did that when we got here.

TS: Right.

TM: "I would like to buy a house, I would like to get my kids settled, and we're not going anywhere else."

TS: I see.

TM: Fast forward two years. I've been here two years, I'm like, "I don't want to live here."  
[both chuckle] And I have to stop, though. That's something that's being in the military mindset, is you think you have—you can't sit down for a long—

TS: Right, you've been moving.

TM: You have to leave. I'm like—I need to stop my kids too. They don't like the school, they're like, "When are we leaving?"  
I was like, "Oh, I can't believe I did this to you guys." Because people don't move away from school.

TS: Right, right.

TM: You deal with it. You work it out. So that's where—current situation, and how we are just adjusting and trying to stay put.

TS: Yeah. Can I ask you some general questions about being in the military as a woman?

TM: Yes.

TS: And as an African-American. You actually have described some incidences where you have been discriminated against, right?

TM: Yes.

TS: Did you ever feel discriminated against as a black woman?

TM: Yes.

TS: Yes. Can I grab another water?

TM: Oh, sorry! I can get you some cold water too.

TS: No, that's okay. So tell me about that.

TM: Discriminated against as a woman. I launched an Equal Opportunity complaint.

TS: Oh, you filed one?

TM: Yes.

TS: When was that?

TM: I filed one probably 2012 or 2013. It was 2013 I launched a complaint.

TS: This was in the Recruiting Command?

TM: Yes, and I chronological—chronolized [sic], kind of, some of the things I had experienced, and I attributed it to me being a woman, and I attributed it to me being black as well, but more so the woman.

TS: Okay.

TM: Because the way that command—it was my commander and the sergeant major. Now, the way they spoke to women, it would be, "No." He'd cut you off.

TS: Disrespectful.

TM: Disrespecting me[?]. He would cut—If you were [unclear] he would cut you off while you were talking. It was crazy. Both of them would do that. And then I had a first sergeant who had some issues, but he would—women were, "Bitch this, Bitch that." So in my—and they would always hang around each other, so I was like, "If you're saying that and doing that in front of my face, what are you doing behind it? If every other person is this—"

TS: Right.

TM: "If every woman is this, you're saying the same things about me." And so, in my opinion, I was like, "This just has to stop. Or at least be addressed. You need to be called out on it."

TS: Right.

TM: And so, I launched an investigation.

TS: And then what was the outcome of that?

TM: By the time the investigation was done I was here in North Carolina. They drew that thing out so long, the commander was gone. Actually, the sergeant major did get relieved.

TS: He did?

TM: Or he got—

TS: Reprimanded?

TM: No, he got early retirement. He was forced into early retirement.

TS: To leave as well?

TM: Yes.



TS: Do you feel like that was an unsatisfactory outcome from your complaint?

TM: No.

TS: No? That it was looked at.

TM: It was looked at and it was investigated. People were able to express their concerns, and so that was enough[?].

TS: Things got aired at least.

TM: Things got aired.

TS: Okay.

TM: It was taken very seriously; made it all the way to the general level. The climate got better in the environment.

TS: Even after you launched it, because you were still there for another year, right?

TM: Yes. I was still there, yes. So we dealt with it.

TS: You didn't feel like you were being retaliated against for filing it?

TM: Oh, no.

TS: No?

TM: No, I didn't think I was being retaliated against. I mean, the damage was already done.

TS: Right.

TM: He had written me an evaluation and the evaluation didn't say anything. It didn't say anything that I had accomplished. It just said that she and her first sergeant are working on cultivating a good relationship in order to attain success.

TS: Okay.

TM: That is so—you can't write that. Like, that doesn't say—This is an evaluation. What have I done?

TS: Right.

TM: There's none of that in my evaluation. There isn't, "She did this amount of recruits, and this amount of activities, and her soldiers have done this."

TS: So underhandedly it undermined you as an officer.

TM: Yes. It undermined me as an officer, but what are you putting my first sergeant on there for? What does he have to do with my evaluation?

TS: Right.

TM: And it says that on there; it says, "First sergeant—Working on a better relationship with her first ser—" I can call the dude right now because he's come back and he has apologized. He was like, "Yeah, I did. I went up there. I complained about you. I said some choice things, and I think it's affected you, and it's going to continue to affect you." I was like, "Why did you do it? You can't come back and apologize now." I didn't say all that.

TS: It's already done.

TM: But I was just like—

TS: But he did at least come and own up to it, I guess.

TM: Yeah, he did. He did. He fessed up [to confess] to it and apologized, and he was just like—because it didn't work. You didn't take any accountability and responsibility.

TS: Right.

TM: And what happened with he and I is, we did an initial counseling, and I told him all these things; the same things I told all of my first sergeants. That's why it was very undermining. And it's because I'm a woman, because I've done this for years now. I was, like, "You're my fifth first sergeant."

TS: Right.

TM: "This is common things that I tell everybody, but you reacted differently, and why—just because you said something, [unclear] my lieutenant commander, who's supposed to be mentoring me, take your word over—" Actually, I didn't even get a word; just blatantly told me that I was being unfair to my first sergeant. Based off of what? We had no conversations. So it was bad. And then he wrote the evaluation, and I was just like, "That doesn't make any sense."

TS: Right. But you didn't really have any, maybe, mentor to reach out to, to help.

TM: No. And I did. I reached out to someone because I was like, "How can I do better?" It's an impossible task.  
But I did reach out to somebody and he—and my commander said, "Well, you have no business reaching out to anybody for mentorship. That shows lack of maturity and disloyalty."

I put all this in my investigation, but who says that? I've never run into that before. When you have Lieutenant Colonel Curran[?] telling you and mentoring you and molding you, and just giving you the endless possibilities, to this guy who says that you are disloyal, all of a sudden there's no—nothing found that I was disloyal. That's like a harsh word in the military.

TS: Right. It is.

TM: Disloyal and lacks maturity. But what he was doing was building a paper trail to say that all this stuff was factual, and for me, I was like—responding to him was like, "In what way? In what manner?" And kind of being like, "Well, here goes what I talked about with this guy." And it's all professional. So no feedback from him. He never counseled[?] me.

TS: You just saw it all in your OER [Office Evaluation Report]?

TM: Yeah. It was all in my OER, and I was like—Okay. The statement: Working on developing a functional relationship with her first sergeant in order to attain mission success. So I have a dysfunctional relationship with the guy? And why would that be my fault?

TS: Right. Exactly. That's true.

TM: Where is his accountability? If I hold him accountable, which is my job—If I hold him accountable and he flips out about it, or he's the one who lacks maturity about it, goes and tells—this is tattle-telling—and you all have this long conversation—because I was receiving calls. Before my first sergeant came to tell me, I knew; I was receiving calls. They were like, "Hey, why is your—" Clowning, kind of joking. They were my peers. Another captain. "Why is your first sergeant up here at headquarters in the office with your—with the commander and the sergeant major?" And I already know how my first sergeant just speaks of females.

TS: Right.

TM: So I was like, "They're probably in there talking about me. But how hard—how bad could that be?" He can do whatever he wants to do. It's not going to make me adjust or change my policies or—because I haven't done anything that wasn't fair. Having a conversation face-to-face with him. At that point he could have said anything.

TS: But he didn't?

TM: But he didn't. He went and just, kind of, complained, but I've said, still, how bad can that be? Anybody can complain. I've had complaints made to me on behalf of other people. I get the other person's side. Just thinking, because I hadn't run into this type of thing before.

TS: Right.

TM: So I just—if I can go back—if I can go back and do it all again, I think that I would probably just confront my commander.

TS: Directly?

TM: Directly. And just ask him, "Is this going on or not?" Because the other way that it was handled—

TS: You were just defending everything that was kind of thrown at you.

TM: Exactly. Just defending everything that was kind of thrown at me. And still trying to just maintain the company command as I knew how it was supposed to be; still take care of my troops. So it was hard. There was staff members—There were several complaints launched after that other than mine.

TS: Really? Okay. So there was a building case against—

TM: Yeah, and that's why the sergeant major, he was forced to retire.

TS: I got it. Can I ask you a much broader question? When you were in they repealed the "Don't Ask, Don't Tell." What do you think about that whole issue of homosexuals and, now, transgender in the military?

["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]

TM: Well, I had in Iraq a homosexual soldier and "Don't Ask, Don't Tell" was on the table or something. It was being—It hadn't been repealed yet.

TS: It was in Congress? They were talking about it?

TM: Yes. So I had a soldier who just wanted to—He [chuckles]—I guess there was some jokes being told—awful probably—that triggered him, but he sent out this email and he cc-ed me on it, and he's talking to his platoon sergeant. I guess that platoon sergeant must have made some comments that he didn't like, and he said, "I'm sick of this. This is who I am. This is who—" A long paragraph.

So he sent it to me, I go and talk to the first sergeant, I go talk to—I go talk to the person who it was directed at. The guy was like—We're all looking because—I don't—I know it's not nice to say that you can tell somebody is gay, but we could tell, so it wasn't a shock to anybody.

TS: Right.

TM: And nobody cares. [chuckles] Like, "Do your job."

So my first sergeant's like, "I'm not getting in trouble. I'm going to have to let somebody know this."

So we contact the—my sergeant major and my commander out there—and we're like, "We're dealing with this situation."

The sergeant major's like, "Oh. Well, it's unfortunate, and he's going to have a tough road ahead of him as he gets through this. As in, "Okay, you're not going home."

Because ultimately, when you do "Don't Ask, Don't Tell," in violation, is kind of UCMJ [Uniform Code of Military Justice] or you get—when you get separated from the military, you get—The word is gone.

TS: It's okay. So by saying, "Yes, I'm gay," then it's supposed to put these things in motion.

TM: Yes.

TS: It's going to separate him.

TM: Yes.

TS: Is that what happened?

TM: No. I spoke to him and I told him that he needs to calm down. [chuckles]

TS: Yeah.

TM: And, of course—and seek counsel if he wanted to, but we were all, like—I was telling him that he really needs to calm down because what's he's doing is being disrespectful, and that's another—that's a-whole-other road that he doesn't want to go down.

TS: Right.

TM: I was like, "If you're feeling this way, then we can address it, as far as people disrespecting you, and that's different. But what you cannot do is disrespect your superiors. And sending this email. And you're not a part of the movement right now; you're part of this mission and you need to do your job."

TS: Not a part of the movement?

TM: Yes. That's what he was doing.

TS: Like part of the gay movement, you mean?

TM: As far as the—

TS: Oh, interesting, yeah.

TM: What do you call it? It's a movement. Or it was and is. The movement of—the marches that were going on and the fighting.

TS: Right. Protesting.

TM: And protesting and everything. So I was like, "Hey, you're deployed, guy, so you better do your job. As long as you do your job, we're not concerned. You've run into the wrong commander."

TS: [chuckles] Yeah.

TM: "You're not getting out of here. Any of us can get out of here, we would."

TS: Right.

TM: "You're not special."

TS: Do you think he did it try to get out of the deployment?

TM: No. I think he did it because he was fed up.

[Speaking Simultaneously]

TS: He just was fed up.

TM: And that's different. So we worked through that, and even—he ended up getting an Article 15 [non-judicial punishment for minor offenses].

TS: For what?

TM: For doing it again, in a nutshell. For just being—I think there was another email probably. Probably to another person too.

TS: Yeah.

TM: And that's when it was like, "Okay, great. Now you've taken it outside of our—"

TS: Hands?

TM: Not even our hands. "You've taken it outside of our bubble, outside of our unit." It's like, "You put it—" and it was, I believe, probably to our commander, but—or sergeant major, somebody—but they already knew.

TS: Right.

TM: They already knew, so luckily it was still in-house. But we had all discussed it. We were just like—The sergeant major's like, "Get him the help that he needs if he needs anything." That was the end of it. That was the, "No, you're not going anywhere."

TS: Do you think that because this policy's in place, the soldier's frustrated?

TM: Yes.

TS: What did you think when it was finally repealed? Was that a good thing, a bad thing?

TM: It was a good thing. I mean, the military has its own set of regulations, but as far as controlling that detail of somebody's personal life, I don't think that it was necessary, and it was an old policy.

TS: Right.

TM: Just like black people weren't allowed at one time. I mean, it has to be repealed at some point. You're getting too personal; into too much of the personal details.

TS: Because the way that you're describing what went on—you were over in Iraq at the time?

TM: Yes.

TS: That policy created all these little obstacles for just doing your mission, right?

TM: Yeah, exactly.

TS: And if it just hadn't been there, then he would have just worked, and whatever personality conflict they might have had otherwise would have been something else.

TM: Yes.

TS: But it would not have led to non-judicial proceedings, right?

TM: It would not have, but he actually was just—Everybody was having a hard time. Not everybody, but individuals have a hard time. He was just really stressing, having a hard time. So that's a good example of what the lieutenant colonel taught me.

TS: Right.

TM: As he came into the office, we were sitting there. He got all his proceedings, all the—I had—I took his rank because it had warranted—everything he did had warranted it. I told him—after all that and you're relaxed in the proceeding and we're signing papers, we had a talk—a regular talk—and I was like, "You were doing so well beforehand, and I know this is not you, not your potential."

TS: Right.

TM: "You—" He was—"You received [challenge] coins," and that's the thing that got him then; he did realize that. He was a soldier and this is his reputation—his career—that is on the line. So he's able to focus now on that, because he's gotten coins from a general—people who traveled all the way to see him. I was able to point that kind of stuff out.

[A challenge coin is a small coin or medallion, bearing an organization's insignia or emblem and carried by the organization's members. Challenge coins are normally presented by unit commanders in recognition of special achievement by a member of the unit. They are also exchanged in recognition of visits to an organization.]

TS: Right.

TM: And for the man that he is, and you're jeopardizing all of this right now.

TS: Right.

TM: Afterwards, I think we took him over to mental health. [chuckles] But he wanted to go. He was distraught.

TS: He needed some kind of support.

TM: Support. So we took him there and I picked him up from there. And then, same thing, I was driving him—He had to be on unit watch—that's what it is.

TS: Okay.

TM: He had to be on unit watch because of that. And so, I put him—I picked him up and we were—I was taking him down to the TOC[?] [Tactical Operations Center?], down—and he was like, "What are people going to think?" [unclear] [chuckles]

TS: Right.

TM: I was driving, I was like, "Guy, we don't—It's not—We care about you. We're not concerned with your sexual orientation." That's me in my head. But I told him, "I think you'll be surprised."



TS: Right.

TM: That's all I said. And get down there, everybody takes care of him. And he's just so relieved.

TS: Oh, okay.

TM: He's different the next day.

TS: Really?

TM: Because everybody—Well, everybody had opportunity to take care of him. We had—the guy is now a fallen soldier. Not in a death way, but he's—nobody wants anybody to be like that. Nobody wants anybody to lose rank.

TS: Well, that's good.

TM: Nobody wants anybody to have to go to mental health because they actually have hit a point where they're a danger to themselves.

TS: Right.

TM: Nobody wants that. And nobody was ever talking to him in our unit. We—Because we receive people's equipment, people will come in and out, and I think other people made comments.

TS: Okay.

TM: And then in the unit, people expressed their feelings—bias or what—and it is disrespectful. So I had to go in, and I had to go back and tell everybody, "You don't say things that are going to offend anybody. Not in this unit. We're a team. If you know something's a hot button, then you don't go there." Stuff like that. So I had to cleanse[?] out my unit, but it wasn't—

TS: But it worked?

TM: It worked, but nobody was really trying to harm anybody there.

TS: Right.

TM: So it was—It wasn't—

TS: Just made a softer landing for him when he came back in, I guess.

TM: I don't know, but it was all in his head, and it was tough having to—you can't have the regular conversations everybody else is having because it's against the rule, okay?

TS: Right.

TM: So it was just tough on him. And seeing that, and going back to your question, experiencing that, and seeing how he was before—just being closed—that closet—what they call that closet—and then being able to kind of be a little bit out of it because now everybody knows.

TS: Right.

TM: "Why are you surprised? Ain't nobody cares, man. Good for you." That's how it was. Now we support you in whatever you want to do. I think this is something else you're just going through. And I felt—At that point you kind of feel bad for the person. You're just like, "Well, that sucks."

TS: Interesting.

TM: But he was a different person after the whole ordeal, and he did get his rank back before he went home.

TS: Did he?

TM: Yes.

TS: Oh, that's great news.

TM: He straightened up. You're falling apart, here.

TS: Is there anything more you wanted to say on that topic?

TM: No, but I do think that "Don't Ask, Don't Tell" was just outdated. At least it was there. Before, you would ask and tell.

TS: Right.

TM: So I do understand.

TS: It served a purpose for a time.

TM: Yes. I do understand you have no business asking anybody's sexual orientation and what they want to do in that area. This is private. So, yeah, I do understand the purpose of it. I am glad they had something.

TS: Right. Right. Well, one of the other hot button issues is women in combat. Do you think there's any position within the army, or any of the services, that women should not have an opportunity to try to do?

TM: I don't want to go into combat [chuckles], but I am happy to combat service[?] support.

TS: Right.

TM: But if you want to go into combat, go into combat, but—I do understand that you can't get children out of any other species but the woman, so if we're all dead then you can't procreate; that's just the way that the world is. So I understand why that is morally conflicting to some people that make these decisions, or that have made the decisions that women can't go into combat. Well, that's just like saying, "Where do they belong?" Hence, saying where a woman belongs and don't belong. Like, in the home. What?

TS: Right.

TM: That's offensive. And so, it's saying that they can't go to combat. You can't tell a woman what she's supposed to do or what she needs to do, and [unclear] law about her own free will.

TS: You think if she's qualified?

TM: You have to be qualified. You have to—If you want to do it you have to do the exact same thing that the men do.

TS: Right. I think most women feel that way, it seems like.

TM: Yes.

TS: Even though—

TM: You don't get special privileges.

TS: No. Right. Well, nobody wants that because then you've got that attention.

TM: Yes, they do. I do. I enjoy special privileges.

TS: [laughs]

TM: If they ask to carry my bag.

TS: You like special privileges. But you wouldn't do that as a captain, right?

TM: What?

TS: Special privileges.

TM: Well, no. When I say "special privileges" as a woman, and I'm talking—

TS: Outside the work?

TM: —I'm not talking about special privileges like fudging any procedures or any papers or any policies.

TS: Right.

TM: Not that at all. I'm talking about ladies first. I'll go first.

TS: Right.

TM: [laughs]

TS: So you're talking about issue of femininity?

TM: Femininity. That's it, yeah. I'm a lady.

TS: I read somewhere recently where women don't necessarily think that they're equal to men, but there's an equivalency in the work they do, right?

TM: Okay.

TS: Everybody brings something to that mission.

TM: Yes.

TS: And no matter whatever size, gender, race, ethnicity you are, not everyone has those same skills all the way across the board.

TM: Right.

TS: So it's a matter of having this equivalency to that team to complete the mission, right?

TM: Yes.

TS: It's not like every single one lined up—all the soldiers are all equal across the board.

TM: Right.

TS: Even if they were all men.

TM: Yeah. It can't be.

TS: So that was a new way for me to look at it.

TM: Yeah. I agree with that.

TS: Does that make sense to you?

TM: Yes. That is—And you—As a commander or as somebody who's a manager, you place people by their skill and by their capabilities and what they can do.

TS: And some people fit on a team because they offer something different than somebody else.

TM: Right.

TS: It's just something I was thinking about when you were explaining that. I don't have any more questions, but I want to ask you, how do you think your life's been different since that day that you were sitting with that recruiter and you got enlisted?

TM: How I think my life's been different?

TS: Has been different since you went in the army, really, is the question.

TM: My life has been awesome since I went into the army. So if I can compare my life to—at the same timeframe I got two best friends—if I compare my life to my two best friends, which sometimes I do—

TS: Growing up with, you mean?

TM: Yes, that I grew up with, high schools, since sixteen. I've had a lot more adventure, exposure, and experience than they [did]. And that's because I just went all for it.

TS: Yeah.

TM: I went all for it, even with the family situation. [chuckles]

TS: Right.

TM: Bunch of kids at one time, and dealing with career, and family is crazy. And then not just *a* career, a military career.

TS: Right.

TM: The travel, the uprooting, the separation. The average person does not go through that in life.

TS: Right. Well, that leads me to another question. Is there anything you'd like a civilian to know or understand about being in the military, or being a soldier, that they perhaps don't understand or maybe misinterpret?

TM: The one thing that flashes in my head, that I have experienced in the last year, are the children—military children. People don't understand, kind of, why they are the way they are; the need for them to have additional support. And when I say additional support, for instance, the first elementary school that I put my daughters in, I didn't know that there was such a thing as a military life family counselor [Military and Family Life Counseling Program?]. And at that particular school, they just enrolled my kids. They did ask if we were military, they did make us fill out paperwork, but, in turn, I think the paperwork was just for them to get money. They did not refer my kid to the actual person who specialized in military kids there. There was a group that was being—that was set aside, that had group meetings, and they spoke to military children. I'm sure they talked about travel; I'm sure they talked about separation; I'm sure they talked about everything my kids probably should have been able to express.

TS: Right.

TM: Or needed to. Instead, my kids were just tested and tested and tested, because we had moved during the end of the school year, and so they want to—they tried—they put things into my kids' records—you don't even know them.

TS: Right.

TM: I don't understand how you can do that, and that's permanent. So I wouldn't quite let them. But I was confused as a parent. I was like, "Are they behind? Are they—Is there something wrong?" Because they tried to make me feel like there was something wrong. "Your kid needs to be tested for special needs and stuff." Well, she wasn't special needs when we left.

TS: Right.

TM: So I don't know. And so, they're like, "We have a program, and then they going to test your kid." Two—The following week, I get another letter from the same teacher. "Oh, you must have had a talk with her or something because she's doing fine now." Well, can she adjust? Yeah, I had a talk with her and now she's intelligent.

TS: [chuckles]

TM: Because I talked to her. Why did you jump to so many conclusions?

TS: Right.

TM: Since then I took my kids out of the school, took them to charter school; the charter schools aren't all that better. So as a parent I'm just like—

TS: What do you do?

TM: Yeah. That's been the last two years. But now I'm a little more grounded now, and I've got my bearings, so I've been ready to fight the school.

TS: [chuckles]

TM: And, I mean, a lot of parents are doing that anyway, so I feel kind of normal in that way, because at least I'm not deployed.

TS: Right. You have time to put into it.

TM: Yeah, so I think that's kind of awesome, but I think that's what flashed because of this current situation, is the children.

TS: Interesting.

TM: They need more support. They need focus on them.

TS: Right. Because they're living a different kind of life than civilian children.

TM: Yes.

TS: Not that they don't ever move, but they're not being deployed to a war zone generally.

TM: Exactly.

TS: Their parents, I mean. If any of your children—they're all girls, right?

TM: Yes.

TS: If they wanted to join the army or some other service, what would you say to them?

TM: I would say [both chuckle] [unclear] Like my dad, right? I'm like, "No."

TS: You'd say no?

TM: Yeah.

TS: Really?

TM: Yeah, I'm going to tell them to go to college; I would tell them to go into the reserves; I would tell them to go into the air force. Everything safe I would tell them to do.

TS: Yeah. You want to keep them protected.

TM: I would keep them protected. If I had a choice.

TS: Now, if it's not your own child and someone says that they wanted to join, what kind of advice would you give them?

TM: Most people that I do give that advice, I tell them to go into the military. I tell them to enlist; there's nothing wrong with it, because there isn't. If you don't commission, there's nothing wrong with it, because there isn't. I do tell them that it's going to be tough, and that it will be different, but it's for the—it'll just make that person better.

TS: Yeah. What does patriotism mean to you?

TM: Patriotism means just having pride in this country; pride in the United States of America and being from the United States of America. It is as simple as that. Just be proud to be what you are, where you're from. We have so many different nationalities here, and you should be proud of your nationality as well, and that's the good part of being American, because you can be whatever you are.

TS: All sorts of backgrounds.

TM: All sorts of background. And I think patriotism is just being proud of being an American.

TS: I don't have any more formal questions, but is there anything that you want to add that we haven't talked about, or to sum up how you feel about your time in the army?

TM: My time in the army has been great. It's been—it's had its ups and downs, of course, but I believe that it's not for everybody, and I do say that all the time.

TS: Yeah.

TM: Otherwise, you have to be cut from a special cloth to put up with it. I enjoy talking to my best friends that I mentioned because the way they view things is a crack-up; they're just so secure in life. And being in the military, I was like, "You do know that that is because everybody has been sacrificing for you to be able to say such things, and be so confident [chuckles] about your life, liberty, and pursuit of happiness."

TS: Right.

TM: And so—

TS: How do they receive that when you say that?

TM: Everybody's respectful. They're like, "Thanks for your service." [chuckles]

TS: Yeah, right.

TM: Of course. Nobody's discounting anything that I've done, and I don't walk around like I'm special, so there's no need to get defensive if I say that.



TS: Right, right.

TM: But—And they're my best friends so it's just funny.

TS: So they take whatever.

TM: Yeah. It's just whatever they say is funny to me, and the same thing, I'm sure, when I open my mouth. It's like, "Okay." [chuckles]

But I do believe that the army is necessary. And we started off talking about history; there's always battles throughout history; battles for progress. And I actually think that we're good now. I'm talking about the world. Like, stop trying to get more territory.

TS: Right.

TM: I think everybody should just be happy in their territory.

TS: Yeah.

TM: Current situation, I'm over war, I'm over deploying. Now you won't see me volunteering or being as eager as I was.

TS: Well, now you've got kids.

TM: Now I have—Yes, children. I've started my own business, so I just like—

TS: What business have you started?

TM: I have a beauty and wellness company called Tashi Hair Boutique and Tashi Health and Body.

TS: Okay.

TM: It's holistic wellness and, kind of, cosmetic arts married into one, so it's total wellness concept.

TS: Excellent.

TM: Yes.

TS: If you could do it all over again, would you, with these exceptions that you said—"Okay, maybe in that recruiting thing I would have had a different—But, I mean, do you have any regrets? Would you do it again?"

TM: I would do it again because my life's turned out great. I did start off with a partner who is still around. So we've been fine. I've always had somebody to talk to, and even in deployment and separation, and I will not lie, we've had different temptations that everybody else has had, and being able to now say that we've gotten through all of that as a couple. I've got to do everything as a woman, I've got to do everything as a mother. I have had a good experience. Everybody can't say that, and I do empathize with—my father, for instance, they're—my mother and father are not together. He's had his military journey and I've had my military journey. I've learned from him. My kids hopefully are going to learn from me, and so on and so on.

TS: Right.

TM: And just being better examples. But I have lived my life to the fullest. We've traveled. It's molding us into better people, because both of us were—what?—twenty-two.

TS: Yeah. Real young.

TM: We were young and you don't feel like that. But now that my kids are ten and I'm just thirty-three.

TS: Yeah, you're still young. [chuckles]

TM: Exactly. And I've had an entire career. I'm thinking to myself, "This is the time people usually start having children." That's crazy.

TS: Yeah.

TM: To me. Because they're ten.

TS: Well, I've really enjoyed the conversation. Is there anything else you want to add?

TM: No.

TS: Okay. Well, thank you very much. I appreciate it, Tasheera. I'm going to stop.

[End of Recording]