

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

INTERVIEWEE: Caroline Cleveland

INTERVIEWER: Beth Ann Koelsch

DATE: 25 September 2016

[Begin Interview]

BAK: Today is September 25, 2016. My name is Beth Ann Koelsch. I'm at the home of Caroline Cleveland in Carrboro, North Carolina, to conduct an oral history interview for the Women Veterans Historical Project at the University of North Carolina at Greensboro. Caroline, thanks for doing this for us today. If you could state your name the way you would like it to read on your collection.

CC: Caroline Cleveland.

BAK: Okay. If you could please tell me—we've been over these on some of the forms, but just for the official oral history—if you could tell me when and where you were born?

CC: I was born on October 7, 1987 in Suffern, New York.

BAK: What did your parents do?

CC: My mother was an outdoor recreational instructor and worked at Helen Hayes Rehabilitation Hospital before I was born, then was a caretaker of myself and my two younger brothers, and her parents in their old age. My father was in the navy for four years before I was born, has a master's in philosophy that he puts due use on daily life, and is finishing up thirty-five years at what was Niagara Mohawk [Power Corporation, New York], now is Bethlehem Energy [Center].

BAK: Okay. Do you have any brothers or sisters?

CC: Yes, I have two younger brothers; John Earl and Andrew.

BAK: Do they consider you a good older sister?

CC: I think so. They say I set the bar too high.

BAK: Oh. [both chuckle] Wow. Okay. What was it like growing up there?

CC: We grew up in the suburb of East Greenbush, outside of New York's capital, Albany. And it was—Nearly my entire family lives all within in that same zip code, so. My best friends growing up were people that I went all the way through school with. And my cousins who also lived nearby, and we'd spend a lot of our summers in the Adirondacks [Mountains] where my great-grandfather had built a hunting cabin on about a hundred and sixty acres. So lots of hiking and time in the great outdoors.

BAK: Wow, okay. [extraneous comments about mic redacted] Where did you go to high school?

CC: I went to Bishop McGinn High School in Albany.

BAK: Okay. A good Catholic high school?

CC: Yes. [chuckles]

BAK: As did I. What was your favorite subject in school?

CC: I'm not sure. I mean, I'm thinking—I liked the sciences. I'm thinking more so my favorite professors in school, particularly my senior year taking an economics class, and that was before the 2005 election. So just thinking about at eighteen what my—I was actually seventeen and wasn't able to vote in that election—but just applying all the things you learned in school to real life. Like establishing our political platforms and doing—running loans for our first car, and kind of the real life skills.

BAK: That's good. Did you like school?

CC: I liked college more than I liked high school.

BAK: Got it.

CC: [chuckles]

BAK: You graduated in—

CC: Two thousand and five.

BAK: Two thousand and five.

CC: Yeah, from high school.

BAK: Okay. Did you go right to college?

CC: I did. I was seventeen when I signed my ROTC [Reserve Offices' Training Course] contract for Siena College [Albany, New York]. I had originally wanted to go to West Point [United States Military Academy] but wasn't able to get a nomination from a

senator or congressman, so I decided on ROTC, and was fairly adamant about going as far away from home as possible, but had to do my ROTC interview at the nearest college with a ROTC program. So I went to Siena, which is actually where my parents rekindled their romance post-high school, at the Rathskeller [campus bar], which is no longer there, at Siena. My mom had been wanting me to go there because it was only twenty minutes from home. So I went for my interview, really liked the campus and the Health Sciences/Biology program. And then at seventeen you still needed your parent's signature to do your contract, so I tried to tell my mom, "Hey, sign here, free t-shirt;" she didn't fall for it.

BAK: [chuckles]

CC: So we had to have a conversation, but they ultimately supported me. My dad, under the thought that, "Oh, the army will pay for med school. I don't have to. It'll be great." My mother still being a little concerned at that point. And then within that first semester I really liked ROTC. I still liked Biology but wanted—knew I didn't want to go into army medicine from the get-go. Still trying to plan twelve years of my life out at seventeen, eighteen years old.

BAK: Your dad served in the navy, so did he wonder why you did not choose the navy?

CC: We did have that conversation, and he didn't understand why I would want to join the army because army people have to sleep on the ground.

BAK: Right.

CC: And I said, "I don't understand why people join the navy because you have to sleep in a bunk on a ship." And I've since then—Actually, when I was leaving the army I visited a friend in Yokosuka, Japan, where my dad was stationed, and she had twenty-four hour duty on the ship, so I said, "Oh, it's cool. I'll go there with you." And it was either really hot or really cold, and you hit your head a hundred times, even with your hardhat on. So I feel like I made the right choice.

BAK: Okay. So he wasn't grumbling, "No daughter of mine is going to join—"

CC: No, it was more just witty banter.

BAK: Got it. Okay. During college, what major did you declare?

CC: Biology.

BAK: Biology. Did you enjoy college?

CC: I did. I really liked Biology, and I—my favorite part of college was ROTC and the friends that I established within ROTC just being really intrinsically motivated and, of course, likeminded individuals as well.

BAK: Siena; you were happy with it on the whole?

CC: Yes.

BAK: But you were pretty focused on the ROTC.

CC: Yes.

BAK: Okay. You graduated in—

CC: Two thousand and nine.

BAK: Okay. And then what happened after you took off your mortar board [graduated]?

CC: Yeah. I commissioned two days before I actually graduated, and then we had a week, and then I left for—I was actually lucky I was in my class because the army wasn't officially drawing down at that point, but active duty slots were no longer surging, so I was able to start active duty just about a week later, and I went to Fort Lewis, Washington, where I—I'm trying to remember what the official name was—but essentially served as cadre for—it's the cadets—summer training for all the ROTC cadets. It's actually no longer in Fort Lewis, Washington but it was at the time. I worked on the Leadership Reaction Course Committee. So we would evaluate the cadets, going through squads, rotating in leadership positions, and evaluate them on their leadership performance, trying to figure out how to overcome that obstacle and—quote, unquote—"complete" their mission.

BAK: Actually, I probably should have brought up this back in high school. What was your motivating factor; why did you want to join the military? Had you considered other job options?

CC: Primarily—When 9/11 happened and I was a freshman in high school, and that was a big trigger towards military service for me. Also having grown up with my dad telling all the fun stories, not the—he talked about some challenges in the navy, within the military as well, but heard a lot of positive things about traveling, and doing things outside your comfort zone and having these more worldly experiences. So that, his stories, 9/11.

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

I remember Pat Tillman being killed, and him as a example of someone who had so much within our society, but then still gave up his multi-million dollar football career to join the service. And then also, my—in high school I was a girl scout—my mom was my girl scout leader—and she took us to military Camporees [gatherings] at Norwich, and West

Point in particular, and seeing the cadets who were still much older than me getting ready to activate into military service. I looked at them as big role models within that time of our history and that time of my life.

[Patrick Daniel Tillman (6 November 1976 – 22 April 2004) was a professional American football player in the National Football League (NFL) who left his sports career and enlisted in the United States Army in June 2002 in the aftermath of the September 11 attacks. His service in Iraq and Afghanistan, and subsequent death, were the subject of much media attention.]

BAK: Okay. Did you consider joining the [U.S.] Air Force or the Marines or anything?

CC: Not particularly.

BAK: Your just kind of the West Point army?

CC: Yeah. I think the army—Both my grandfathers were in the army as well, and I actually didn't know until my mother's father passed away that he had originally been an MP [military police].

BAK: Oh, really?

[Speaking Simultaneously]

CC: [unclear] branch and everything—Yeah—before he transferred to the infantry. I think our stories kind of parallel, too, so there might have been some underlying similarities in my family.

BAK: When you were commissioned, was it for a certain duration?

CC: Yes. When I was seventeen I signed my contract, it was for four years of active duty; so four years of ROTC, which then would be repaid by four years of active duty and four years of reserve time. I have a year and a half left of my reserve time, which I'm doing through the Individual Ready Reserve, which is just the list that you go on, so you don't have to drill or affiliate with the unit, but if anything were to happen they would pull from the list for selection.

[The Individual Ready Reserve (IRR) is a category of the Ready Reserve of the Reserve Component of the Armed Forces of the United States composed of former active duty or reserve military personnel. The Ready Reserve is a U.S. Department of Defense program

which maintains a pool of trained service members that may be recalled to active duty should the need arise]

BAK: When did you officially sign your papers?

CC: It would have been 2005; probably the Spring of 2005. And then began ROTC in college at Siena in the Fall of 2005.

BAK: Okay. And then they sent you to Washington state?

CC: Yes, Washington State.

BAK: Was that the first time you'd ever been away that far?

CC: No. While I was in ROTC, I was nineteen, I was a sophomore, and it was the first time I was on a plane, but I got to go to Air Assault School. That was in Fort Pickett, Virginia. So it was my first time on a plane, flying into Richmond. That was about two weeks. So it was the first time I was significantly away on my own, particularly with the military.

BAK: And that was two weeks? The Air Assault School, you said?

CC: Yes.

BAK: Okay. What was that?

CC: Air Assault School is—it is dealing with helicopters versus airborne. It's jumping out of planes. It is—It starts Zero Day [the first day of Air Assault School]; before you can actually enter the school you have to pass an obstacle course and army physical fitness test with a run—actually, one of the things I always liked about it is everything is gender equal; so the run time, obstacles, everything is the same.

And then there's three phases. So the first phase is basic helicopter knowledge of the different types of helicopters and configurations. And then phase two is all about how to inspect sling loads [a device suspended below a helicopter to allow for the transport of external loads during flight]. So if you were to take a Humvee and sling load it to the helicopter, then the helicopter could fly with the Humvee in the sling, take it where it needs to go. But obviously, that has a lot of precautions. The sling line needs to be tied correctly, and the difference between cotton cloth tying something and nylon cloth tying something could equal the Humvee staying up in the air or it falling, damaging the Humvee, damaging something else. So phase two is all about sling line inspections, and then phase three was rappelling out of the helicopter.

BAK: Did you enjoy that?

CC: I did, yes. And it culminated with the twelve mile ruck march [a relatively fast march over a distance while carrying a load], and I actually—we had the opportunity during the

summer to go to Airborne or Air Assault, and I had to convince my colonel—one of my cadre on my behalf helped me convince my colonel to send me to Air Assault instead of Airborne, which I wanted to go to because it was harder. They didn't want to send me because I was a girl and it's more common. So I ended up being—of everyone that started, about two hundred and forty people, ten of which were women—I think it was—I forget exact numbers—but about a hundred and fifty graduated, and I was the only woman from the original ten that had made it through.

BAK: Wow.

CC: But that's why I wanted to go.

BAK: Wow. So physical fitness, is that something that you've always done, or did ROTC sort of kick you into higher gear?

CC: I ran from a very young age and, I mean, without realizing I was doing pullups, I was playing on the swing set and the rings and doing pullups.

BAK: [chuckles] [unclear]

CC: Yeah. And then hiking. The more snacks you want to carry, the heavier your backpack gets, so. Hiking and rucking were very different, in that rucking you're carrying a lot more weight and trying to move a lot faster without actually breaking into a run a lot of times. That was probably the most significantly challenging physical skills I had to acquire, but I eventually got pretty good at it.

BAK: Again, I'm jumping back, I apologize.

CC: That's alright.

BAK: When you decided to do ROTC and join the army, your high school friends, what did they think?

CC: [unclear] I don't know. I guess most particular thinking about friends from high school—of the twelve girl scouts that I went with, one enlisted in the army, another ended up going to Norwich Military University [Norwich University – The Military College of Vermont]. So of those friends, a lot of support and a lot of understanding as to why I would want to do that. We had had those common experiences, and then developed those common interests. One friend in particular from high school, her boyfriend was a couple—a year older than her, so he had already started in Valley Forge [Military Academy and College], which is a two-year military academy.

BAK: I'm from around there.

CC: Okay, yeah.

BAK: And they filled the movie *Taps* there.

[*Taps* is a 1981 American drama film, which follows a group of military students who decide to take over their school in order to save it from closing]

CC: Okay. And so—But then that difference—that change in their relationship—somehow the military life strains relationships. She—So that was kind of—She, I think—And then she eventually broke up with him and she's married to someone else now who's awesome. But that was kind of a strain on the friendship, or just a separating—she was trying to separate from that part of her identity being tied to the military because she didn't like it, but then I was stepping into that, so.

BAK: And what about your non-ROTC friends in college?

CC: I mean, they—I think with me doing the military that was the track that I was on when I met them, so.

BAK: Was that pretty well integrated in Siena College, the ROTC?

CC: Program? Yeah. Integrated, as in—

BAK: Well, there's certain universities that are very—

CC: Like, segregated almost?

BAK: Yeah, segregated, or kind of more military-friendly than others.

CC: Yeah. I would say Siena—I guess I view most colleges as being fairly liberal so you automatically have a little bit of separation between those people who would be more prone to join the military and everyone else. But overall, very supportive and—we were integrated in that we weren't—we were integrated into classes and dorms and everything like that.

BAK: Okay. Jumping ahead again.

CC: Yeah.

BAK: What has stuck out with you, your first few days in the service?

CC: I guess first, technically—the first few days on active duty would have been at Fort Lewis, Washington. And that was kind of unique in that I was surrounded by all of my peers, and really for my first six months in the army with that, followed then by my officer training assignments, I was always surrounded by peers. So that was sort of the phase of just a grand adventure. And wearing—I wore my uniform a lot with all the



things to do with ROTC. But just being on a military installation day after day and hearing reveille [a bugle call; also French, meaning "wake up"] and Taps [a bugle call signaling that unauthorized lights are to be extinguished] and [unclear]. It's just that military culture, it felt a little different, but it also felt—it felt cool initially; it got old eventually. And then you're like, "Get me off of post!"

But then—So that's in stark contrast to, then, the first few days at my actually assignment—my assigned unit, where you don't really have any peers, you only have superiors and subordinates. And then you might have a couple, like, your fellow platoon leaders. But to arrive at a unit—And they do—people do the best—the commander and the platoon leaders do the best they can to take care of you, in a good unit. But it's still—People are established within their own lives, so it's a little bit more isolating. It also was the great unknown, which was hopeful as well.

BAK: Okay. And you chose, sort of, the MP route?

CC: I did. I actually—For three years I had wanted to—I had thought I would put—well, originally, I thought medical services, and then within the fall semester I was like, "I want to have my boots on the ground first." And I had thought—I had met an engineer officer at Air Assault School my sophomore year, and just speaking with him I was pretty sold; I was like, "I'm going to go engineer." And then, really, maybe three weeks before we had to fill out our little wish list of branch prioritization—that I switched to MP, and my rationale at the time was engineers and MPs do cool—big contributions in combat. Cliché, but specifically as a woman. I didn't have all the other options.

BAK: Would you have chosen a combat role if you could have; if that was an option?

CC: Yeah, I think I would have. Granted, field artillery—And I guess I viewed engineer and MP both as having combat roles. Field artillery did as well, however, women were still only allowed to serve at the battalion level or above, I believe, so I knew I wouldn't be able—it would be unlikely. I actually have a friend who—they ended up making an exception for her, and she was a platoon leader in the field artillery. But my deciding factor between MP and engineer, it was like, "Alright, what do we do if we're not in combat?" Well, engineers will build things and MPs will do law enforcement. So that was kind of my deciding factor. I don't know why I thought law enforcement would be cooler, and I'm like, "Oh, I could have built a house, but it's okay."

BAK: [chuckles]

CC: It's one of those things, looking back, I might say, "Oh, I would have made a different decision." But ultimately, I can—I have the luxury of looking back and seeing how everything has also worked out, so I'm glad I made the decision that I did.

BAK: Okay. What was the training like for MP?

CC: That was in Missouri.

BAK: In Missouri, okay.

CC: Yeah. I think it was ten weeks. Did some classroom—I was the last class to go after I got done with Fort Lewis. I was the last class to have Basic Officer Leadership Course II. So ROTC counted as I [one]. Then there was branch non-specific course that was at Fort Benning, Georgia; mine was at Fort Sill, Oklahoma. That was supposed to be just basic tactics.

BAK: So you were in Missouri and then you went to Oklahoma.

CC: It was actually in Washington. And then I was in Oklahoma for BOLC II, and then I went to Missouri for BOLC III, which is a branch specific course.

BAK: Okay.

CC: And so, we did some basic officer—I mean, I know there was a classroom portion, and then we did—so then the branch specific thing such as customs—we had a class on customs—then we had a crowd control/riot control instructional, and then practical portion where we practiced clashing with each other. [chuckles] Then the areas of military police doctrine, like area security, convoy security—instructional portion of that—and then we culminated with a—I think ten-day field exercise where we were on a base of sorts, and then we'd run scenarios out of there. And it ended—That was ten weeks, so that ended in September—or December, right before Christmas.

BAK: You were thinking this was a good decision, a bad decision?

CC: Yeah, it was actually—in a way it was a great—in a way it was sort of an equalizer for me, because I had gone from my commissioned class of twenty to amongst my peers in the military, and it was actually very cool because I think 60% of MP peers in BOLC III were females, and they were, by majority, really awesome. So I had gone from being one of only—I was one of two that commissioned in my class, and I was the best of two, which is la-di-dah. I was better than some of the guys, too, but that's maybe besides the point. Then going into 60% of my MP peers being women and them all being awesome, I kind of—it was a good check that you're not the best at everything anymore, which is—it's a good reality check. And also, empowering to know that I had good peers.

BAK: When did you realize the moment that you weren't the best at everything?

CC: Oh, I said I realized that I wasn't the best.

BAK: I'm sorry. That's right. Did you have a moment when you're like, "Huh?"

CC: I think my friend Jackie Uhorchuk, she was number one[?] in her class at West Point, and she and I were in the same squad, and probably within just a few weeks—I was at the time—it's almost like we were—not jealous of each other but—and I think just teams—diverse teams—always do that, where one person's weaknesses are compensated by

another person's strength, and we relied on each other a lot. But I was still—I was probably at my physical peak then, and people—but she just had a command presence that I envied and that I wanted to emulate more.

BAK: You guys were pretty tight?

CC: Yes.

BAK: And it's J-A-C-K-I-E?

CC: Yeah. Jacquelyn is her full, official name, yeah.

BAK: Right. And then how do you spell her last name, just because we put it in the transcript.

CC: Her maiden name is U-H-O-R-C-H-O-K, and now she's Asis—A-S-I-S.

BAK: Okay. What was your favorite part about being an MP?

CC: Overall, my favorite part of being an MP—because I ended up going to a non-deployable unit. I had requested Germany because I thought it was close to Iraq and Afghanistan so they'd obviously send me. And that was disappointing but, again, it lined me up timeline-wise to be perfectly positioned to then jump on board with CST [combat support team] when it came out. And honestly, I think the best thing about being an MP was that for that first round of CST selectees, Ranger Regiment, said from the get-go—I wasn't in the room, but legend has it that they said, "Alright, who are all the MPs? We want all them first."

BAK: Oh, wow.

CC: And then they—because the Ranger Regiment and Special Forces representatives had to say, of all of us and all of our skill sets, kind of who they wanted for their mission set.

BAK: What was it about MPs that they thought was—

CC: I think the—the history of the MP Corps—I mean, I guess—I'm sure it dates back beyond the Gulf War, but just in our very asymmetric wars that we've been in, in recent history, I think MPs have developed a really good reputation. And women who tend to join the MP Corps—not always, but a lot of them would likely—and it'd actually be very interesting to see now that the infantry and armor have opened up to women which women will choose that versus MP—but I think a lot of us funneled into MP because that's the closest we thought we could get to the fight. Because in essence, infantry goes in, they conquer the village, MPs come in, they secure it. The infantry goes off, and then who gets counter attacked? The MPs get counter attacked.

BAK: Oh. I never thought about that.

CC: Yes, in a combat situation. And there's other combat capacities, such as training National Police, and other things like that. But I think the MP Corps, as well as women within the MP Corps, had a strong reputation that was respected by somebody.

BAK: Okay. Going back to Missouri, were there any parts of the training or the way that your peers, or superiors, treated you that you kind of wish didn't happen?

CC: Not memorable. No, I don't think so.

BAK: Any notable stories from your time there, like, "One we did this." It doesn't have to be—

CC: Yeah. One might come to me. I think more so just that sense of being amongst my peers and establishing those friendships.

BAK: So you felt pretty good about what your—I'm not phrasing this right.

CC: What my role would be?

BAK: You felt like you were doing a good job.

CC: Yeah. Well, and also, I felt I still have so many ways to improve as well, so it was kind of that reality check that I got.

BAK: Sure.

CC: Yes.

BAK: So you asked to go to Germany?

CC: I did.

BAK: And they said okay.

CC: Yeah.

BAK: When was that again?

CC: I arrived in Germany, January of 2010.

BAK: Okay. What was that like?

CC: That was my first trans-Atlantic flight and—

BAK: Was it commercial?

CC: It was commercial. And I had packed up everything to—basically I had, probably, two big suitcases that would be everything that I'd get to live with for about thirty days before—I forgot what all the acronyms are—but then I'd get, like, some stuff that would come, then all my furniture would come later. And really all I had was my bedroom set, so it's not like I had a ton of household goods coming.

But I arrived and my executive—company executive officer picked me up from the airport. And then something, unfortunately, that stands out always about that first day in Germany is, she said to me that I was going to hate it here. That's a good—

BAK: Really? Wow.

CC: That's a good self-fulfilling prophecy. That worked out.

BAK: [chuckles]

CC: But the unit situation, we had just downsized and de-flagged, so essentially the whole battalion was de-flagged, so all those people, when they left to go to different duty stations, they were not—they were not replaced. So that whole battalion had essentially gone away.

BAK: What battalion was that?

CC: I think it was 2nd Battalion, within the 18th MP Brigade.

BAK: Just because of downsizing?

CC: Yeah, downsizing—well, it's like Europe is interesting because—and I'm sure the whole army is like this too—but all the contracts and everything is projected so many years in advance, and then based on our status of forces agreement that we have with Germany, all of our contracts—like, a certain dollar amount or numbered amount of our contracts have to be through local nationals, and so that has to be done years out.

[A status of forces agreement (SOFA) is an agreement between a host country and a foreign nation stationing military forces in that country]

So there's just—Europe is a little crazy, just to look at the big picture, because bases were closing—like, a three million dollar commissary had just been built, but now the base was closing, and it was—then they were moving all these soldiers somewhere else, but then within the period of a couple years then they would all move back, so it was just kind of a restructuring nightmare. But it was obviously way above my pay grade, and hopefully it was making sense to someone. So yeah, that's just my perspective.

So we had lost that battalion, and that battalion had had battalion size road commitment for law enforcement, so soldiers on the road doing law enforcement patrols.

So now our company that was a non-deployable company had to pick up—we had to maintain our same road commitment but pick up a battalion's road commitment.

BAK: What size was your company?

CC: A company is about a third the size of a battalion.

BAK: Okay.

CC: About two hundred people, I think.

BAK: What was the name of your company?

CC: It was the 529th MP Company. Meanwhile, with that, the commander—there had been a history of this non-deployable MP company—the 529th—soldiers didn't get a chance to train. If they spend three years in the company, and they go PCS [permanent change of station—official relocation of an active duty service member to a different duty location] to the 82nd at Fort Bragg, they're going to look pretty stupid when they don't understand basic tactics.

So there was a—And it was good for morale I think, like, originally, to have the company go for—they'd cycle through a couple weeks—each platoon to a field training exercise, which is preparing for that, on top of everything else. The soldiers, the amount of time that they would get off for off-duty was—I mean, they might work ten days straight, get a day off—which, one, that could change in a heartbeat because something would come down from higher and I have to do this. You're not working the road that day so now you're going to work this detail. That could happen, or they could just have to last minute get called in to do some kind of administrative duties. So morale was pretty low when I got there. They had also just had a soldier who had had an undiagnosed heart injury, I guess when he—or not heart injury but heart condition—when he entered the military that medical didn't catch. And so, previously there had been a big deal—when you get pinned—when you get promoted—you get punched in the chest, right?

BAK: Oh, no.

CC: So not a big deal. But some soldier—some sergeant somewhere in the army took a two by four, hit the guy in the chest, and it spurred—and there were lots of little spurs—but spurred this no hazing emphasis. So hazing, physical punishment—this could be a whole dissertation—but only commanders can punish, but everyone else can implement corrective training, so technically no one but a commander should punish—physical punishments shouldn't be a thing.

BAK: Right.

CC: But obviously, physical corrective training is good to draw emphasis to the soldier. It could be good to draw emphasis to the soldier, "Don't do this again because here's the consequence." And usually a little physical fitness doesn't hurt anybody.

And right before I had gotten there, I guess a soldier had been in the passenger seat of someone who had gotten a DUI [driving under the influence]. So his sergeant went and picked him up from the provost marshal [title given to a person in charge of a group of MPs]. He was obviously upset; ruined his Saturday night. And went out behind the barracks, had them fill up water cans, make a little mud pit, and then do all this PT [physical training]. The soldier was having issues breathing. By the time they realized kind of what it was, they made them clean up everything, shower, before they took him to medical. And the parents were filing lawsuits. So there was a big emphasis on—

BAK: What happened to that soldier? Did he die?

CC: No. He just had this heart condition diagnosed. But it was a little bit of a scandal. So morale was just super, super on edge when I got there.

BAK: And you were a first lieutenant or second?

CC: I was a second lieutenant.

BAK: Second lieutenant, okay.

CC: And within that first week I signed my property. There was a big emphasis to—and again I had to [unclear], but it was—you're supposed to find an apartment and do all that stuff, but you got to come in and sign your property. And I was gung-ho so I was cool with that.

But sergeants were disenfranchised, that they couldn't take the action that they felt was necessary to properly train and discipline their soldiers. And so, it was this really delicate juggling act of—I have this new commander that I'm supposed to support and hopefully—

BAK: She's the one that said you'll hate it here?

CC: No, that was my executive officer. Then I have sergeants who I want to empower—

[Speaking Simultaneously]

BAK: So you had a new commander.

CC: Yeah. It was interesting. And then also, I went from ROTC to active duty, we're all twenty-one years old, haven't been worn down by life yet, really enthusiastic and excited to start our military careers, and we get to a unit where they've been at war for ten years, and on and off deployments, and they just want to go home at 5:00 [p.m.] and hang out with their kids.

BAK: Right.

CC: And that's actually really understandable, once I got there.

BAK: Didn't you say that was a non-deployable unit?

CC: It was, but they had—the unit was non-deployable but the soldiers who had—or were in the unit had been in other units before where they had deployed. So the unit itself was almost seen as, [whispering] "When you get here, just take a knee." [Idiom for pausing in one's actions]

BAK: [chuckles]

CC: And also, some the soldiers that were in the unit had been selected just less than a year before to deploy, so the company didn't deploy but soldiers from the unit could deploy, be it attached to other units, or formed—they had just recently formed a platoon sized element to be the personal security detail for the brigade commander and brigade sergeant major, when brigade headquarters had deployed, and they were just returning.

BAK: Did you adjust at all, or were you just like, "Wow, this is just not a good situation that I can do anything about?"

CC: Yeah, I had two great platoon sergeants. Really, every NCO counterpart that I had in my military experience was awesome. I had peers who had less than positive experiences, but I was just—I just got lucky and they were just really stellar.

I had one platoon sergeant who was actually—he was a E-6 staff sergeant, so he was actually one rank below what would typically be a platoon sergeant. And it was nice going—having him as my first platoon sergeant, because he still had a lot to learn so I didn't feel quite as inferior. We just made a really good team, and he understood the soldiers, and I think we grew a lot together. And he also understood his role as a platoon sergeant and mentoring the platoon leader, which I think a lot of platoon sergeants even above his rank wouldn't necessarily understand, but it was really critical.

And then my—I think he might have been there for six months before he changed duty stations, and then I got my second platoon sergeant who had just returned from a deployment, and he had just made E-7 sergeant first class. He made it in seven years, which is the fastest you can make it. And I think for him, again, it was a big learning experience because when you fast track that quickly you almost get promoted one level above—one level above your—I don't want to say your abilities—but what—

[Speaking Simultaneously]

BAK: Maybe what you're ready for, what you've been trained for?

CC: What you're ready for, exactly, yeah. But we were a good team too.



BAK: Did you have any issues that you were working with guys that were deployed and you weren't?

CC: No.

BAK: Did you feel any judgement there?

CC: Not really. I mean, I didn't feel judgement, I felt my own intrinsic sense of insecurity about it, but the nice thing is that, being an officer, the NCOs are the primary trainers anyway, so it was really their credibility from their deployments that the soldiers were listening to anyway. And I made the mistake in one of my first discussions with my commander, saying, "I'm here. I signed up to contribute to our war effort. I'm ready to deploy."

She looked at me, she's like, "You're a brand new second lieutenant. You're not ready to deploy."

BAK: [chuckles]

CC: So that's what I would say as advice now, just establish yourself where you're at, do the best that you can where you're at, and if opportunities arise, seize them.

BAK: Did you live on base?

CC: I lived off base.

BAK: Off base. Did you learn any German?

CC: Ein bisshcen [German, meaning "a little bit"]. I learned just enough to order coffee, order food, kind of get directions from the train station. I got really good at hand gestures.

BAK: [chuckles] At smiling?

CC: Yeah. When I was in Berlin, the receptionist spoke zero English, and so she knew the word "super," so that was like "yes." So if she said, "Super," that meant yes, and we were pointing at a map. I mean, I knew enough to get by.

BAK: Did you like Germany?

CC: I did. I like Germany a lot. Germany, especially too, is just a great foothold to then visit a lot of the rest of Europe. Which then made my security clearance when I applied for a Top Secret very, very convoluted, because I'd been to twelve different countries and I had to write them all down, and the dates, but it was a good experience.

BAK: Did they question, like, "Why'd you go to—"

CC: No, I think they know it was for travel.

BAK: Okay.

CC: But I think they probably have to run checks in all those countries anyway.

BAK: Okay. Let's see. So again, your main responsibilities in that situation, it was scheduling, or were you out there too? MPing? [chuckles]

CC: Yeah, I—scheduling is actually platoon sergeant would manage the DA6, which is the duty roster. So I more so—I mean, I did—We still had to do some basic certification annual training, so I would work with operations to resource and plan that. And then property accountability, which I guess is the one thing that can get a platoon leader fired, so. You've got to have accountability for all your property, and then—I worked the road a few times, but more for the sake of morale. So I worked a couple times just to see what they were doing, and it was less of me working than me riding along and responding alongside the sergeant. [unclear]

[Speaking Simultaneously]

BAK: What does "working the road" mean?

CC: Just like in the civilian world when you get a call to respond to this, or noise complaint, bar fight, suspected child abuse, and obviously there are long periods of boring in between there. But about the same.

BAK: Any memorable experiences in that?

CC: Well, Christmas is kind of funny—my first Christmas working the road—because the—we got called to a domestic violence and it was one of my sergeants.

BAK: Oh.

CC: But whose wife I knew really well and it was more she was just throwing his stuff out the window. She was pissed at him because—yeah. So it was—it wasn't nearly as bad as it could have been.

BAK: Not in this particular case, but if you get a call to go into somebody's home, it's just like a cop? You would have the ability to arrest them, or just calm them down?

CC: Yeah, to apprehend and bring them to the provost marshal where there's a detainment facility.

BAK: But in that situation, did anyone have to be written up; that one with your sergeant?

CC: No.

BAK: No? Okay. How long was Heidelberg?

CC: Eighteen months.

BAK: Eighteen months.

CC: Yes.

BAK: Okay. And then the next part was the email?

CC: Yes.

BAK: Can you talk about that day?

CC: Yeah. Actually, I had just had--

BAK: I'm sorry. If you could explain for those of us who haven't read *Ashley's War* [: *The Untold Story of Women Soldiers on the Special Ops Battlefield*; by Gayle Tzemach Lemmon], what the email was and all that.

*Ashley's War: The Untold Story of a Team of Women Soldiers on the Special Ops Battlefield*, tells the story of CST-2, a unit of women handpicked from across the U.S. army to serve on combat operations alongside Army Rangers and Navy SEALs in Afghanistan. The army reasoned that women could play a unique role on the Special Ops teams, by questioning mothers, sisters, daughters, and wives living in suspected insurgent compounds]

CC: Yeah. I actually have it. Let me grab it.

BAK: Oh.

CC: I'm the resident archivist.

BAK: Excellent. Caroline right now is going to her plastic container and getting some binders. We love a good archivist. [knocking on door] Oh, we'll pause that.

[Recording Paused]

BAK: Okay, we're back from a little "Are you registered to vote?" break.

CC: And I think it's actually interesting to differentiate, too, my understanding of what my deployment was going to be when I first read the military personnel message, and then as I went and got later on into training—

BAK: Yeah, because they called it one thing.

CC: Yeah, so—

BAK: Did they call it that because they thought it was going to be one thing and then somebody higher up changed their mind?

CC: I actually don't know if this is true, but my best guess is that the conventional army—everyone was calling these teams "Female Engagement Teams," and the conventional army was creating them as well, and so Special Operations had to stay special and call it something different. [chuckles] I don't know if that's actually the case.

[Female Engagement Teams (FET) are comprised of volunteer female members of appropriate rank, experience, and maturity to develop trust-based and enduring relationships with the Afghan women they encounter on patrols]

But the subject of the message—and I can scan this and send it to you as well—is: *Female volunteers for U.S. Army Special Operations Command Female Engagement Team Program*. So I knew it as Female Engagement Team; as FET. And interesting, too, is they list the key task for our mission set as: Key Leader Engagements, Medical Civic Actions Programs, Searches and Seizures, and Humanitarian Assistance, Civil Military Operations.

So all of these things, like, I guess I thought it was just Special Forces that were looking for women to go out on mission with them in more of a—well, this was one component—the village stability operations piece of the Special Forces mission, and it actually wasn't until I was at assessment section and one of my teammates whose husband had been in Ranger regiment, she asked me, "Do you want to do the Special Forces mission or the Ranger mission?"

I said, "What?"

And interesting also, too, is that when I commissioned, the colonel had us write a five and ten year plan, and I really love to plan.

BAK: Okay. [chuckles]

CC: But just generically I had written that in five years I wanted to be in a position that if Ranger school opened to women, I would be physically, tactically, ready to go. And then between five and ten, if it hadn't opened, that I'd start to rally friends and we could write congress. And women have done that in the past, and you know where we are today.

BAK: So you wanted to be a Ranger, you didn't want to be Special Forces?

CC: Well, I didn't realize that was an option. And then, funny enough, we had a, kind of, wish list right before we got—we had gotten selected for the program, then went for the actual training component of it, where we learned about the two separate mission sets more specifically. And when asked what I preferred to do—we had a little interview for the person who would be advocating for us and that kind of boardroom where they fought over us—fought over our packets.

BAK: If I remember correctly, packets were assigned to certain people, and then you said the person that was going to advocate for us.

CC: Yeah. That was the—

BAK: I'm jumping ahead, sorry.

CC: That's okay. I'm jumping around. That was—Her name was [Golden Tilley?]; she's mentioned in the book. She was the officer in charge of the training portion of Cultural Support Team program [a secret pilot program to insert women alongside Special Operations soldiers battling in Afghanistan]. And so, she advocated for us when it—she advocated for what mission we wanted to go on. She could speak—She had met us so she could speak to how we performed and what our preference was for the deployment mission.

BAK: I'm sorry, she had—

CC: She had seen us; like, she had seen us perform throughout the course and throughout training. I had actually said to her, "Well, I don't really have a preference. I kind of like that part of the army that just tells us what to do."

BAK: Right. [chuckles]

CC: And we don't have to make too important of a decision, even though just being here is kind of an important decision. I said, "I'll probably just—Just put me down for the Special Forces Village Stability Operations. It's probably what I would be best at, or make the most impact."

Because I had previously spoken to someone, and they said, "All the girls with the Rangers dudes[?], they just show that they can PT; that they can physically perform. And we all know that women can do that anyway, they're not really contributing." So I had that bias in the back of my head.

The day came that we were going to get told what we were assigned; what mission set we were assigned to. I said, "I hope it's Rangers. I hope it's Rangers. I hope it's Rangers." And obviously, from reading the book, we made contributions that were—I mean, our physical performance was just the venue by which we were able to contribute. So it was a lot more than just keeping up with everyone on patrol.

BAK: Okay. Let's go back so we don't miss anything.

CC: Okay.

BAK: So one day this just pops up in your inbox.

CC: Yeah, I had—I was actually on one of my last days of convalescent leave, because I had just had corrective eye surgery. Which then made a fun loophole because I'm supposed to be done for three months before you can deploy, and so I had to get an exception from my ophthalmologist. But all that aside, I was home, I got the email—like, ten friends forward me the email—my first sergeant forwarded me the email and was like, "This is you!"

I was like, "Yeah, I know." And I—Probably within that week, I turned around and did all the paperwork.

BAK: The email, it states what the role is. Does it say what qualifications they were looking for or requiring?

CC: It does. It says: *The purpose of this message is to solicit army-wide support to provide eligible female volunteers to train and deploy in support of Army Special Operations/Forces Operations.*

Which I actually think that's interesting, too, because it makes it sound as if we were going to be the first women in Special Operations ever, which is simply not the case. And even within this organization, we were not the first women within the organization. This was just a separate program they were creating, with a mission set that women have been doing probably since the Gulf War, with going out and attaching to infantry units, so I thought Gayle outlined that really well. So by no means anything new, just an individual program for it.

And my favorite part of it is—there's a part in there, because I had to read it to my colonel, and it basically said: If I'm qualified, you can't stop me.

BAK: [chuckles] okay.

CC: Yeah, so it's: Paragraph 4.D: Soldiers completing the qualification course—Nope, just kidding. Not that one. I thought it was in F. Oh, yeah. Paragraph 3.B.1: *Soldiers that volunteer for FET assessment selection cannot be hindered from attending this army priority mission.*

So basically, if I was qualified, I could at least go try out. And at this point in time, I had a new company commander that made me really wish that my previous company commander was still [there]. And this was just like everything in my life was really lining up to just go do this program.

BAK: Did you feel that the new company commander wasn't going to be supportive?

CC: She was not supportive. And she—

BAK: She didn't want to lose you or just—

CC: No, she just wanted to make my life miserable because she was miserable, in a nutshell.

BAK: Okay.

CC: That's my perspective.

BAK: Got it.

CC: I can be more mature and draw other things as well from it.

BAK: Your choice. [both chuckle] This is your story.

CC: But she did say that, "Cleveland, you'll just be back."

Because I had asked because I knew if I was gone for a year I was going to be delinquent on my annual evaluation, so I asked if she would write me a—either do an evaluation or write me a letter of continuity, and she said no, because I would be back there in a month when I failed out.

BAK: Oh!

CC: And so, on ruck march in Fort Bragg, through the sand of Camp Mackall, and you're tired, you're hungry, your feet hurt, and every step I was like, "I'm not going back to Germany." And I was really bold because I even put all of my furniture and household goods into deployment storage, so it would have been really, really humble pie if I had gone back, but I didn't really leave myself that option.

BAK: It sounds in some ways she might have done you a favor by being that extra bit of—

CC: Yes, I was able to harness her impact into a positive source of motivation [chuckles]

BAK: She probably wasn't expecting that.

CC: I know. So yeah.

BAK: I had noticed that in this email you had highlighted some of the—what where the highlighted parts?

CC: Yeah. Sadly, the highlights were things I didn't know what they were, or that I just wanted to look up an army regulation here—And DROA—this is sad, but DROA is just the acronym for—which maybe I should—Government of Islamic Republic of Afghanistan [DROA is an acronym for the Democratic Republic of Afghanistan], I think is what it stands for. But just things that I wanted to make sure I was competent and everything.

And then it actually does talk about Cultural Support Teams, even though this is technically a call for Female Engagement Teams. It was interesting as the army was sorting out its semantics with what they were going to call different things.

BAK: What was the criteria selection that they put in there?

CC: It was a ruck march and a run. Just a general army physical fitness test. A ruck march. I think we had to be current on unclear[?] training. But yeah, so we sent this in with—I probably have it somewhere. Here we go: *Deployable in accordance with U.S. Army Regu—U.S. Army procedures covered in AR. 22-20*. So that's why I had that highlighted, because I was like, "What are those requirements?"

My company had—administrative NCO had to look all that up and sign off on that. And then for enlisted personnel they had to have a GT score [General Technical, a section of the ASVAB, which includes Word Knowledge, Paragraph Comprehension, and Arithmetic Reasoning (AR)], which is the test you take at the recruiter station to see what jobs you're eligible for.

BAK: Got it.

CC: So I had to have a certain GT score. The army physical fitness test, and you need to have at least a 210, minimum, which is, in my mind, a little sad; they could have upped the standard on that, but it's okay, it all worked out. I don't think that was really hard for anyone who was there. Height and weight standards. Ruck march we had to do six miles in an hour and thirty-nine minutes, with thirty-five pounds. And again, I think we blew them out of the water on that one. Not be flagged under criminal investigation; have at least a secret clearance; and then we couldn't have an "End Time in Service" date prior to September 2012. Basically, we had to be able to be in the army and serve through that whole deployment.

BAK: Was there any letters of recommendation?

CC: Yeah, this was it, and it had to be signed by the first O-5 in our chain of command; the first lieutenant colonel. So in theory—Well, in theory, my commander could have tried to inhibit me from getting to my O-5, but that's why I love that passage in the [unclear] message, which I brought around with me that said, "You can't hinder me if I'm qualified."

So eventually, got to my O-5, and actually my—his counterpart—command sergeant major—he—I guess he heard about it, or it had to go through him before it got signed, so I ended up—I don't know if he contacted me, or I was up there and he just called me into his office, and he was really the main advocate for—between me and the colonel, making sure that this got signed. And I asked him why, and apparently I said something very candid when they came around for a sensing session [group conversations where soldiers or officers are encouraged to speak freely], which I don't remember, and he didn't remember off the top of his head, but—

BAK: What's a sensing session?



CC: Where a command team comes around to talk to soldiers and ask them how things are really going, not just how their bosses say it's going.

BAK: Okay.

CC: And I guess they asked a question and he said I spoke my mind, and he thought that was good because everyone else was afraid to, so I don't remember what it was.

BAK: And when you fill out the application, was it like a college application essay of, like, why you want to do this?

CC: No, I don't even think there was an essay. I think it was really—it was this document and then the supporting, so I'd have to have all the supporting documentation with it.

BAK: That basically said you were—

CC: That basically said all these things here that have been checked off as complete. Now I have my army physical fitness test score card, and different stuff.

BAK: How many women applied; do you have a sense?

CC: I used to know the number but, honestly, I don't remember.

BAK: Hundreds, thousands?

CC: It was hundreds, it wasn't—I would have thought it would have been thousands, and I was disappointed that it wasn't. And I mean, I even had friends who were interested, but just time of life, either within their personal career, pipelines, needing to go to advanced training, or having just got married, or having just got back from deployment. I know—I think the interest was there—more people had the interest—but it wasn't necessarily the right time in their life for it. But it wasn't even a thousand. I even think it was under five hundred, which I was disappointed by; I thought it would have been more. I thought we could have made a bolder statement.

But of all of us, there were sixty that then went to—I think there's—I forget how many actually went to the assessment selection of all the applicants, other than sixty of us were selected from active duty, National Guard, and Reserve. And then of those sixty, forty went on the Village Stability Operations, and twenty went with the Rangers.

BAK: Okay. So some people didn't make the cut, even before they—

CC: Yes.

BAK: Why do you think they were cut?

CC: From assessment selection?

BAK: Yeah. Or even just before they got to that. People that weren't invited to Fort Bragg.

CC: Yeah, I think, honestly, these standards here that they ask for, for physical fitness, I think a lot of people who showed up at Fort Bragg for assessment selection were well beyond this. So I don't know if they made it an internal cut based on, even though you've met the minimum requirement, now we're just going to pull the top tier, but I do think it was also smart that they didn't just select people who were the most physically fit. Selection had a lot to do with ability to adapt to uncomfortable situations, in a cultural context in some of the scenarios that we did; ability to work with a team; we did do peer evaluations, that being a critical component, because we had to not just mesh with the mission set of our units when you're deployed, but also get along with all the people in that unit. So just having that adaptability.

BAK: Okay. Before we get to Fort Bragg, you applied. What's the time lag between when you applied and when you found out that you knew you were going to go to Fort Bragg?

CC: Yeah. I think it was—This actually says February 9, 2011. I guess I had thought—Yeah, I mean, so that must have been when I came out. I thought it was late January but—so early February. And then—I mean, I was probably—had all my things in by the end of February. March we found out; I don't know exactly when in March. And then there was an assessment section just for Reserve and National Guard where thirty people were selected, in April. And then active duty was in May.

BAK: So you flew back—

CC: I flew May—It was May 2 when I arrived back in the States.

BAK: When was the first day of assessment?

CC: I think probably the fifth.

BAK: Okay, so a couple days.

CC: Yeah. So I had a few days to, like, settle into Fort Bragg, and—I'm just looking for—I don't think—There was originally—I don't think this website exists anymore, but this was the original website, and then—I thought maybe there was a timeline. Yeah, so—Yeah, I think it was about May 5. Yeah, May 5 to the thirteenth was assessment and selection at Fort Bragg.

BAK: What were you feeling before the first day? Were you nervous? Or you felt excited, I'm sure.

CC: Yeah. I was trying to practice humble confidence.

BAK: [chuckles]

CC: Because there were a lot of people—

BAK: I've got to look that one up. That's great. I've never heard that before.

CC: There were a lot of people who are at the gym and are just walking around in their muscle shirts, puffing their chest. And we joke now that people at Fort Bragg were probably like, "What the heck are all these women doing here? Is there a military women's CrossFit competition or something going on?"

BAK: Yeah, I remember that from the book.

CC: Yeah. But—And then—it's actually kind of cool, she just called me today, I have to call her back—but one of—Allison Lands[?] was one of the girls I was in Girl Scouts with, that went to Norwich, and she and I had—I had seen her email on a distro[?] [distribution] list or a packing list or something like that, so when I was in Germany we called each other. So I immediately had a friend when I got to Fort Bragg.

BAK: She was trying out too?

CC: Yes. She ended up deploying on the Village Stability Operations side of things. So yeah.

BAK: So that was good. You had somebody—

CC: Yeah.

BAK: Alright. I remember that was notable to me, that first day, everybody kind of [unclear] everyone out.

CC: Yeah.

BAK: Some people being nervous, some people not as much. Okay, so the first day, you're checking in in a big room.

CC: Yes.

BAK: What happened next? Did you know what the percentage of people that were going to make it? No?

CC: I don't think so.

BAK: Okay.

CC: Not that I recall. So yeah, really the first thing was zero dark thirty [slang for having to wake up very early in the morning] in the morning, all of us in formation, to load up the van to go up to Camp Mackall, and I don't know if Gayle—I forget things that I told to

Gayle and that Gayle actually wrote about—but one of the girls—I'm trying to think of what—I don't know all of her aliases—but she was a first lieutenant at the time, and she was like, "Alright, ladies, let's load up the vehicle!"

So everyone was just putting on their best leadership face, "Our assessment starts now." But also, just a lot of energy and just playing off of that team dynamic from the very get-go.

BAK: How many women were in that initial zero dark thirty?

CC: I think it was sixty of us, and then thirty ended up making the cut.

BAK: Okay. What is the author's name?

CC: Gayle Tzemach Lemmon.

BAK: Okay, I'll never try to pronounce that. This is the author of *Ashley's War*, so that's what "Gayle" is referring to.

CC: Reference the book, yeah. [chuckles]

BAK: Alright, so first day you loaded up. Where did you go to?

CC: Camp Mackall.

BAK: Okay.

CC: And that's—it's on the Fort Bragg reservation, and it's where Special Forces Assessment and Selection, civil affairs, and psychological operations, which were all within the Special Operations community, hold their assessments as well. Tent City, as it is called—

BAK: Tent City.

CC: —because of all the little tents.

BAK: Were you feeling like you got this? A humble confidence.

CC: Yeah, I think—there was no point—I—When I was at Air Assault School at nineteen years old, I felt more vulnerable to failure then, than I did at CST, Assessment and Selection. And I even remember, "Alright, first ruck march, go." And it's—you cover an unknown distance for an unknown amount of time. You have no idea where all the air[?] is, when it's going to end, where you're going to be able to refill on water, take a break, whatever. Or what will even be next. And I just remember everyone starting to run. Like, "We've got a long time to go."

And it was me and a couple other girls were just walking, and it was kind of an area, too, where you could see for a long way. And so, you see some people eventually

stop, and then—but there are some girls, they never stopped running the whole time; just awesome, amazing, like, ultramarathon type people.

But they're slowing picking people off. And you're not supposed to talk to each other, but saying, "Good job. Keep it up." Which is kind of mean when you're passing someone. "Good job. Keep it up. I'm passing you." But certainly, we really meant it to each other.

BAK: I remember Gayle talked about how that was slightly different than an all-male environment; being supportive.

CC: Yeah. I think so.

BAK: Alright. So you had the ruck march. How long did the ruck march end up being?

CC: I mean, I really—Well, we weren't allowed to wear watches either, so I honestly have no idea.

BAK: You don't know? What else besides the ruck march was involved in this assessment?

CC: It's like you ruck and then, "Alright, put your sneakers on. Now run and read this article, and now go run again and at the end you get some group coordinates, and you have to remember them. And there were things that were—now tell me about the article that you read hours ago." Yeah, some things were individual, some things were team, but even when they say, "Okay, now it's individual," it's, "Really? Aren't we supposed to be staying in our teams?"

And so, it was a whole, like, psychological component to it. You walk up as a team on telephone poles and, "Alright, now carry these," again, for an unknown distance, or, "This person's shot, carry them. Here's the coordinates to memorize." And then everyone has to go, after so many miles, and tell the observer what the group coordinates were, and you know you said yours right to them, but they're saying no one said them right, so now you have to keep running, and they're just messing with you. So yeah, there was a lot of that.

BAK: How long was that?

CC: The whole thing, it was a hundred hours, which is—

BAK: How many days is that?

CC: I think it's five days. About five days. And it's just a drop in the bucket in comparison—it's the same that civil affairs and Psyops [Psychological Operations] do, but it's a drop in the bucket compared to what the Special Forces Assessment Section is. And I think that's always important to note, not in a self-deprecating way, but just in how inspiring it was to be on that train, and maybe—I mean, I only caught a glimpse of—two or three times, but of someone who's been walking for weeks and has twice as much weight on their back, and probably no skin left on their feet. Our feet got swollen but no one—Special Forces

Assessment and Selection, they will—they're known to, like, cut the toes off their boots because their feet literally are just swelling outside of them. It's kind of hallowed ground in a way.

BAK: Yeah. Did you have any interaction with anyone else at Fort Bragg or were you guys enclosed?

CC: We were pretty much in our own closed space.

BAK: Okay.

CC: I have friends at Fort Bragg who—before we went out on Mackall I had linked up with—but once we were at Mackall there was no—there was nothing. It was just us. And then if you quit, you just had to sit there the whole rest of the time, which is like, there's no reason to quit. "You're still out here. You might as well keep going." And there weren't many. There were a few that quit.

Oh, my gosh, though, one funny story is there was—we had a vet—like a veterinarian—army veterinarian—in our group, and my friend who had been married to a former Ranger, who told me about the Ranger side of things, to this vet—she had made it all the way through this ruck march, and now we're kind of trying to keep her up to the front and keep her going, and she's just sucking; she just probably doesn't want to be there anymore. So we get back, drop our gear, and she says, "I'm going to quit. I'm going to go tell the cadre I'm quitting." Or no, she came back and she's like, "I just told them I'm quitting."

And my friend, she's like, "No. You go back there and you tell him that you changed your mind and that you are staying."

And it just cracked me up because she's like, "Okay." [both chuckle]

And so—But she made it the whole time. And I think they were like, "Whatever. You're not going to get selected now but you can get back in the ranks if you want."

BAK: Why did Gayle give everyone pseudonyms in the book?

CC: Because some of the girls are still in the military, and of those that are still in the military some are just doing super, super cool things within the Special Operations community that they—we just all got pseudonyms, so by process of elimination you couldn't figure out who was left and—

BAK: Were you sworn to secrecy that you won't tell anyone that you're "X" in the book?

CC: We're not sworn to secrecy, and already with you knowing that I was the one in Germany you can tell who I am.

BAK: Okay.

CC: Yeah.

BAK: Well, I'll maybe not do that to honor your—

CC: Yeah. We did sign—With the unit, we did sign a statement—that I probably still have somewhere—but that we can't talk about certain things from the missions for seventy-five years, so I've got seventy-one years left before we can tell the whole story.  
[chuckles]

BAK: I can't promise that I'll be around to be back to get Part 2.

CC: Part 2.

BAK: "We're here at the nursing home..."

CC: Yeah. We'll leave it to Gayle.

BAK: Right.

CC: "Gayle, one of your kids is going to have to be author or something." She'll be retired by then.

BAK: That's great. Okay, so after the hundred hours, how did you feel? Did you still feel enthusiastic? Did you feel you had a good chance?

CC: I did. Another really memorable sentiment was once it's over you're like, "That could have been harder. They could have made that way harder." You're glad it wasn't, but it also could have been. They could have done a lot more to have tried to break us off, because at no point did I consider quitting. It just wasn't an option. But I guess it's a good thing too.

BAK: How many people dropped out during that?

CC: I don't know how many quit. I mean, I wouldn't—I don't think it was more than five. It really wasn't many.

BAK: Then what happened next, after the hundred hours?

CC: Then we got to line up in the hallway—in [Colonel Aaron] Bank Hall—which is the schoolhouse for Special Operations on Fort Bragg—and one by one—

BAK: Did they just decide that night?

CC: I don't know when they decided. But then one by one we went in to the room, we sat down with our observer, and they told us if we made it or not, and—yeah.

BAK: Wow. Okay.

CC: And then we got on a bus and we went to CRC, which is a CONUS Replacement Center— and CONUS stands for Continental United States [correction: Contiguous United States]—so basically a big deployment site at Fort Benning, Georgia, where we went to the range and we did our standard deployment requirements. And they just have a site where you can go through, do all the medical stuff—get your Anthrax [vaccination]—it's like an assembly line to deployment. So we did that.

And I remember, too, we got on the bus and there were—there were thirty of us— or maybe thirty-three—thirty-two, thirty-three had been—three extra had been selected than we had CRC slots for, so we're just like, "Dang. There's three people who made it but they don't get to deploy until the next cycle—the next rotation—a year from now." What a slap. I'm just glad it wasn't me because then I would have gone back to Germany. Been victorious but not really victorious. "Yeah. I really didn't make it."

BAK: Okay. So they selected, and that's when you chose whether you wanted to do Ranger or Special Forces?

CC: Yeah. We had six more weeks of language, culture training—for Pashtun culture—which was the main area—Pashtun culture is just the—based on one of their pillars of hospitality, it's just one of the main demographics within Afghanistan that the Taliban was able to get a stronghold on because they can go into their houses and hide because Pashtunwali says, "Be hospitable," and that really is just a huge pillar in their culture. There's obviously Farsi and Dari and other microcultures within Afghanistan, but we focused on that.

And then some more scenarios-based training, some more training on searching, and then just general, so we still—I still had training on doing medical capabilities event or [unclear].

[Pashtun culture is based on Islam and Pashtunwali, a non-written ethical code and traditional lifestyle]

BAK: Like first aid?

CC: Yeah. And then just navigating cultural nuances within those situations. So it still was very beneficial, I think, for all of us to have that cross-training. And then two weeks after that, once we were divided between Special Forces and Ranger Regiment, we did specific training with them, which was—those two weeks were my best two weeks of training in the army.

BAK: Okay. Before we get to that, can you remind me what the difference is between the women that were going to deal with the Rangers and what they were going to do with the Special Forces?

CC: With the Rangers, our mission was to accompany Ranger Strike Forces [a military force armed and trained for attack] on night raids to capture and kill identified terrorists that



were in that vicinity. And then—Our specific role was to search and safeguard the women and children, and search them for either derogatory information that the terrorists would hide on their person, because they didn't think that we were searching women and children at that point, or if the identified terrorist was dressed up in a—a shawl dressed up as a woman, and then also to tactically question the women and children to confirm the identity of the person we were after.

BAK: Okay. And then for the Special Forces?

CC: The Village Stability [Operations] platform is where Special Forces teams, they go, they live within the populace—so within a small village or town—and they work with the local governance, local community, to establish ways to—this is just my understanding, too, which is, I'm sure—it could be critiqued—but to help that village become self-sustained enough that they don't need to rely on terrorism; can defend themselves against Al-Qaeda, other networks of terrorist forces. And so, then the women specifically—the Cultural Support Team with the Special Forces missions would speak specifically to the women in that community.

BAK: Okay. When did you indicate which one you wanted to be with?

CC: I think that was a couple days before the actual decision was made.

BAK: Right. You have to remind me, you had said, "I'll do what the army wants me to do," but then—

CC: Yeah. And then within those intermittent seventy-two hours I was like, "I hope I get the Ranger mission.

BAK: But you didn't tell anyone that?

CC: I mean, I told the girls. Yeah. But I don't think I was in a position to really [unclear] on my original decision.

BAK: Got it. So pretty happy when—

CC: Yes. Yeah. And actually, when they did the roll call, it was, "This person VSO, this person VSO," [unclear] seven people. And then it was, "Cleveland, Ranger," so I was really first. Just—I mean, not that I was first selected, it was just, probably, alphabetically. Oh, good. I thought that was kind of cool.

BAK: Had you bonded with anyone else besides that person you knew from New York, I think?

CC: Yeah. I mean, we were—for training, we were divided up into twelve man—twelve women teams, so made quick bonds with those that we spent so much time with, and then even just amongst ourselves, we spent all day. But I would say specifically within our teams.

BAK: Okay. After the decisions were made, you were assigned to the Rangers. What happened next?

CC: Probably the graduation ceremony, and then we were—those two weeks with the Rangers, doing deployment-specific training.

BAK: What was that like?

CC: That was super motivating and, I mean, it focused a lot on marksmanship specifically, close quarters transitions with our weapon, [unclear] more scenarios with [unclear] but[?] from their deployment experience, not having had us, they were able to replicate situations that were more identical to what mission would actually be like for us; scenarios they had run into, and then allowing us to troubleshoot our way through them and figure out how to best handle the situation, but then also giving us feedback based on their expertise.

BAK: They brought in women and children for this?

CC: Yes. Not so many children, but women.

BAK: Women?

CC: Yeah.

BAK: Okay.

CC: Women from the Special Operations community who were doing other roles that had some—that just replicated [unclear].

BAK: I remember from the book that your training was much abbreviated.

CC: Yes.

BAK: I think all of it, but this specific part.

CC: Yeah.

BAK: So a male Ranger, how long would that training have been for him?

CC: That's a good question. I know they have their own assessment called RASP [Ranger Assessment and Selection]. And then—I don't know how long. I don't know how long it is.

BAK: Okay.

CC: Probably more than two weeks. [chuckles]

BAK: Yeah, probably, right? So two weeks. Did you say that was your favorite part?

CC: Yes.

BAK: Anything else you wanted to talk about; any experiences you had specifically?

CC: Yeah, I said this to Gayle, because my main—one of my main critiques always too—which now—I said then, I say it now—but they—part of—one of our capabilities is fast-rope [technique for descending a thick rope] out of the helicopter directly onto the target compound, and so that course, for the rest of the army and all of them, is two weeks; FRIES [Fast Rope Insertion Extraction System] and SPIES [Special Patrol Infiltration Exfiltration System]; fast-rope insertion extraction—whatever the acronym is—but it was two weeks. And I actually had the opportunity to go to it after Air Assault School if I hadn't had to go back to school.

But we had two, three hours of them saying, "Alright, go down the rope, go down the rope. Alright, we're going to go up a little higher. Go down the rope."

And our officer in charge, she broke her leg, and so that sucked. Then we got on deployment and another one of the girls was with her unit doing that same training, just for a refresher for all of them—doing it in non-hostile situation, which is refresher training—and she broke her leg on the airfield.

And so, then this guidance came out through command that said CSTs don't fast-rope. We're like, "Well, that's not cool because now we can't go on missions where there's any probability that we might have to fast-rope." Which, by the way, the missions that you think you have to fast-rope on, you don't. And the missions you think you don't have to fast-rope on, you do. And there are some units—individual units—that may or may not have listened to that guidance and those girls fast-rope, and that's the way of the world. But my critique with that was always that I just wish—and I think it had to do with time—I'm not saying that training should have been delayed to get out the door, but I just think—CSTs can fast-rope, and I think it goes with a lot of things. Women can do the same—Women can have so many of the same capabilities if they're given the same opportunities to train. Which is one of the reason I'm so happy that Ranger school is now open, so that people just have the opportunity to learn and develop their skills.

BAK: How did you feel that the instructors—who I guess were general Ranger instructors—

CC: Yeah. They—

BAK: —their attitude.

CC: Their attitude was great. They were our—They were just our biggest supporters. They welcomed us, like, "We're so happy to have this team and for our regiment to have this capability, and we believe that—we already know all the ways you're going to help us on mission and help our fellow Rangers on mission."

And, I mean, just with our boss breaking her leg, it was almost a good training opportunity because you saw how one in particular—how he just dealt with that and the first aid, keeping her very calm, so it was opportunity training.

BAK: She was probably not looking at it that way.

CC: "And we're medevac-ing [medical evacuation] her, okay. Good drill."

BAK: [chuckles]

CC: But a testament to her is, she got released so soon from the hospital because her leg healed, like, two months before they—normal prognosis for a broken leg is, and I think it's because she's a weight lifter, her bones are already so dense from loading through them with all her weight lifting that she just—she's, like, a month late to deployment, and she hit the ground running, so it was all good.

BAK: Literally.

CC: Yeah.

BAK: And Rangers, there's a special uniform, right?

CC: Yeah, they wore—Special Ops was always trying to be special so they had—they wore the Crye [Precision] uniform. And it's not that the rest of the army can't wear it, it's just the Rangers got issued it. And a lot of other Special Operations got issued it.

BAK: C—R—Y?

CC: C—R—Y—E.

BAK: I'll have to look that up.

CC: So just nicer, sort of stretchy material so you can move better in it, and it has knee pads and elbow pads for crawling around that got right directly into the pants. But, I mean, I know people—if a soldier wants to spend, like, three hundred dollars on a pair of pants for their deployment, they can. Just, we got them.

BAK: Did they fit? Because I would imagine they hadn't made ones for women.

CC: Yeah, so the small was—I don't know—I guess—I'm not super petite so I don't—like, there were some girls that are—I mean, they're much tinier than the average tiny male soldier. But I didn't really have an issue with them. But small was the smallest size they were made in, so some of the girls had to, like, get the belt, and then the crotch was a little saggy, but other than that, you just hike your pants up. [both chuckle]

BAK: Okay. Mom jeans, right?

CC: Yeah.

BAK: Okay, so you had the training. And then what happened next?

CC: We deployed. I can't remember if we got post-deployment leave. I feel like we would have. Yeah, because I know I went home for at least a long weekend. And then—

BAK: What did your parents think?

CC: Well, I think of all twenty of us, I was the most honest with my parents, which was still in a very ambiguous way. But I basically told them that I was going to be with Ranger Regiment, that there were going to be things that I couldn't talk about, but not to worry because I was—I felt safer—even though we were going in to more dangerous situations, I felt safer being with such a competent and professional unit, than I would with an average unit, so I tried to reassure them in that way. And they were very supportive.

BAK: Okay. So were you deployed right after that?

CC: Yes. So August we deployed, we were—went to Bagram Airfield, which is the big [unclear] there, so we're like, "Oh, my gosh. This is—" whatever. [chuckles] And so we just—

[Speaking Simultaneously]

BAK: How were you feeling on the flight over?

CC: I felt okay. I guess the thing was more with landing. It just kind of—it was sort of surreal, because you land, and then you land in Bagram and you're like, "I've just landed in a war zone, but this doesn't feel like it yet."

BAK: Right. Did you know who you were going to be attached to before?

CC: I knew who my partner was going to be.

BAK: Were you happy?

CC: Oh, yeah. I mean, all the girls were awesome.

BAK: Okay.

CC: And then I knew—Yeah, we knew the location that we were going to. We hadn't met any of the people we would be with yet.

BAK: Okay.

CC: We knew where we were headed.

BAK: Alright. How long were you in Bagram?

CC: Maybe three days.

BAK: Three days? And how far away was where you were—

CC: Yeah, I was a couple hours by [Lockheed] C-130 [Hercules], I think; it was a couple hours flight.

BAK: Was there any issues on the flight there?

CC: No. Well, the commanding general of the unit was on our flight so that was kind of cool, but then also, the pilots—because we flew at night, and so the pilots let me and my teammate go up front and had binos [binoculars] and look at everything under night vision, so that was just kind of cool.

BAK: Yeah, definitely. But you didn't feel you were at risk at all?

CC: I—Honestly, I felt—I was less afraid, so my fear—my spectrum of fear went from beginning deployment, not scared, and then end of deployment, super scared. So I kind of had to reverse—I had the reverse jitters.

BAK: Got it, okay.

CC: For what that's worth.

BAK: Okay. So they landed somewhere in the middle of the night.

CC: Yes.

BAK: What happened next?

CC: Got off, smelled like diesel, and we got our gear, and then we went to—we were met on the airfield by one of the supply guys—one of the logistics people—and then he showed us to where our billets were, and I think—if I remember it correctly, I think we met—so the women who were doing our job—so they were—we always say we were the first selected group of Cultural Support Team members, but there were actually women there who had been pulled—one was a lab tech within Special Ops, right? So she's there doing the job because the Rangers said we need women to fill this capacity.

BAK: Oh, my gosh.

CC: So they were—I don't want to say that they were untrained or unqualified in any way. They technically got the same ad hoc [arranged], last minute—even more ad hoc, even more last minute—than what we got. What the difference was, that we all wanted to be there, and a lot of them are like, "I didn't sign up for this."

BAK: Right.

CC: So they were a little hit or miss. But the one specifically that I replaced, I think I met her, and she was like, "Alright, got to go on mission." And then left and came back, and the next—the following night we went out to—so there were four—it was me, my partner, and then the two women who we were replacing all went out.

BAK: On a mission?

CC: Yes, to kind of say, "Alright, this is you—you watch us tonight." We watched them, helped wherever we could. And then the next time it was like, "Alright, you guys do it," and that was it.

BAK: Wow. Okay. And you had an interpreter.

CC: Yes. We had two female interpreters.

BAK: That were with you.

CC: Yeah.

BAK: Okay.

CC: So we each—Ultimately, me and my partner, we would go out with each a different strike force, versus both going out twice. So we each just took an interpreter—a separate interpreter.

BAK: How many missions did you go on?

CC: We were there for eight months. I forget. I mean, there was a period between, like, February and March where the weather was really bad, so it was hard to get air assets and surveillance, so there were a couple bouts. And also, it's not really the fighting season because our enemy likes to hole up and not go out in the crazy weather either. So there was a bout of—a little bit of a down period then, but we went out about every night, every other night.

BAK: Wow. You're so calm about it.

CC: And if we weren't—if we didn't go out on mission we would be doing something to refit or plan or something like that.

BAK: Any stories you want to talk about? You said you got more scared as it went on.

CC: Yeah. Well, I think just the reality setting in. Ashley was killed very early on with our deployment, and then soon after that I got in my first fire fight, so that was—I mean, and that was within, like, October and November—the weeks in there—and we still had—we still had, like, five, six more months left.

[First Lieutenant Ashley White was killed during combat operations in Kandahar Province, Afghanistan on October 22, 2011, when the assault force she was supporting triggered an improvised explosive device. She served as a member of a Cultural Support Team attached to a Joint Special Operations Task Force in Afghanistan.]

BAK: You were firing your weapon also?

CC: Yes.

BAK: Any casualties in that?

CC: Mine, no. So luckily—

BAK: Them?

CC: Yes.

BAK: Okay.

CC: And then just things, too, with the women and children you see different things. And I guess, too, like, statistically, as the time between now and home gets closer, it's like you've just had all this luck already used up in the months that I've been here, and so statistically, and also just having ignorance removed or—not that I—ignorance isn't the right word—but denial—having some of your denial removed, you just see the likelihood of catastrophe.

But something that Gayle didn't—and I think I told her about—but something that I think especially, too, now is—we talk about women in the front lines [unclear] the front lines, even though it's an asymmetric war—

BAK: I'm sorry, can you tell me what "asymmetric war" means?

CC: Just that there's—the enemy can come from below, be it a IED [improvised explosive device], above via a mortar, and then from your front if you're in an assault. Or if you're—quote, unquote—"in the rear with the gear" in a logistics capacity, they can still ambush you.



["In the rear with the gear" is a term used to describe the disdain front-line combat troops feel for troops who are in combat support roles and not necessarily on the front lines]

BAK: So a symmetric war would be a traditional "These are the front lines."

CC: The front lines, yeah.

BAK: Okay.

CC: I think with that—I don't think this—we're not supposed to talk about, like, our tactics, techniques, and procedures—TTPs—but—and I know not all the girls were used in this way, but I just—I have this—when people talk about the front line and women in combat, and we've been doing it since—women have been in combat since Molly Pitcher and the Revolutionary War, and all the wives that followed their husbands in the Civil War—but there are times when we would try to call out the men first.

BAK: What do you mean? What does that mean?

CC: Literally say—So there—We could either go in and wake everyone up with our—wake everyone up, like, "We're here, and you're not fighting us right now," or—

BAK: And that would just be women doing that or the men also, like, when you go into a house?

CC: That would be men also.

BAK: Yeah, okay.

CC: Or we could—Over the course of my deployment, we were trying to put less of a bad taste in the locals' mouths with—that's not a fun way to wake up. I totally get that. I don't want to get woken up that way either.

BAK: Right.

CC: So instead we would call them out and say, "Alright, we're here. We're coalition forces"—and you'd use an interpreter—"we're here to search your house;" there was a whole thing. And men come out first. That way, once they had all the men, then maybe the women—the women and children we'd call out last. And one of the ironies, too, is that there's a significant higher number of male coalition forces there, with a significantly lower number of male Afghans, and then I get sixty women and kids, and it's me and my teammate and it's [unclear]. So it was always a kind of stark contrast, and funny to me.

Sometimes the women were really no less hostile, [chuckling] maybe even a little bit more hostile, than the men, and so it was kind of funny.

BAK: They would yell at you?

CC: They were usually pretty pissed, yeah. And sometimes they were timid and shy. It really often depended on what the—either the oldest women, or if she was very old or senile maybe the next oldest matriarch. Also, too, if the men did not respond to the callout, then me and my interpreter would have to call the women out.

So it's just—I think it's ironic because we talk about women not being on the front lines, but I would literally be very close to a doorway, which is a fatal funnel that you always want to stay out of, but in order to do the callout, there I am in between our identified enemy, and then—

BAK: There's you, and then the men.

CC: —you could argue a hundred thousand people behind me in that instance. Obviously, there's missions going on at night all over the country but—So I just think that's something worth remembering for the sake of our military history.

BAK: We will note that.

CC: Yeah.

BAK: You said these were all at night, and you actually didn't go in the house, you called everyone out first?

CC: That was a technique. We did go into the houses. And even when we would call everyone out, especially if the weather was bad, we would search the house, and then also—I mean, especially with the women and children if the weather was bad, once a room was cleared I would bring them back in and then do everything—maybe search them outside but then talk with them inside.

BAK: What did you learn by doing that that wasn't brought up in training? I'm sure there were a lot of things that you're like, "Huh, I wasn't trained for this thing."

CC: Yeah. I guess I learned—And it's kind of hard because you try to fight the lesson of empathy, because I just think about if someone were taking my dad away in the middle of the night, what that would feel like? But then also, it was more a confirmation on what they're telling us, which is—some women are like, "My husband beats me. Here's all his shit."

BAK: [chuckles]

CC: "Okay. Well, alright, that was cool."

And then—But that's certainly not the norm, and I'm sure there's—it could be vice versa in either scenario. And then—What was the other thing?

Well, one time we were going through and searching women, and my interpreter was like, "So that woman over there was talking about killing you."

And I was like, "Alright, we're going to search her next." [both chuckle] So that's good. And she was just talking smack. She was just really pissed that we were there.

So then—I don't know if it's a lesson, but it just stinks when—it stinks when the situation presents itself and you realize that this little kid is turning in their parent, or their uncle. So I don't know if these are lessons that I learned at the time or more reflect on now, but just thinking about the ramifications, I'm sure, at some point that kid will be reminded that that's what they did, and just thinking about—there's just—I guess—

And a lesson I learned when I came home—[unclear] home to Germany—is I was on staff and another new staff member had just returned from his deployment, and I didn't feel like we were heroes, but I felt like we did good things, and my perspective at the time that I was deployed was that this is reality and everyone else needs to get on board and support us. How could you not support what we're doing? We're weeding terrorists out of Afghanistan.

BAK: When you say "everyone," in the army?

CC: The army and the rest of the world. And so, he said to me, "Were you—" and he said the task force number.

And I was like, "Yeah, that was us."

And he was like, "I hate you guys." He's like, "We would—" in the region that he was assigned, after we would leave it was his job—he was on a provincial reconstruction team—so it was his job to go to that house and say, "We're sorry. Did we break anything? If we did, we'll pay you for it."

But then also in that context, he would get ambushed all the time, because they knew that American forces were coming, and it was the perfect opportunity to retaliate against what we—I—had just done the night before. So that was humbling, coming home and just thinking—just better understanding why nothing is easy, nothing is simple.

BAK: Right, definitely nothing is simple over there.

CC: Yeah. And of note, too, a lesson I learned, is that I never trust anything I read in the media, because there was a mission that my teammate went out on, and the target used his two wives, one of which was pregnant, as human shields. They shot our EOD guy—explosive ordnance disposal guy—

BAK: He did or his group did?

CC: The men in the compound shot him.

BAK: Men in the compound, okay.

CC: Yeah, shot him in the head. He's alive; amazing; the bullet grazed his brain. And *The New York Times* wrote about—and I have the article—*New York Times* wrote about how "American Forces Shot Pregnant Afghan Woman."

BAK: Oh, my.

CC: Didn't say anything about our EOD guy, didn't say anything about her jackass husband using her as a human shield. So I don't know. It's kind of—It's just people's perspectives and agendas, and all we can do is try and control its nastier influence[?].

BAK: Right. Of the bad guys at the time, what percentage do you think they were successful?

CC: I think—I don't know if I can put a percentage on it, but I think the most successful that we were was the higher up in their own chain of command that they were. I think on days—and some of our commanders were better about it than others—but right now the only person that we have, like, a firm target on, is this really low level guy that—he dug a hole and he buried a bomb. Is he bad? Or did he just—is he just trying to make a living for—to feed his family and that was the best employment opportunity for the night? So I think we were successful when we went after high level people that could really be—his information and capture could really be leveraged to learn about the organization and different things. And then when we looked more strategically at lower level people who may or may not have had—may or may not hate America, but if we go get them and take them, they will, and so will their one hundred cousins.

BAK: Right. And you said you were involved in one firefight?

CC: I was in three.

BAK: Three. Is there anything you want to say about that?

CC: Yeah. The first one, I felt very ready. It's like, "I feel—" like, not ready in the moment but I was—had my alleyway and I was going to shoot whatever came through it; like, that nervous ready.

BAK: This is with night vision goggles?

CC: Yes. Yeah, which are all mega-pixeled, and then when you're nervous, start playing tricks on your eyes. And so, in that scenario, our lead element had gotten cut off from us, so they were trying to wrap around and link back up with us so that we could break contact. And meanwhile, we were surrounded on all the other sides.

BAK: By buildings?

CC: Yeah, and the enemy as well as starting to surround us. And it was an ambush from within an Afghan National Police station. And there was an IED wire involved that was actually why the lead element stopped, to disable it, and just as they did the police station opened up on us. So it's known as a sleeper element, which is where the enemy will recruit squeaky clean people to work in the Afghan National Police Force; who we have to coordinate our routes with sometimes, so they knew we were coming.

Our male interpreter, who I helped immigrate just with, like, a letter of recommendation, reference, he's in California now; so awesome; him, his wife, and his two daughters. But he ran up and he was unarmed. He ran up to try to communicate to

them, not knowing that there had been an IED wire involved that was an ambush at the time. He tried to run up to them and say, "Put down your weapons. We won't hurt you. We're American forces." And it didn't quell the situation, but he was just—I think sometimes—he's just that other part of Afghan culture that I have to remember is there, and is awesome.

And our strike force commander could probably be in a textbook just from that mission, because he followed de-escalation, and [escalation force?], like, so incredibly disciplined. Our people are yelling at him, "Just let us kill them."

BAK: [chuckles]

CC: "Call in the Hellfires!" And he was just—I mean, he was just textbook; he was just really awesome. And eventually we did call in Hellfires, and that was awesome too.

[The AGM-114 Hellfire is an air-to-surface missile (ASM) first developed for anti-armor use, but later models were developed for precision strikes against other target types, and have been used in a number of targeted killings of high-profile individuals]

But in the meantime, in my little alleyway, I'm ready to shoot whatever comes through, except I see this body and I hesitate. And it's one of those, "Well, thank God I did," because it was our lead element linking back up. And I forget what the circumstance was, but we talked after. He was like, "I almost shot you."

And I'm like, "I almost shot you."

And I forget if my light wasn't on, or if his light wasn't on, or somebody's battery was out, so—but also, he was a really big dude so it was kind of hard to confuse him with an Afghan. So that was all good.

But I remember beating myself up a little bit about my cowardice in that situation. I was like, "Why did I hesitate?" And, like, yeah, I was—good that I hesitated, but I started to intrinsically analyze myself and my own readiness.

So I think my takeaway message from the whole gamut is just—I think there's guilt associated—maybe guilt's too strong a word—but we always think about people who are veterans who kill, and the guilt associated with that, and I think—I know that it is very real, but I think it's important to remember veterans who maybe have some guilt associated because they never did that. Which for better, for worse, I never did that, or I didn't—there's some people who never deployed and they feel—they feel bad about their service because they never deployed, and I just don't think any of that is fair because it's one team, one fight. So just remembering both extremes of that part. And it's not to emphasize the victim's story that is so often told about veterans, but just recognize that component of it.

BAK: Pogue/non-pogue divide.

[Pogue is derogatory pejorative military slang for non-combat, staff, and other rear-echelon or support units]

CC: Right. And it's—neither is good; neither feeling is good. And I think if—And I think veterans are—I think veterans are good about accepting each other and supporting each other because no one can do that better than a fellow veteran, and I think that's really important for us to stick together, even outside of service, but there's certainly that—the war story in the bar, and there's—that's a component of it, but just to be—for us to be considerate of it and make sure that we welcome all veterans. And even me now, I try really hard not to make anyone feel like I think my service is more important, because it's not, it's just a part of everything. I mean, I'll stand—I feel like I stand on the shoulders of giants and women—men and women before me, and I'm really grateful for all of that.

BAK: Any other missions that you have any stories you want to talk about, or any observations or lessons?

CC: I think those are the highlights.

BAK: Okay. I would imagine you would come back from that and it would just take a long time to wind down.

CC: Yeah.

BAK: And then you have to go out the next day.

CC: It was just kind of—It was exhausting. And then, like I said in the beginning, too, I'm there—I get there, 1st Battalion is leaving, right? So maybe, like, a week or two and then they're gone. So two weeks in, I'm feeling good so I can make a strong impression. I got all my rookie stuff—most of my rookie stuff out of the way—like [falling in to wadies?], and things with night vision and depth perception falling all over the place.

So now, 2nd Battalion comes in, and I'm cool, I'm cool. But then they're there for three and a half months and then they leave. And then the 3rd Bat[talion] comes in, and 3rd Bat's ready to hit the ground and, "Go, go, go!"

And I'm like, "Guys, relax."

And also, I think that's probably how our Afghan counterparts feel because they've been there for ten years at the time, and we keep coming in every three months, or conventional forces come in every six to—six months to eighteen months and hear the same thing. So that kind of offered some perspective of—when we think, "Oh, our Afghan counterparts are lazy." No, they're not; they've just been at this way—in a way more committed and sustainable fashion. And it's not to detract from our frequent deployments and time away from our family, it's just different.

BAK: So your assignment was for a set amount of time?

CC: Yes.

BAK: And it didn't extend?

CC: No, it didn't, because then the next rotation of CSTs came in right behind us.

BAK: You had the same base that you went back to every night?

CC: Yeah, actually, I was at one camp, and then a month later my strike force was going to—they were just filling in where there was a higher need; where there were more missions coming up; more targets coming up—we went there and we were only going to stay there temporarily but then we ended up staying there the remainder of my deployment.

BAK: Okay. By the end of your deployment, were you counting down the days before your luck ran out?

CC: Oh, yeah. And I was just imagining every day, down to the smallest detail, of post-deployment leave. I'm like, "This day I'm going to go on a bike ride with my dad, and then this day I'm going to—this day I'm going to do this."

BAK: You didn't have any leaves at all during your deployment?

CC: No.

BAK: Wow. Sorry, just to repeat, eight months?

CC: Eight months. I think they only give you leave if you're there for twelve.

BAK: So you were on seven days a week, six days a week?

CC: I mean—yeah, it was—there was no off day. There were days that you check in at the Tactical Operations Center, right? Which was really just our central meeting location where we plan everything. So there were days that you check in, they're like, "No—" and we would rotate different days that people would be in charge of stuff too; for the more, like, operational continual surveillance side. It's like, "Nope, nothing today."

"Okay."

"Check in in an hour, see if we have anything. Nope, nothing in an hour."

BAK: What did you do in your little bit of off time?

CC: Work out, read, take a nap, call home if you could.

BAK: What were the sleeping and the eating facilities like?

CC: The sleeping facilities were—the second place was really sad; it was like little plywood—which, I mean, it could have been worse—but, like, little plywood holes to

live in. But actually, at the second place, we befriended some Navy Seabees, which are—they were there building stuff on the camp.

[United States Naval Construction Battalions, better known as the Seabees, form the Naval Construction Force of the United States Navy]

BAK: As Seabees will.

CC: Yeah. And so, two of them were females so they hooked us up with a pretty nice—and it was actually really sweet, because they were refurbishing the sleeping area, and it was called a C-SPAN, so that's—or no, K-SPAN [pre-engineered arched steel panel building] which was kind of the—it's not a tent, it's not really a building—but that's what we were in. And so, there was a VIP [very important person] sleeping area on the other side of the plywood wall; there'd be, like, colonels or whatever in there, and they'd come through. One day we came back and the colonel—the most recent colonel was gone and they had torn down the wall. It was no longer the VIP room. And they made us these really nice—significantly nicer—little areas to sleep. And they were like, "These are the girls that go out on our missions, so they get the nice spots, and nobody else complain about it." And one of them was a real hardass [slang for a person who follows rules and regulations meticulously and enforces them without exceptions], so we're like, "Thank you. That's really nice."

BAK: What happened when the next colonel came in?

CC: [chuckles] I don't know really. I don't even know. There must have been some other space in the camp that they just redirected them to. But yeah, that was pretty sneaky but I liked it.

BAK: How many camps were you at?

CC: Just two.

BAK: Just two. About how many people were in each camp?

CC: There was all of us, and then there—some support personnel, so. There was, like, maybe five Seabees, five signal people.

BAK: So pretty small; like, a hundred to—

CC: Yeah. And then we were closer to—on the outskirts—like offset off of a larger installation FOB [Forward Operating Base].

BAK: What about eating?



CC: Just your general—I shouldn't say it that way—but there was the DFACs, so on the larger base—

BAK: Dining Facilities?

CC: Dining Facility, yeah. So our breakfast was really dinner, so then we'd have eggs for break—

BAK: Right.

CC: —eggs for dinner, yeah.

BAK: I imagine you never got enough sleep.

CC: Yeah, it was weird, too, because we'd get back, and by the time we were done with all of our reports and our mission debrief, it was light out, and so just our circadian rhythm of that had [unclear], and then plus a little adrenaline, and let's hope that you don't have to go pee in the middle of the day, which is your night, because then you're wide awake. You're like, "Well, I should—it's noon and—" and it's the only sunlight that you get to see, so I think we might have just been really sensitive to it too. It's like, "Sunlight [unclear]."

BAK: Right. Wow. About how much sleep a day did you end up getting?

CC: Probably six—five, six hours, yeah. I don't know how good any of it was, but. Actually, I think it's kind of a story in and of itself, but I remember the first time—it was early on, maybe the first couple weeks—but we were out on mission so late that it was into the early morning and it was the first call to prayer, and we were just lined up waiting for the helicopter to come get us, and I was like, "Oh, it sounds so pretty. It sounds so nice."

And they were like, "No, that does not sound nice. That means everyone's waking up and we're—this is not good—that nice sound is not good for us." So that was some perspective.

It's like, "No, everyone's waking up. We need to get out of here."

"Oh, yeah, we do." [both chuckle]

BAK: Wow. You never really think about that.

CC: Yeah.

BAK: That's interesting. Anything else you want to mention; your thoughts about your deployment?

CC: No.

BAK: Okay. So after eight months you get on a chopper to get on a plane and go back to Heidelberg.

CC: Yeah, we went—we got to come back to Fort Bragg, turn in all of our gear.

BAK: So you didn't go to Germany, you went to Fort Bragg first?

CC: Yeah. Well, I guess, the—we were laid over in Germany.

BAK: Right.

CC: But I didn't tell anybody I was there. I was like, "I'm still on orders." [both chuckle]

BAK: You didn't want to see your ex-CO.

CC: Yeah. I think she was gone by then.

BAK: You didn't want to parade in front of her going[?]*—*my Ranger uniform.

CC: Well, and that's actually an interesting point, too, because we're are still—I don't know if it will change—but we are still not authorized to wear the Ranger scroll as our deployment patch.

BAK: Oh, really?

CC: Because we were not assigned to the unit, we were attached to them. And it's a little frustrating—it's one of those things like, should you make it a big deal, should—I don't know. But it is a little frustrating because there are men who are not Rangers but who serve with them, in maybe even a lesser capacity than we did, but who wear that as their deployment patch. And again, in some ways I'm almost grateful that we weren't [correction: were] the first group because I know if I had walked around Germany for my last year in the army with a Ranger scroll on my deployment soldier, everyone would have had something to say, and tell me I was jacked up. And I would have had to explain that I'm actually authorized to wear this, so it's probably—But I think about—

BAK: You said you were glad you *were* with the first group; is that what you said?

CC: Yeah. I'm almost glad that we weren't authorized to wear the scroll.

BAK: Got it, okay.

CC: Because it probably saved me a lot of pain in the butt. But then I think about [Kristen] Griest and [Shaye] Haver, the first two women to graduate Ranger School, and I think about them wearing that Ranger tab and I'm sure they're going through that. But they've had enough publicity that everyone's like, "Oh, that must be one of them." And give it ten years and it won't be a big deal. It'll be like Air Assault wings. No one's going to think that you're out of line for wearing that and that you're a liar. They're just going to be like, "Oh. You went to Air Assault School."

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

BAK: Okay. So you went back to Fort Bragg.

CC: Yes.

BAK: What happened then?

CC: Then we had, I think, about a week where we—we turned in all of our gear, we did some debriefing to help form the curriculum for the future. We had really nice—Since we were still in the organization, that everyone was "read on" [an access determination based upon an explicit need to access intelligence information] to—"read on" is a term for being read on to anything Secret or Top Secret, so you know what's involved. So we were able to do a little debrief with the unit psychologist who are around everything, so I thought that was really cool, and just a nice opportunity.

And then I took some leave with the family, and that was awesome. When people say—and I had a bunch of leave because I really hadn't taken much leave my first three years in the army, so I think I took fifty-two days of leave—

BAK: Wow.

CC: Yeah. And it was great. And when people say that you get bored on vacation, don't want to go back to work, I don't know what they're talking about. [chuckles] Because—I mean, it was fine going back to Germany. But that was probably my biggest adjustment, because when I went back to Germany—

BAK: For your leave, you could just turn everything off, because you'd just been eight months of hyper-vigilance, and then you saw your family.

CC: And also, it was fifty-two days of always being with someone, and almost not having to think about army stuff. And yet, I kind of had my canned thing, like when, "How was deployment?" And you just say your little canned thing and you kind of blow it off so you don't have to deal with it.

BAK: And you still couldn't tell people what you actually did or who you were with? That was still classified, or not really?

CC: I could still say with the Rangers. That part wasn't classified at that point.

BAK: Okay.

CC: But I also didn't feel like going into details about anything else.

BAK: Sure.

CC: And I was still angry at the rest of the world, and *The New York Times* for not being on the same page as me, so it was just easier not to deal with things. But then when I got back to Germany, one, I was alone and it was—I just had this really—for months I had this really weird sense of some of [unclear]—crazy but true—I felt like—I hated being alone in my apartment because I felt like someone was about to night raid me. And I would come home from my—come home to my apartment and I would clear the whole house. And, I mean, I set up my house so that it was super easy to clear; it would only take a couple minutes.

BAK: That's not uncommon.

CC: Yeah. Yeah. And then being back in the army, people assume that I did—people had assumptions, I think, in my unit, about what I did, and it was just easier to let them assume what they wanted to than really share much, and play off that squirrelness [restlessness; nervousness] and not have to deal with it.

BAK: What did they assume you did? Different people assume different things.

CC: Someone told someone—A sergeant told a whole bunch of soldiers that I worked with the CIA [Central Intelligence Agency] [chuckles], which is just, like, "Yeah, that's funny." And just things like that.

BAK: And you were assigned back to the MP company, unit?

CC: Yeah. Then I went up to battalion to be on staff. And I had a really good boss. I mean—

BAK: You went right there when you were back in Germany?

CC: Yes.

BAK: What does that involve?

CC: I was in the S3 shop, which does all—there's operations, training, and plans, so I was in the training section, I ran the training section, which I actually really liked. I got to—over the course of a year—plan and execute two mission readiness exercises for platoons within the battalion that were deploying. So kind of similar concept to the training that I got, running scenarios and things like that; and resources that and executing it, so. I found that fulfilling, and it was also just fun to get out of the office and do something that felt more real than operations orders and stuff like that.

[The S3 is the battalion's operations and training officer. It is also the battalion training officer, ensuring the ongoing military education of the battalion's personnel]

BAK: But you still felt alone, kind of, the whole year?

CC: Yeah, not the whole year. I—Peers on staff I kind of befriended, and it takes me a while. I always feel like it takes me six months to adjust to most new situations, with the exception of CST because we were all instant friends.

BAK: Right. Were there any other Rangers, female or male?

CC: No.

BAK: Okay.

CC: And I think some people it could have just been self—projecting this on myself—but I think—well, I know in particular, one master sergeant who was in the 82nd [Airborne Division] at Fort Bragg. So Fort Bragg is like the 82nd, and then—quote, unquote—"the other side of the fence" is Special Operations. And 82nd only hates Special Operations because they're jealous. [both chuckle]

BAK: Okay.

CC: But he got there, and he apparently made some comments about, "Oh, she can't think that she's better than everybody else." And it's like, whatever. So I don't know if there was more of an assumption with that, but I was also just finishing up my last year.

BAK: You were a captain by then?

CC: Yes. Then I got promoted to captain when I—sometime over the course of that year; I forget exactly when; probably about halfway through. Six months before I got out probably.

BAK: Okay. Anything else you want to talk about that last year?

CC: I don't think so.

BAK: Did you not want to re-up? What are your thoughts on that?

CC: Within six months of being on active duty, I was thinking, "I don't—" Because I had originally—in ROTC, I was like, "I'm going to stay in for twenty. I'm going to make it a career. I'm going to make colonel. It's going to be great." And then within six months of active duty I was thinking, "I'm probably just going to do four and get out."

But it was important for me to deploy, and I think if I hadn't had an opportunity to deploy I probably would have re-upped. But I felt, having deployed, and then also, thinking back to five and ten year plan as well, I was like, "I accomplished more than—I didn't go to Ranger School, I deployed with Ranger Regiment."

And, I mean, guys would joke, "Cleveland, you just passed Mountain Phase again," after a mission, and up in the mountains.

So I felt very—I just felt very ready for whatever was next.

[Mountain Phase is the second phase of Ranger School. Here, "students receive instruction on military mountaineering tasks, mobility training, as well as techniques for employing a platoon for continuous combat patrol operations in a mountainous environment."]

BAK: Did you know what was next?

CC: Yeah. In Afghanistan is kind of where I was playing around physical therapy. And my mom had worked at Helen Hayes [Rehabilitation] Hospital, and she had always said—I had been a biology major so I was interested in medicine, just wanted to have boots on the ground first—and my mom had said about how she always wished that she had gotten into prosthetics, and—well, honestly, my mom's right about everything.

BAK: [chuckles]

CC: Luckily, I learned that early on in life. But it's like, "Okay, Mom, I'll entertain this idea," and different aspects of physical therapy, so I thought it would be a good fit. And that last year in the army I also took some of my remaining prerequisites, so I had taken an advanced psychology and an exercise physiology. And then, unfortunately, I still had to re-do my anatomy and physiology, so that I had to wait until I was out of the army. I tried to get a waiver at UNC [University of North Carolina – Chapel Hill] because I didn't have—I had to re-do my anatomy and physiology, but I thought, "Oh, they'll make an exception." And I had to have it done, all, by the Fall before, so I was like, "I'll just take it in the Spring. It'll be done. They can give me an exception because I'm a veteran." And I could take it at an American accredited university, but UNC's pretty competitive so there was no exceptions. [chuckles]

BAK: Oh, gosh.

CC: It all worked out, and I took those at Fayetteville State [University].

BAK: I know we talked about this off tape, but you came back, you knew you wanted to get out, you were at Fort Bragg, and you decided on Chapel Hill because—

CC: I decided on Chapel Hill because when I was in Afghanistan I Googled "Top Ten Physical Therapy Programs in America," and for—I forget how many years—but Chapel Hill had consistently been a Top Five, and I thought, "Okay, I'll be using—My army family's all on Fort Bragg. My fiancé now—" he had just—we had met in Germany before I deployed. He was going to be stationed in Fort Bragg. He actually just PCS'ed [permanent change of station] too; he just got changed station to Boston—"so that'll be good. I can transition at Fort Bragg with the support of my friends. UNC, I'll be using my GI Bill—in-state tuition—Top Five school."

BAK: Okay.

CC: And I emailed Dr.—I basically stalked professors in the PT [physical therapy] program by their bios. I saw Dr. Karen McCulloch, who did traumatic brain injury research with the military.

BAK: Oh, wow.

CC: And I was in Germany, post-deployment, trying to do pre-req[uisites] and realizing that I was going to have to wait to finish before I could start school. And I emailed her and asked if I could volunteer on her study for volunteer hours, and she said, "I need to hire a research coordinator."

BAK: Hey.

CC: So I worked on her study for two years. And it actually just ended May of 2015. Then I started school in August 2015.

BAK: When did you separate?

CC: Two thousand thirteen.

BAK: Two thousand thirteen, okay. And then you came directly to here? I mean, you were Reserves.

CC: Yeah. So Fort Bragg.

BAK: Fort Bragg, okay. But you don't have to go back for—

CC: No.

BAK: Okay.

CC: Yeah.

BAK: Alright. What was your veterans—there's always a period of readjustment.

CC: Yeah, I actually feel like I delayed my real readjustment until school started. Because I came back to Fort Bragg, and all the people I hung out with were my army friends—my fiancé, my army friends—and then through the study I made some new friends but they were government employees who understood the military and acronyms, are married to servicemembers, so it was all within that little micro-community.

BAK: Wait. So the study was here?

CC: It was at Fort Bragg.

BAK: Oh, that makes sense.

CC: Yes. So my real adjustment, I think, was postponed until I started school here. And also, too, the book was a huge unavoidable—just—I had to talk about stuff, people are asking me about things, people are coming out of the woodwork, from friends and old military people saying, "I didn't realize," or, "I'm so proud of you," and, "Let me know if you need anything, because you must be hurting."  
And you're just like, "Okay."

BAK: When did she contact you? I can't remember the chronology.

CC: She contacted me probably around September of 2013, so yeah. [First Lieutenant Jennifer M.] "Jenny" Moreno was the second CST that was killed—had just been killed—and the book was originally supposed to be a magazine article, and Gayle said to Ashley's parents it should—it could be a book, and they said, "Okay, let's do it."

And then the only reason any of us talked is because Ashley's parents are awesome, and you can't—you're not going to say no to them, so it's like, "Okay, you guys want to do this, let's do this." And luckily, we didn't have any backlash. But again, I think it's—I mean, I know after it was published no one said anything about it to the command. But after it was published they vetted it and there was nothing persecutable in it so we're all good.

BAK: It must have been a little nerve-wracking.

CC: So far so good. "I'm out. I should be fine. [unclear] so we're good, right? They know who we are." [unclear] They can figure it out, yeah.

BAK: Wow. Yes, it's an amazing book. Did she come down and interview you?

CC: Yeah. She spent a lot of personal time and money to make that book happen. So she spent a lot of time at Fort Bragg, one-on-one, at kitchen tables, all of us talking. And I was reading the book; it's just weird to read about yourself.

BAK: I can only imagine.

CC: Yeah. But then it's also interesting because you see in her perception of all of us, how we all think that the other person's awesome. Like, "I'm not awesome but you all are great." Like, "Oh, my gosh, we all do that to each other." So it provided us with this great vehicle for which to become closer as a team; have a lot of important conversations that we might not have otherwise.

BAK: Do you still keep in touch?

CC: Yeah. We just—Labor Day weekend, one of the girls got married, so—and we all got invited so it was as much as CST reunion as it was a wedding.



BAK: Was the groom like, "Hello?"

CC: Yeah. He's like, "Well, I married into this, so."

BAK: That's right. He knew what he was getting into.

CC: He knew, yeah.

BAK: Marrying into a sisterhood.

CC: Yeah.

BAK: Oh, wow. So you said your readjustment started when you got here in—when, again?

CC: I started school August 2015.

BAK: Two thousand fifteen, okay.

CC: Yeah.

BAK: Okay, wow, so it hasn't been that long.

CC: Yeah, just over a year; I have two years left. And I think—I had this weird thing where I was like, "I don't need any new friends," so I kind of did it to myself where I was like, "I'm just going to be standoffish, and I don't need new friends." But then new friends have happened.

BAK: That's good. How many people are in your program?

CC: Thirty, including myself.

BAK: Any other military?

CC: No.

BAK: No? Okay. And is prosthetics what you're interested in?

CC: No, now I'm interested in everything PT related. Every time we have a new guest speaker I'm like, "Man, I want to do that." But I want to—What I want to do is, when I graduate I want to go to the [Democratic Republic of the] Congo [Central Africa] and volunteer at HEAL Africa.

[HEAL Africa is a Christian organization whose perspective, practices, and personnel are shaped and guided by its vision, motivation, mission, and values. The word "HEAL"

reflects the focus of its activities (Healthcare, Education, community Action, Leadership development) and the word "Africa" speaks of the geographic roots of the organization]

BAK: Okay, didn't see that coming. And with whom?

CC: HEAL Africa is a hospital.

BAK: Oh, H-E-A-L.

CC: Yeah.

BAK: Okay.

CC: And they have—I mean, they do so much of the medical, so you've heard of them.

BAK: I'm sorry, the—

CC: You've heard of HEAL Africa.

BAK: I have not.

CC: Oh, okay. I thought you gave a little acronym to it.

BAK: No, no, I just assumed—

CC: You were like, "Oh, H-E-A."

BAK: I had just assumed it was an acronym.

CC: Oh.

BAK: But it's not so that's what threw me, because everything's an acronym.

CC: Gotcha. Yeah, so volunteer there or get an actual job where you don't get that much vacation. But then—I mean, there's just a bajillion things that I want to do.

BAK: That's good.

CC: Yes. I'll probably be a generalist; dabble in a little bit of everything. But—And I think I like the idea of being a generalist, too, as a PT because then you can continue to look at the whole body instead of just, "I specialize in the spine," or, "I specialize in the shoulder," and still be able—because everything's connected, and the foot—something messed up in the foot can make the hip messed up, and that can throw off something else, so.

BAK: Are there certain populations that you think you might want to work with?

CC: I think I would narrow it down to—I mean, I'd work with anyone, but I would like to work with war survivors, whether that's veterans in our country, or people affected by war and genocide in other countries. It's kind of what I'd like to do.

BAK: Okay. And other adjustment to civilian life that you want to talk about?

CC: No.

BAK: You feel like you're getting out more; you're not worried about who's behind you at any point?

CC: Yeah. I mean, I don't like to—I—My thought on that maybe what you're getting to, as far as, like, the aftermath and how that affects everything, is that I think the army, I look at it in a very positive way. The army taught me a lot of good things—being alert, being prepared—and I like post-traumatic growth versus stress disorder, which not everyone—some people struggle with it more than others, but I think there's just been—I've been lucky enough to grow a lot and take away—be able to take what I learned and experienced in the military and apply it in a positive way.

BAK: Have you been diagnosed at all with—

CC: No.

BAK: There are people that you care about in that group, would you say, that—

CC: Oh, yeah. Well, I don't think anyone has been diagnosed.

BAK: Oh, really? And I guess when I say adjustment, I'm also thinking of when we have interviews with student veterans, just the—I don't want to say priorities—but just the values and rhythms of civilian life is very different from—

CC: Yeah.

BAL: —be it anywhere from whatever to, "You said you were going to do this, and be there on time, and you weren't," versus—I don't know if there's discussions in your classes about the army or anything.

CC: No. If anything, in my program people like to talk about universal healthcare, which I think is an awesome idea. However, I see our government's application of that as Medicare and the VA [Veterans Administration], which there's a lot to be improved upon, so I just—my perspective is a little different than my classmates, in that I think I don't idealize some things as much as they do.

BAK: Have you had experiences with the VA?

CC: I did. yeah. Thankfully, the VA was kind enough—I hyper-extended my knee in Afghanistan, so that was in my file from my post-deployment, and then right before school I blew out my knee and tore my ACL [anterior cruciate ligament] playing a little flag football, so they were nice enough to cover that for me since it was kind of—they connected the dots like that, so. And I had a ten thousand dollar deductible, and my Blue Cross/Blue Shield so that's why I had inquired, and it was easy-peasy.

BAK: You had a good—

CC: Yeah, very appreciative.

BAK: Does anyone here at Chapel Hill know about *Ashley's War*?

CC: They do, yeah.

BAK: They come up to you and you're just like—

CC: Well, it's actually interesting. A couple people early on—one of the guys who I interviewed with, and is now in my class, he—

BAK: What do you mean you interviewed—

CC: Like, we were in the same—

BAK: Oh, at the same time.

CC: Yeah, so we met during interviews. And then—He didn't read the book, he read—Am I going over time?

BAK: No, no, no, I just want to make sure.

CC: Okay.

BAK: No, there's no such thing as overtime.

CC: Okay.

BAK: But it would just be beyond horrible if it ran out. No, we're good.

CC: Okay. He didn't read the book but he read the *People Magazine* article about the book, and then sent me a little message, and I just thought that was so nice. And then slowly classmates have found out about it, and some haven't said anything. I think everybody knows at this point, for what it's worth, but maybe don't realize what it is. But some have said things to me—or actually, last year on the anniversary of Ashley's death, one of the girls in my class randomly said about how—I forget exactly what she said, I just

remember, "Wow, this is—" and I thanked her and I said, "This is the anniversary of Ashley's death and that just mean a lot to me." Yeah, so.

BAK: You knew Ashley pretty well?

CC: Yes, we were within that first team of twenty, so yeah.

BAK: So you found out about this through Amber [Mathwig]. Are you involved with the veterans' community?

CC: I found out about this through Amber, yeah.

BAK: But are you involved with the veterans in Chapel Hill?

CC: I went to one of her workshops last year and—actually, I wanted to go to Dress for Success's—Saturday they're having a workshop about our six word—like, our military in six words, and I wanted to go to that but it's Freed-OM Festival in Pinehurst that we throw with the Richard Stephens Foundation, but they—we have a big yoga festival, so it's "Freed-Om," right? Freedom. [chuckles]

["Om" is a common mantra used in yoga. It is the whole universe coalesced into a single word, representing the union of mind, body, and spirit that is at the heart of yoga]

BAK: Oh, I would not have got that.

CC: That's okay.

BAK: I could have been there all day.

CC: It makes more sense when you see the flyer. It's a big yoga festival, and a lot of, like, community businesses will have food and beverage booths, and the yoga place donates—like, they donate a bunch of their proceeds to the foundation, and it goes toward a scholarship in honor of Ashley. And then we also memorialize Jenny as well.

BAK: Okay.

CC: So I have to go—I'm going to that of course. But I think I definitely want to do more stuff with the organization for sure.

And Amber has kind of set up an informal mentorship kind of thing, so I do have an undergrad who is actually—maybe you should talk to her next because she's the one that I replaced in Afghanistan that did CST before it was a thing. She's married now so her name is different, so I didn't realize it until, like, we were at the Student Union, talking to our friends, like, "Where are you?" Because we're meeting for the first time. We're like, "Oh, my God. I know you."

BAK: That would be wild.

CC: It was pretty cool. It's a small world.

BAK: She was enlisted?

CC: She was enlisted.

BAK: Wow. You're about the same age, would you say?

CC: I think so, yeah.

BAK: That's weird. Alright, a few more questions.

CC: Sure.

BAK: I feel weird even asking this. Do you have any thoughts about combat roles opening for women?

CC: Yeah. I think I said—I mean, or I at least hinted to it—because my thought about what the army is—what the military is doing, especially in light of downsizing, is, "We want to—" and maybe I'm drinking the Kool-Aid too much but—"We want to retain the best candidates for the jobs."

["Drinking the Kool-Aid" is an expression meaning "to blindly follow"]

BAK: Right.

CC: So if we lift things that have nothing to do with doing the jobs, such as gender—right?—now we open the pool of best candidates up for the military, and if that saves the military money and taxpayers money, and also makes us stronger as an organization, that makes me happy. And I know maybe I do idealize that a bit, but I just think, from my experience, when you diversify a team so there—I mean, we all as people have masculine and feminine qualities, men and women alike, kind of—we all have masculine and feminine qualities. Women might have more feminine qualities, men might have more masculine qualities, but then sometimes that's not even always the case. And gross motor skill, fine motor skill, communication—I mean, there's just a gamut of qualities that people of diverse backgrounds, affected by things such as gender, or socioeconomic, or culture, or education level, but just people being diverse, coming together as a team, will make that team better, because someone's strengths compensate for someone else's weaknesses. And to say this job can only be for a subset that may have nothing to do with actually being good at the job—so being male may have nothing to do with being good at the job—limits the success of the organization.

BAK: But you have the arguments against it, physio—yeah, I can't make an adverb out of that—but the carrying of the two hundred and some pound wounded comrade off, can women do that, and this idea—because there'll be articles about opening up different roles, and I always read the comments.

CC: Yeah.

BAK: And they fall into pretty similar categories of—

CC: And I think with—And having—So with that, when someone gets hurt in real life, someone carries a person; someone carries a pack; someone crossloads. And, I mean, we've had girls that have—of someone who's been wounded, they've taken some of their gear and their weapon. Or drug them, because the vest has a little handle that if you can't throw them on your shoulders you can drag them. And you can leverage body weight; especially short women with a lower center of gravity can leverage their body weight pretty substantially. And there are small men, too, so—and I've seen women who can out-physically-perform men. So think that's where the divide is. And I think it reiterates the importance that the standards have to be the same—the standards that are identified to be good at that job have to be the same regardless of gender. I think it's interesting to look back in history, and how we used to segregate African-American units, and say that they didn't have night vision, and that they wouldn't obey orders, and that they would evade in the face of combat, and things that obviously have been disproven.

Ad old one with women in the military that I've heard, is that our periods [menstruation] will attract bears.

BAK: Yeah.

CC: You're just like, "What? That's—Someone really thought that?"

BAK: Right.

CC: Might as well add sharks, too, right? But I think it's important to maintain the same standard. I've heard arguments such as—Okay, so then going to the same standard also, one of those should be being able to pull your own body weight. So if you're a two hundred pound male, be able to pull your own body weight. If you're a two hundred pound female, be able to pull your own body weight, out of a burning vehicle, out of whatever. And then the whole dragging someone versus carrying them, there are—and I think that's the beauty of our assessment and selection; like, if you can't do it the regular way of putting someone on your shoulders, figure out how to do it, and figure it out right now. And [unclear] same standards. And I've also heard the argument that the injury rate of women is higher than men, and my perspective on that—I mean, aside from all the different variables, such as reporting and not reporting, or men not reporting an initial injury and actually having worse disability that's costing our government more when they exit the military. I don't know. The study hasn't been done as far as I know. But just taking raw data, if women have more initial entry injuries than men, I just think, from my perspective, it's not acceptable—I've heard 60% and 40%. So I think for men to have a

40% injury rate is no more acceptable than women having a 60% injury rate, and so let's not look at that as a gender issue, let's look at that as an equipment and training and medical evaluation issue, and keep all our soldiers healthy. And so—Yeah.

BAK: Okay.

CC: Not an easy solution, but just—

BAK: Right. There's also, for example, having women on submarines, with the close quarters argument. Do you have any responses to that?

CC: Close quarters, as in fraternization issues?

BAK: Yeah, or just that men are always going to feel protective toward women, and they'll always be worried and ignore their own safety.

CC: Yeah, I can speak to that because the love that I have seen between men and their brotherhood is just as strong, if not stronger, than the love that they have for their wife and their mother. And so, I think in an all-male organization, where a buddy is injured, that buddy's gender does not matter. They're going to put their life on the line for their buddy because of that love. I mean, I just feel like that argument of a man's going to protect a woman is almost nullified by the fact that a man's going to protect—or a woman's going to protect someone that they truly care about, and in a good organization with camaraderie, like your family, and you'll do anything for each other.

BAK: There's also the distraction issue of men who can't concentrate.

CC: Yeah. I know. That's kind of funny. And I don't know whose fault that is. I mean, [chuckles]—I feel like women, they're dirty, they're smelly; "I'm peeing in front of you," that's not cute. So it almost becomes incestuous; like, "Ew, don't look at her like that." I know that's not necessarily the case. I know that there's still drive and attraction, but I think maybe it's not as significant an issue as proponents—or opponents of integration make it out to be. They really [unclear].

BAK: Alright. I promise just a few more questions.

CC: Sure.

BAK: Do you consider yourself a trailblazer?

CC: Yes.

BAK: Okay.

CC: But I think—I just think it's fair that I didn't start the trail, that's all.



BAK: Okay. How has your life been different because of your time in the military would you say?

CC: It's different because it is the way that it is right now, and—I don't know—it's like everything that got me right to this moment, and set the foundation for everything that's ahead.

BAK: Okay. Would you recommend the service to young people?

CC: I would. I like the idea of civil service in some capacity—if not military, something, for everyone—because I think it builds skills and a sense of accomplishment, particularly, I think, for people who've been in school for a really long time and maybe don't have that much real-life experience, just to get a little under their belt. And I think it could even make people more marketable in the midst of all of our unemployment issues. And I would just weight it with reality and say it's not all glory, but it is good. And be prepared for the bad parts, but you'll be better off for them.

BAK: Okay. There's been a lot of Congressional investigations about military sexual trauma and sexual harassment.

CC: Yes.

BAK: Do you have any reaction to the spotlight on these issues?

CC: I think it's one of those things where I don't think the issue is—I think the issue will appear worse before it gets better, and I say that because I don't think the incidents of sexual assault, from my perspective, has gone up any more, and so I don't—I haven't lived in everyone's shoes, I don't know, but I think it is being reported more, which I think is a good thing, but again, it's going to look like it's getting worse before it actually does get better.

BAK: Okay. What was the hardest thing you had to do physically in the service?

CC: I don't know. I just think—It's all relative, because when I was younger—when I was nineteen, in Air Assault School—I wasn't as fit, so things seemed harder. Deployment was almost an [unclear]—I can't really pinpoint it to an exact moment or an exact obstacle or mountain top or anything. I'll have to think on that one.

BAK: No problem. What about emotionally, hardest thing?

CC: In the military. That's hard, too, because I almost think emotionally is more after the military.

BAK: Okay.

CC: So that commander I spoke to right before I deployed, I was in a place where I was starting to believe that I really was a piece of shit, and that's—no one can—and now I know no one can make you feel that way. You have to buy into a sentiment like that yourself. So that was definitely a point of emotional growth for me. But I think more so post-military, doing some soul searching and just emotional digging within myself to work through things before they become problematic. And I have—thanks to our post-deployment talk with the psychologists, I have been able to stay proactive about things before it has become a problem. And I almost think it's a great gift, and I imagine a lot of people needed to think about what your—what are the things that we're saying inside of our head that we don't realize is becoming part of our psyche, and establishing—being able to separate our sphere of influence from our sphere of concern. And I've heard someone say that we go to the dentist once or twice a year for our oral health, but we seldom actively attend to our mental and emotional hygiene. I think the hardest parts have been more post-deployment and—with my friends, just kind of doing that soul searching.

BAK: Okay. So you kind of have peer support on that one.

CC: Yes.

BAK: You said that post-deployment, meeting with a psychologist. Was that like a one-shot thing?

CC: Yeah, it was a one-shot, just to kind of say what's on your mind, get it off your chest. Here are resources and things that might come up that are red flags that you—one of the things they told us was, "Don't just give that cookie-cutter answer. Don't just give that canned answer to, 'How was your deployment?'" I didn't really listen to that one. But just some early education about things that were normal to occur down the road. And I always liked that post-traumatic stress is a normal reaction to abnormal circumstances, so it's not something to be—to feel bad about or to ignore or deny.

BAK: Right. It's not necessarily a disorder it's—

CC: Right.

BAK: You've had trauma and you deal with it.

CC: Yeah. And growing from it. Recognizing it and growing from it is the most important part.

BAK: Okay. What is air assault?

CC: Air assault?

BAK: Air assault.

CC: Assault, yeah.

BAK: Okay.

CC: And then I did go—then I got to go to Airborne the next summer.

BAK: Okay. [unclear] air assault.

CC: Yeah, air assault [the first summer?].

BAK: Okay. That's so different. I just figured it was another acronym.

CC: Yeah, because you assault out of a helicopter.

BAK: Alright. Okay. Alright, two more.

CC: Okay.

BAK: What does patriotism mean to you?

CC: Patriotism, to me, means loyalty to one's country. And in our case, the Constitution of the United States.

BAK: Okay. Is there anything in particular you would want a civilian to know or understand about what it's like to serve in the military that they might not understand or appreciate?

CC: Maybe just the heroism syndrome, when civilians make all of us out to be a hero. We know that not everything we do is heroic, and even some of the things that they might think are heroic don't feel heroic. So just be careful about how much they play that up. I'm trying to think, too, offering some concrete suggestion. So I think it is nice to be thanked, but then also, treat us like regular people, not like we're so awesome, because we probably just want to be regular people.

BAK: Right. Okay. Is there anything else that you might want to add?

CC: I don't think so.

BAK: Okay. Well, thank you, Caroline, for your time.

CC: Thank you.

BAK: We'll look over some of your stuff. I really appreciate it.

CC: Yeah, thank you.

[End of Interview]