

WOMEN VETERANS HISTORICAL PROJECT
ORAL HISTORY COLLECTION

INTERVIEWEE: Paula Benway Flores

INTERVIEWER: Kimber Heinz

DATE: 26 September 2016

[Begin Interview]

KH: Today is Monday, September 26, 2016. This is Kimber Heinz, and I'm here with Paula Flores, and this is an interview for the Betty H. Carter Women Veterans Historical project at The University of North Carolina at Greensboro. Paula, would you mind telling us how you want your name used for the interview and how to spell that?

PF: My name is Paula, P-A-U-L-A, Benway, B-E-N-W-A-Y, Flores, F-L-O-R-E-S.

KH: Great, thanks. Do you want to just tell me a little bit about where you grew up and some of your childhood, early life, before you got in the military?

PF: I grew up in—I was actually born [21 November 1968] in Albany, New York, and as an infant my parents brought me up to where my mother's family's from, which is Lake Placid, New York, which is a rural area in upstate New York, pretty much closer to Canada. And I grew up there, and I had the same friends all the way from Head Start [program that provides early childhood education for low-income families] all the way through high school. My graduating class was eighty-six kids, and I graduated from school and I proceeded to work. Actually, when I was fifteen years old, I started working. And by the time I got out of school, I was working three jobs trying to make enough money for college. And it was a very touristy kind of place. It's where they held the 1980 Winter Olympics. So pretty much it was seasonal, so I'd get laid off from me working, and I got tired of that. And my parents had moved to South Carolina. I went down there and tried to make a living, but never got further than a job at McDonald's [fast food restaurant chain], and I decided to join the military. My father had done navy time before I was born, and all of my uncles on my mother's side served in the military; everything from World War I to the Korean War. And my Uncle Charlie retired air force. I have a brother-in-law that was in the air force, and so they talked me into going into the air force, even though I came from many different services in my family.

KH: What was life like with your brothers and sisters? You said you had siblings, right?

PF: Yes. I have three older sisters and, for the most part, we were close. I'm probably closest to the oldest, Donna. She was around for most of my growing up. The other two just, kind of, went about their ways as they got older. But I had three siblings: Donna, Rhonda and Lisa. My sister Lisa just passed this past May, and I think that's why I'm doing this, actually, because I wanted something to carry on. She was only fifty-two years old when she passed.

KH: I'm sorry to hear that.

PF: Yeah. So that's one of the reasons why I'm doing this, is that I just wanted to pass on this information instead of it not going anywhere.

KH: How do you think your early time with your family—I mean, in addition to the legacy of your sister that you're remembering here—what was the influence of your family on your decision to join the military, or on you now?

PF: To tell you the truth, even though my uncles were in the military and my father was prior navy, I didn't really hear a lot about joining the military when I was growing up, because it was mainly a male-dominated thing at the time. But when I went down to South Carolina and I wasn't getting anywhere, my father sat me down and he told me I should try the military.

And my Uncle Charlie was down that way, too, and he said, "You should try the military."

So I went by one of the recruiting offices and took the test. That was funny too. I guess I have to thank my New York education because I thought the recruiter was going to get on the floor and start crying, because he was like, "You can pick any job you want." And I went open mechanical because it was my highest scoring and I actually like working with my hands.

When I was in high school, I took a—what do they call—a trade school through junior and senior year, just half days, and I took auto mechanics, and I rebuilt engines and changed oil. I actually learned some welding and things like that, so I was pretty adept at mechanical things.

KH: And you moved to South Carolina after you had already graduated from high school?

PF: Yes. I actually kicked around my hometown for a while trying to make a go of it. It was just too hard. I mean, where I grew up, if you didn't come from money, you weren't going to make any money. You had to go to school, you had to be anything but a chambermaid or a waitress or some kind of sales clerk. You were going to end up having to go to school or something, and that just didn't work out for me. I was working jobs that were seasonal and I kept getting laid off.

KH: And you said, out of your siblings—your sisters—you were the only kid to end up going to college.

PF: Yes, I wanted to go to college. I always did, I just never had the money. Growing up, my family pretty much made it paycheck to paycheck, so none of us—they couldn't send any of us to college, and I don't know if they would if they could've. Pretty much, I had to make my own way, and I tried, and I just couldn't come up with the funds that I needed to go to school.

So when I joined the air force, at my first duty station, I started working on my associates [degree], which, in our time, was—back before the tech age, it was a lot harder to get through school when you were in the military. And there's a story behind that too. You had to finish your CDCs [Career Development Courses] first. [chuckles]

But yeah, I am the only one that went to school, and I ended up getting two associates degrees while in the military, and started a bachelor's, retired, finished dual bachelor's degrees, and got a master's degree. So I have five degrees, and I'm the only one out of all of my siblings that has any college.

KH: You enlisted in South Carolina, you said, right?

PF: Yes, at Fort Jackson, South Carolina.

KH: Fort Jackson. What date was that?

PF: Nine, May 1988.

KH: Nineteen eighty-eight. What was that experience like? You said a little bit, but what was that like for you?

PF: It was kind of crazy after the recruiter said that I had really good scores, and it was less than a week to two weeks before they told me that I would be going to the MEP [Military Entrance Processing] station, and they checked me out, cleared me medically to be in the military, and then the next thing I know, I'm being shipped off to Texas. That's the way it felt anyway. And I was going into basic training.

KH: What was it like to actually be sent somewhere so far from where your family was?

PF: It was really surreal. You'll find— not just me, but it was the girls around me too—all of us wanted to go back home, even though I didn't really have a great home life per say. I still would rather be somewhere I was familiar with. And I grew up in a mountainous, lush area up in upstate New York and this is dry, flat, hot, heat, dirt, sweat. It seems like that's all we did is sweat a lot, but it's amazing what they say about "what doesn't kill you makes you stronger." And that's exactly what I would describe basic training as being. And it taught me a whole different viewpoint on life, in general; made me realize, in a way, I was kind of pampered, even though I didn't have much. I still was pampered. I learned hard work. I learned grueling exertion, physical and mental, and I learned how to be a team member where I was always kind of a solo person. Being in a situation like that, you learn to count on each other to get through it and I think that's what, basically, basic training is about; is teaching you that you've got to have each other's backs during times of adversity.

KH: So you were at Lackland Air Force Base in Texas, in San Antonio, and you were in a basic training group with all women?

PF: Yes. We all had different flights and different squadrons. We had a brother flight that were all men. And usually there was four different flights. There was one women's flight and we had our own part of the building, and then there were three brother flights. But usually they went two and two, so it'd be a sister and brother flight, and then a brother/brother flight, all in one compound.

And we'd be up at the crack of dawn, throw on our clothes, run PT [physical training]. After PT we would go to the chow [dining] hall and try to make it by the snake pit—that's where all the TIs [training instructors] sat—and hope they didn't call you out and scream in your face for a half hour of your eating time. It was crazy. By the time you got through the line for your food, and you were, like, nose to head with the person in front of you, because you were supposed to get through the line as fast as possible. I don't think I finished a whole meal while I was there because you only had a small time frame to eat.

KH: What was it like to have that experience along with other women?

PF: It was interesting. I made some really good friends. Up where I grew up—I hope this doesn't offend anybody, but I guess we're all one in the military. We don't—I never really saw color. But I did learn a lot about my fellow bedmate who was African American. I didn't know they had to wear their hair up or put oils in their hair and wear a shower cap. I [unclear] staring and she'd be like, "What are you staring at?"

I'd be like, "I'm just really—I've never seen this because I grew up in a rural town in upstate New York." And me and her became almost best friends because she'd never met anybody quite like me before, because I really didn't grow up with a lot of ethnicities around me, so I had no version of one, I guess. It was really interesting.

I learned about different ways of life from these women that I had never seen. It's funny how everybody has their own little personal bubble they grow up in and their own little cultures they create. I just expanded my horizons and basic training started it, a lot. I learned a lot more about people.

KH: What are some examples within basic training of your learning more about people, or you said earlier, it kind of broke down a lot of who you were in some ways before you came in?

PF: I grew up with nothing, really. I moved from living with my aunt in a trailer park with my parents to moving into my grandmother's house, and it's like we just kind of tried to just make it through, because my father's work was pretty seasonal work. He was a carpenter up there where it used to get thirty [degrees] below zero, so [unclear] we're always living hand to mouth. And then going there, and you'd have rich kids there. And then you'd have a couple of the African American women saying, "All of you white people have problems with black people." Or then you'd have a Hispanic person in there and she's trying to get along with the Caucasian people too. It was just funny. And in the end, we all forgot

about all that and we were all just women, people, together; a team that had each other's backs. And they knew that we would be there for each other.

It got to the point where I was really good at shoe shining, so I did everybody's shoes. I couldn't iron anything for the life of me, and I still can't to this day. [chuckles] And then somebody would be good at ironing, so I would do everybody's shoes so they'd pass inspection, and another girl would do all the ironing, and we just did things— Somebody would polish all the brass. Or if somebody could make a bed better than the others to bounce a quarter off. That's how we survived; we helped each other. We learned each other's talents and we utilized them, and we tried to help each other make it through, and I think that was part of the training that people don't always get. It wasn't just to see how much physical stuff we could take. It was about whether or not we could adapt to our environment.

KH: What was a typical day like during basic training?

PF: Got up at 0400 [4:00 a.m.] in the morning. Got, pretty much, lights on, screaming, yelling. It was total mayhem. [chuckles] And you never slept in your bed, by the way. You made that bed as tight as you could and you slept on top with a small blanket on top so you wouldn't have the remake that bed, because you just didn't have time. You walked through the shower brushing your teeth at the same time. Well, excuse me, we'd get up at 0400 in the morning, and we file out in PT gear, half-awake. We go out there, and we were out there by 0430 [4:30 a.m.]. Believe it or not, a whole bunch of women outside by 0430 just getting woke up at 0400, in PT gear. Some women would actually sleep in it just to be ready. And then we would run three miles, and then we'd stand in—then we'd be called back, and we'd be underneath a shelter, and we'd be standing at attention, and waiting to go row by row back up to shower and change and all that, and that's when you showered and you brushed your teeth through, because you had to be back down stairs by 0630 [6:30 a.m.] or 0700 [7:00 a.m.], depending upon how long our run took. Our run— Whatever we did.

Then we'd stand in front of the chow hall in formation, at attention, until we were called into the chow hall, and then we proceeded to go row by row, and we'd be so close to the woman in front of you that your nose would actually almost bump the back of their skull. That's how tight we were going through the row to get to the line to get chow, and then we'd get chow. Like I said, try to get through the snake pit without them calling you over to ask you why you were messing up in some way, and you'd have a circle of TIs surrounding you, screaming at you about something. And then you'd sit down and you'd try to inhale your food as fast as you could so you could form up again. And then you would march to get uniforms, or you'd march to get haircuts. You'd march to the uniform place, or you'd march to the medical facility to get any shots they wanted you to get.

Then you go through drill, and you would march to drill, and they teach you how to stand at attention, to do the quick step, to do the half march, to do basic marching. Then you go into a classroom-like setting for a couple of hours where they would go over the hierarchy of the military, from the president of the United States all the way down through your chain of command. Basically, you would then end up marching to lunch and then marching to dinner. You would have a short study period, and you were tired and you went to bed early, and it would start all over again the next day. It was a lot of

marching and it was a lot of physical things. You would be doing—Besides just the marching, you would be doing pushups and sit-ups and all this.

You were actually—By the end of basic, you had to make it through this whole course where you had to crawl up walls and jump things and do the rope swing and do the hand over hand ladders. They got you ready for that. It was a very physical time, but it was also mental too. If you had one thing out of place, it would totally destroy where you laid your head. They would have uniform inspections while you were wearing them or in your closet. I can't tell you how many footlockers I've seen turned over all over the base.

But it was all about teaching you to be very mindful of everything. It was seeing if you could follow direction and order, and if you could actually do that consistently, because it might just be a pair of socks today, but it could be someone's life tomorrow, is what that was all about. If you cannot follow their instruction on your socks go to the left and they are folded this way, or your t-shirts have to be a perfect square of this to this—if you can't follow an order like that, what's to say you can't follow an order when the time comes to save someone's life? It all seemed very rudimentary, or maybe a little bit overwhelming at times, but there was a purpose behind it. Just like making all of us girls get along with each other, and making all of us girls to get down to a level where we were all equal.

KH: After basic, where did you go?

PF: I went to Chanute Air Base in Rantoul, Illinois. It was mainly for aircraft maintainers. Technical schools is what we used to call them, for people that are either crew chiefs, machinists, welders. What I was structural maintenance, which is pretty much sheet metal, a.k.a. [also known as] Rosie the Riveter [a fictional icon of World War II, representing the women who worked in factories and shipyards to replace male workers who joined the military]. That's what I was. And I proceeded to go through eleven weeks of courses to learn how to be an aircraft mechanic.

I told you a little bit earlier about the phase system. We were some of the newer people to actually deal with—in 1988—a phase system. They didn't have one before. They'd let people out of basic and just say, "Okay, now it's time to go to school. All you have to do is form up and march to school and form up to come back, and then the day is yours." But they were having problems with people going crazy wild, because after being under such strict rules and regulations, all of the sudden to be let go like that.

So they had a phase system where it was just like basic at first. You had to march everywhere. You had to stay in uniform all day. You had a curfew to get back into the dorm. And then slowly they allow you to wear civilian clothes when you were out of school, but you had to stay on base, and then slowly they'll let you have a little bit of time on the weekends to go off base, and that's how they tried to get people to mellowly transition to tech school and make sure they didn't go crazy and they actually learned their job in tech school. Because they were having problems with people washing out.

They were very strict about your learning and the course materials. You had homework when you came home, and then you had the course work in your classes. And they were usually in four segments, and in any segment, if you did not pass the instructor's—whether it be the test or the abilities the instructor said that you should have

had, you could get washed back. That means you had to start all over again. And that didn't just mean the classes, that meant the phase system too. So, needless to say, it was a good push for people to make it through. [chuckles] It was kind of hard.

The actual dormitories were quite a ways from my school, so we had to march quite a ways to get to school every morning. It was really silly. We had to carry those little flashlights with the cones because it would be O-dark thirty [military slang for very early in the morning] in the morning when we started marching to school. We had to form up and then march, so it was all these little yellow flashlights going down the street. It was pretty funny. Road guards out. I was a road guard, so I marched in the back of the flight, and then I'd have to run to the front to block roads as the flight would go down the road. But it was an interesting time. It really was.

KH: How long were you there?

PF: I was there for eleven or twelve weeks, something like that. I finished my technical school and I became a [Aircraft] Structural Maintenance Apprentice; a three level, is what the air force called us. It's really interesting, too, is that you're not really allowed to wear any rank until you hit tech school. When you're in basic, you don't have any rank. And your rank doesn't matter in tech school, so your first duty station is when you really get to utilize when you've got any stripes [insignia]. Some people had them because they had college before they came in, but I didn't. I was a slick sleeve [private E-1; has no rank insignia on sleeve]. I was an airman basic.

KH: Who was in tech school with you?

PF: In my tech school we had people that were [National] Guard, we had active duty, and then we had re-trainees that were coming through tech school again to change their career fields. So we had a different amount of people in there, and different—Some people had been in the military for quite some time, but it was made very crystal clear from the beginning, well, even if you're a re-trainee and you outrank the instructor, whatever the instructor said went, and they would act just like any other student in that classroom. We'd have to clean up the classroom, and buff the floors in the classroom before we left. Everything.

I was the only girl in my class. I was active duty. And it was really funny how they did things back then. They decided this class says state-side, this class goes overseas, and—except for the Guard and everything. They go back to wherever they were going. But my class was overseas, so every single person in my class that passed, actually got a deployment—I mean, got their first duty station as an overseas. We either went to Germany, England or Japan, and I got Japan.

KH: Did other folks end up going with you to Japan from your school time?

PF: Yes. There was a gentleman by the name of Mark Gatman[?]. He's in my tech school picture that I gave you. He actually went to Okinawa with me.

KH: What was it like to be the only woman in tech school?

PF: It was—I wasn't the only person in the dormitories, but I was the only person in my classroom. I used to say it was a whole different era back then, as far as what you consider politically correct, and I learned a lot of colorful language. And guys are just kind of gross sometimes [chuckles]. But other than that, I had skills that they didn't have and they had skills I didn't have. We all helped each other out. And I held my own.

Later in my career, I found that I seemed to always have to work harder, because I was a girl in a maintenance career field, and you are supposed to have some form of endurance and strength. Yeah, I'd have to say that I actually worked harder than some of the guys I worked with, mainly because of my physical differences. But as far as talent, I had talent when it came to bending metal. I did, so I made up for it that way, and I always found ingenious ways to get around my strength issues. It's amazing what you can do with tools if you use them in different capacities.

KH: The first place where you were assigned after tech school was in Okinawa [Japan]?

PF: Yes, I was assigned to—

KH: And what year was that roughly?

PF: It was in 1988. I was [unclear] the year of 1988, and I was there until 1990. I was 18-EMS, which is 18th Equipment Maintenance Squadron, and I worked on F-15s [McDonnell Douglas F-15 Eagle; type of tactical fighter aircraft]. That was the only aircraft that I worked on while I was there, for the most part. I worked in a back shop and the phase docks. Aircrafts have phase systems where they have to come through inspections at periodic times—that's why they call it phase—and they're supposed to be inspected thoroughly. And they used to find cracked panels and different things broken. We used to get a lot of work from the phase docks. There was three or four different squadrons of aircraft there. What I'm saying is, even though I worked in 18-EMS in the sheet metal shop, I was considered a specialist, but the squadron took planes, there were three or four different ones that had maintainers, which were crew chiefs, and they used to rotate through the different units for their aircraft.

KH: Your daily life when you started out, what was that like?

PF: Well, when I first got on a plane to Okinawa—Okinawa also has a marine base [Camp Hansen]—I got on the plane and I was actually sick. I had like a hundred and one temperature or something. I was sick but I couldn't miss—you do not miss a scheduled [chuckles]—Whenever the air force says that you had to be somewhere you will be there. So I got on the plane sick, and I rode for over eighteen hours on the plane with a marine that kept falling asleep on my shoulder. I get off the plane and I have a sergeant meet me, and I was nervous. I'm in my dress blues, and all wrinkly and all a mess from being on an aircraft. He takes me around the base. I'm half out of it. "This is the chow hall. This is the dormitory. This is where you work. And be back at work at seven o'clock in the morning." Total time difference and everything and I'm in my dorm room less than five minutes and there's someone knocking on my door to see if I want to go out somewhere. It was a total—You go from having a very strict and regimented lifestyle, to all of the

sudden, you're free. You work during the day, and now you can play all night or whatever. It was really kind of—I had a hard time getting over the whole "stand at attention" and things like that.

One thing that happened to me was, I was an airman basic, a slick sleeve, and not many, I guess, officers ever have had the chance to see one and I got surrounded by a bunch of officers, and I was just beside myself because I didn't know whether to salute every single one that was surrounding me in a circle or just stand there at attention, so I just stood there at attention and didn't say anything. They were like, "Are you an airman basic? Are you really one?"

I'd have to say that I was very uptight—very uptight—when I first got there, and then I started to loosen up. Went to the shop and they started giving me small duties. Yeah, it came with time, but one thing I did notice is that Getman[?] got taken immediately by one of the NCOs [non-commissioned officer] and started going out and working on aircraft. They had me going through technical orders and reading all about the F-15s, and reading about this and [unclear].

KH: That was your classmate, right?

PF: Yeah, and he went immediately out and started working on aircraft. They stick me in the break room with technical orders to read. Then I was inside[?] and one of the NCOs from the shop said, "Come with me. I'm going to get you working." And he actually—Like I said, it was a different timeframe. He used some colorful language about making me sit on my butt in there while the other airman was out working, and this was several weeks later, actually, and I turned out to be one of the best mechanics they had, but they didn't give me a chance because I was a woman.

They did have another woman in there, but she worked, I noticed, in the office a lot. [chuckles] But she was an NCO, so that's what NCOs do, and I was an airman. But she did seem a lot cleaner than the guys I worked with, even the NCOs. There was a stigma about females in maintenance career fields, especially ones that had a physical aspect to it that I had to overcome. I'm telling you this from a woman's history point of view. I'm sure it's not as—Women do so many other things now without that whole veil over it, but it was still there back then. There was a few that realized that—like Sergeant Happell[?] that took me under his wing and said, "You can do anything that these guys do." And I did, and I did it better, actually, if I say so myself. I actually liked being a sheet metal mechanic very much.

KH: As a mechanic, when did you really feel you got a chance to fully be on the job?

PF: When we were out at phase and they had a cracked panel along the bottom of the intake, and they said that there was probably rib[?] damage underneath, and Sergeant Happell[?] sat down, opened his [unclear], and goes, "Here's basically what we have to do. We have to take the skin off, and we have to rebuild the rib," and all that. And, "You've done this before with my help." And he said, "Bye," and he walked away. And he only came back and checked once in a while.

Pretty much, I had to rebuild a rib, ribbon[?] it in, replace the skin. It takes a lot of work. You have to bevel the edges and everything. I think it was then and probably the

first time I made a hydraulic line. We did everything from repairing things, to replacing just fasteners to making the hydraulic lines that, actually, all of the fuels and all of the hydraulic fluid went through in the aircraft.

I became really good at being a tube bender too. We had this big monstrous machine[?]
—it's probably all computerized now—but this big monstrosity, and you had to line up the old broken line and try to—be able to bend it just right and everything, and the right dyes. Yeah, it was a lot of work. It took a talented hand, and I seemed to have that talent too.

But yeah, I'd have to say those two instances were probably—And one time when I was in Okinawa, I got sent to Cope Thunder [10-day air combat training exercise], and I made a line with a hand machine connected to a vice, and got an aircraft up that was going to miss its sortie [a flight by a single military aircraft]. It's times like that that you felt like you did your job correctly. And I made a line that the seven-level [Air Force Specialty Code for Craftsman skill level for non-commissioned officers.] I was there with, while I was just a new five-level [Air Force Specialty Code for Journeyman skill level] couldn't make. He tried several times, and then they called me in and I did it. So yeah, it was a good feeling.

KH: In terms of now you're in your early assignments, you're doing jobs now, what was your social life like? What were you doing when you weren't working?

PF: Okinawa was like an Oriental Hawaii. And I'm not even going to tell you it's not true, it's true; there was one girl for every seven guys that was there. I never lacked any kind of companionship. I was always going to the beaches, or I was going out to eat, or I even had—went out shooting 9-mils [9-millimeter gun] with a friend of mine, and I always had a group of friends. There was a couple females in there. I'm not talking about just male company. I mean, I never had a lack of entertainment because, of course, males want to be around females, and there was fewer females in Okinawa once you went downtown and got with the regular Japanese women.

But I'd have to say I had a very entertaining time. I saw things that I would never see if I had never left the States. I was scared to death to go. I didn't want to go to a foreign country, but once I got there I was like nails in the tarmac trying not to get on the plane because I loved it there. I worked hard but I played hard too. I played really hard, and I had a blast. It was—I was on the beach all the time. If I wasn't on the beach, I was at a club with some friends. I was always doing something. I didn't stay on base. I got to know the Okinawa people. I went downtown. I had this one special mama-san's [a woman in a position of authority] place that I liked to eat at, and I used to eat yakisoba [Japanese stir fried noodles] and okazu [general term for a Japanese side dish], and me and her used to trade gifts with each other. I got to know the locals too. I really loved—I don't know—I went from a very sheltered growing up in a small town, to being very open to learning that new culture. I learned a little bit of the language, not very much. In fact, I haven't utilized it in so long that it's only a few words here and there now. But I enjoyed it there. I used to go to all the little festivals they had. I went to a mongoose and snake fight, and the mongoose always wins, by the way; the mongoose always wins.

KH: Were you staying in touch with your family at all during all that time?

PF: Yeah. To tell you the truth, I had, kind of, a very unstable relationship with my parents. I was very close with my older sister and my aunt. I used to send—I sent everybody a set of Japanese vases, and I'd write them letters here and there. Back then, it cost a fortune to call. I'd call every once in a while. I'd get some of the—They started doing the whole phone card things, but they were very expensive and the time ticked off in no time.

But yeah, we didn't have phones, and because you were in a foreign country, it was foreign TV [television], so they had, what we called, Forces Entertainment Network, and it was FEN; it was called FEN; it was Far East Network, but we called it Forced Entertainment Network.

[The Far East Network (FEN) was a network of American military radio and television stations, primarily serving U.S. Forces in Japan, Okinawa, the Philippines, and Guam]

They had Dorm Vision, where they had this one area in the dorm where they had a gazillion movies. We had this one group of people that would play *The Good, Bad and the Ugly* [*The Good, the Bad, and the Ugly*; 1966 epic Spaghetti Western] every single weekend. I wanted to go down there and beat those people with that tape. But pretty much that was our choice. We had one FEN channel or Dorm Vision, whoever played a video tape, or you watched Japanese TV, which was highly entertaining, especially when you didn't know what they were talking about.

And I wrote my family, but at that point, I'd have to say, I kind of distanced myself from my old life and started a new one. I mean, I always kept in touch. In fact, my older sister lives near me now, and my aunt passed some years ago, and I always sent her air force t-shirts, sweatshirt, wherever I was, and I wrote her. But between the age of nineteen to probably about twenty-two, twenty-three, it was very seldom because I was sowing my young oats ["sowing wild oats" is an idiom for being adventurous, especially sexually], I guess. But then when I settled down a little more, I realized—I think that's what every kid does. But I did keep in touch with my family. In fact, I found a letter I wrote my mother in one of my boxes before I did this interview. I actually found a letter from Okinawa to her. I did bring it if you're interested, let me know.

KH: Great. Yeah, that could be really interesting. You've had three different job assignments, right, during your time in the military.

PF: Right.

KH: Do you want to say anything else about your time as an aircraft mechanic, and doing the structural maintenance? Anything else about other places that you went, or other highlights from your time in that job?

PF: Well, I really enjoyed—From there, I went to George Air Force Base in California and I worked on the Wild Weasels, which is historically important because they no longer exist. George Air Force Base doesn't exist and the Wild Weasels got phased out. But they were one of the first aircraft that actually deployed during the Gulf War, and I used to

work on them. When I got to George Air Force Base, they were deploying out for the actual [Operation] Desert Storm. I had just returned from Okinawa, so I didn't deploy with the air craft. I stayed behind to maintain what was left.

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

[Wild Weasel is a code name given by the U.S. Armed Forces, specifically the U.S. Air Force, to an aircraft, of any type, equipped with radar-seeking missiles and tasked with destroying the radars and SAM installations of enemy air defense systems]

The Wild Weasels were, really, a tough plane to work on. They'd been around since the first—I think since the World Wars. They were an old aircraft but they could ride close to the ground. That's what made them so difficult during wartime for the opponent, is that they had the ability to move at a fast rate of speed, close to the ground. They were called F-4 Wild Weasels and I got an opportunity to work on them before they no longer existed in our inventory. Then I went to Edwards Air Force Base, which was really cool because I got to work on all kinds of different aircraft, even helicopters and the B-1 [Rockwell B-1 Lancer is a heavy bomber aircraft used by the United State Air Force].

KH: That was in California?

PF: Yes, that was also in California. When they closed George I went to Edwards Air Force Base, and I got to work on all different kinds of aircraft. When my career field started not being good for me—The air force from time to time will join career fields together to try to save costs in manning, or streamline career fields so they don't have too many, to make it more functional. And they joined me with paint shop. Corrosion control is what it was called. And we became a new [unclear] that was sheet metal with paint shop. I had just started working there, and I'd helped with some full paints, and I actually got to help with the Thunderbirds when they came through there once, and that was fun. I got to go to Advanced Composite School in Pensacola [Florida] from there. That was fun.

[The USAF Air Demonstration Squadron ("Thunderbirds") is the air demonstration squadron of the United States Air Force. They are the third oldest formal flying aerobatic team in the world]

And then I went to [Royal Air Force] Lakenheath [England]. I had gotten married and I had a daughter, and we decided that we wanted to get out of California, and we went to Lakenheath. At the time, it was an F-15 base, and Lakenheath—I worked as an aircraft mechanic there, but they put me on the actual corrosion control side of the house, and this is what I mean about the combining of career fields. I had never been a painter, and we had skilled painters working with brand new sheet metal painters. And then you had skilled sheet metal people with nobody that had done sheet metal before. So it was really a hard time to consolidate and get everybody on the same page.

But when I went down to corrosion control, I found out I had an allergy to blast dust[?]. Not the paints, but they had a blaster in the back, and they had these beads, and something in the beads put me in a situation where they had to MEDEVAC [medical evacuation by helicopter] me to Cambridge [England] so my airways—

Once a career field is combined like that, they make—It was easier for them to make me cross-train than just tell me that I could only work sheet metal or in the paint shop away from the bead blasters. It was just easier for them just to make me cross-train, so that's what they did. I became a training manager. And, yes, from England, they sent me to Sheppard Air Force Base in Texas. Keesler [Air Force Base, Mississippi]. Was it Keesler?

KH: Yeah, that's what you said.

PF: No, it's Sheppard Air Force Base in Texas, and I cross-trained into being an education training manager, and what that consists of is making sure that everybody is getting all of the training that they're supposed to do for upward mobility and rank in the military. When I went back, I actually worked for a specific AMU [Aircraft Maintenance Unit], which is a specific squadron of planes. They had the 492nd [Fighter Squadron], the 493rd and the 494th in Lakenheath. I worked for the 493rd as their education training manager. And while I was doing that, I made rank and I became an E-6 [technical sergeant]

At that time—again, the military always making changes—decided that they wanted anybody from the rank of E-6 or above to cross-train out of education training because they decided it was either they were going to keep it just for airmen or they were going to civilian contract it out. And now, years later, that's exactly what they did; they civilian contracted it out. So I ended up having to retrain again, and this time I had a choice, and I checked out a couple different career fields and I decided to go into Comm, Communication-Computer Systems. They sent me to tech school again, but first, I had another child. I had a son while I was in England. He has a dual citizenship.

While I was in England, before I actually left aircraft maintenance—I had left this part out—I had went to this thing called a NATO [North Atlantic Treaty Organization] Air Meet, and that's something I would like to talk about, because it was all these countries from all over the world and we met in Zaragoza, Spain. We maintained our aircrafts, but we got to see German aircraft and all different—and they would fake fight pretty much. We all met and we all brought the food—We made chili. The Spanish made paella [Valencian rice dish] and sangria [alcoholic beverage]. The Germans made brats [sausage] and things like that. And the Koreans brought soju [South Korean alcoholic beverage] and a whole bunch of other things. And we just had this one, huge party in the hanger of all the different countries. And to this day, I still have a German tech sergeant's

shirt and he has mine. He was a big, six-foot person and I'm only five-foot. I don't know, maybe he hung it on a doll, I don't know, but he's got my tech sergeant shirt and I've got his tech sergeant shirt. Cover shirts. The cover shirts over our t-shirts. But it was an interesting time. That was probably one of my first experiences, other than Japan, when I got to meet all of these different people from all these different cultures, and how alike we really are, and that's the reason why I'm bringing that up. I got to make friends from all different places.

[The aim of Exercise NATO Air Meet is to train air forces in tactical air operations, including training in the suppression of enemy air defenses and electronic warfare]

I guess I should get back to my history line. After I was a maintainer in Lakenheath, I became the training manager. And then I found out I was going to cross-train into Comm, but before I did that I had my son, and we found out that we were PCSing [permanent change of station—official relocation of an active duty service member to a different duty location] into Seymour Johnson Air Force Base.

KH: And that's in North Carolina?

PF: Yes. It's in Goldsboro, North Carolina. And we PCSed in, and I put my bag down, kissed my family good-bye, and I got on a plane to go to Keesler Air Force Base in Mississippi for my communications-computer system training, and I was there for two-and-a-half, three months. I retrained into Comm, and I came back to Seymour Johnson Air Force Base, and this is in 2000. I started my career as a Comm person.

KH: Let me take you back real quick, because I want to make sure we get to some of your experiences before you started your job in Comm

PF: Okay.

KH: Is that okay?

PF: Yeah.

KH: Okay. Because you were in California during Desert Storm, right?

PF: Yes.

KH: What was that time period like in the military, and what was it like for you, as a woman, in the military during that time period?

PF: It was pretty difficult, as far as there was a lot of aircrafts still that had their, at least, training missions at George Air Force Base that still had to be flown and still were breaking, and I had to maintain them by myself because everybody else was deployed.

And it wasn't because I was a woman that I didn't go; it was because I had just PCSed in and I hadn't in-processed before they actually deployed out. But yeah, it was a really difficult time. Long hours. I don't know a day I didn't work less than a fourteen-hour day. It was a really tough time. When I PCSed to Edwards, it was kind of a lull because it was during that time when they had backed off and they were going to see if Saddam [Hussein] was going to play [by] the rules about no weapons of mass destruction, and they were under the watchful eye of the investigative team that they had watching over them. Things were hitting a lull for a while there, so Edwards wasn't that bad, and even Lakenheath, but things picked up. Believe it or not, after I became Comm is when things started getting real active for me.

KH: Got you.

PF: I didn't mention that when I was in Okinawa, Japan—This is an interesting tidbit that you either want to keep or you don't. I think it's relevant to the female aspect of being in the military. I'm a female in the shop, and we Cope Thunder every year, and what that is, is our aircraft go to the Philippines, right? They go to Clark Air Base, that don't exist anymore because a volcano had taken out. [Operation] Fiery Vigil. You can look that up in history. Fiery Vigil took out Clark Air Base in the Philippines.

[Operation Fiery Vigil refers to the emergency evacuation of all non-essential military U.S. Department of Defense civilian personnel and their dependents from Clark Air Force Base and U.S. Naval Base Subic Bay during the June 1991 volcanic eruption of Mount Pinatubo in the Philippines. Approximately 20,000 people were evacuated.]

Well, the Philippines is known to be sin city. It's mama-sans, they sell their girls. Party time. What goes TDY [temporary duty], stays TDY, kind of situation. Okay? Needless to say, they were a poor country. For twenty dollars you could get yourself a three-course meal and a girlfriend for the day, kind of situation. They'd have Cope Thunder every year and they would send maintainers to go take care of the F-15s that went to there to meet with the other aircraft, and they'd have play dog fights and stuff like that with the aircraft, and it was all a test on trying to take care of your airplanes and make sure that their capabilities were up there where they were supposed to be against other aircraft and what have you.

Unfortunately, when the maintainers came back there'd be a rash of divorces, or separations, and problems. So the next deployment, guess who went? Me. Because I *was* a female. Because they had less of a worry about me getting in trouble when I went to the Philippines. [chuckles] And I have to say, I had a really good time. It was kind of sad. It was a very poor country. I mean, very, very poor. I ended up walking around in my combat boot for the last week I was there because I gave away my shoes to kids who were dumpster diving. Some marines, for fun, would throw pesos in the streets to watch kids dodge traffic to get them. By the time the TDY was over, I was ready to leave. Gum girls would sell Chiclets [brand of chewing gum] until they were old enough to work in the bars or what have you. It was a really sad kind of situation outside of Clark Air Base.

Great people, sweet people, hard-working people. I actually have friends that are Filipino now. They married and came back to the States. It's not every area, but just around Clark Air Base was this place called Angeles[?] City, and this is where this all occurred. And we all had to stay in the hotels down there because they didn't have the room on base. That was something that I thought you'd be interested in; that I got sent to maintain the aircraft because I *was* a woman. [chuckles] Because the men would get themselves in trouble in places like that.

And another piece of history is I made it back to Japan and, like, two, three days later a gate guard got shot in the head by the Communist Party over there, and that's when they started pulling everybody on base because they had riots and stuff from these militants over there that were against the American base being there. Then, a month or two later, the volcano erupted and Clark Air Base was no more. That happened in 1991, '92 timeframe. I'm sorry I backtracked on you but that's a nice little piece of history there. I enjoyed the Philippines, but it was also very sad because they were very poor, and in a way, I feel a little bit like they got taken advantage of.

KH: That they did?

PF: Yeah. Yeah.

KH: During this time as well, you got married and had a daughter, right? During the California time before the Philippines.

[Speaking Simultaneously]

PF: Right, at Edwards Air Force Base. After I left—I was at Kadena Air Base [Okinawa, Japan] when I went to Cope Thunder in the Philippines, and then I was at George Air Force Base, and then they closed that. Then at Edwards, I met my first husband, and he was in the military also, and he was a maintainer also, and we PCSed together—Actually, what happened was, we became very close friends at Edwards, and then eventually we married. I was twenty-seven when I had my daughter. We got married when I was six months pregnant. We were living together for a short time before I found out I was pregnant, and then we got married. We were both from New York. He actually—It worked out well for the extended long, because the way it works is you get two military maintainers for the price of one PCS. The air force really loved the fact that they only had to move one household for our assignment to England, and they only had to move one household to get a Comm person and a maintainer to go to Seymour Johnson. Shortly after we got to Seymour Johnson I ended up going to tech school, and then I went to Comm and I worked, and then 9/11 happened. I worked some pretty interesting jobs when I was in Comm I had a top-secret clearance. I worked with classified things. At the time it was classified, but you can Google it now. I used to work TBMCS, which is Theater Battle Core Management Systems [correction: Theater Battle Management Core Systems], and it was a usable tool to the military during the war; virtual maps.

[The Theater Battle Management Core Systems (TBMCS) is a set of software systems used by all air wings of the United States military to plan and execute military missions utilizing airborne resources, maintain automated airspace deconfliction, and allow inter-service communication]

[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.]

KH: This was the Iraq War?

[The Iraq War (March 2003-December 2011) was a conflict that overthrew the government of Saddam Hussein in Iraq. The war began when the United States invaded Iraq due to concerns that the country was manufacturing and harboring weapons of mass destruction, a claim that was later proved erroneous. Iraq's support of al-Qaeda, the terrorist group responsible for 9/11, was also a factor in the war.]

PF: Right. Also, when I was in Kyrgyzstan, what happened was we were in Comm, and I was sitting there, and I had just gotten back from somewhere, a school or something, so I missed a deployment. We were, at the time, an AEW, an Air Expeditionary Wing, and we were considered combat Comm so we were always going. Now it's called an AEF [Air Expeditionary Forces], and it became a situation where if you deployed, you came home, you didn't go anywhere again for eighteen months. I wasn't under that realm of protection and none of the people I worked with when we were an AEW were. They came up with that because of what happened to us and other people being deployed back to back to back.

Needless to say, the combat Comm people—I had gone off to some cert [certification] class I'm pretty sure. I think it was the one in South Carolina for TBMCS. And I came back, and they were in Egypt and they got the alert and they thought it was part of a game, but it was actually 9/11. And I was in the office in Seymour Johnson and I saw the second plane going through the second tower. My first thoughts were, "I need to go home and pack. We are going to war." Really. That's the first thing I thought about, is, "I need to go home and pack. We're going to war." I really didn't end up leaving for another couple of months, actually.

But we ended up going to build up a air base at Ganci Air Base [former U.S. military installation near Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan; also known as the Manas Air Base] in Kyrgyzstan. Pretty much we were in a farm field across from an old, Russian airport, and that's where we built Ganci Air Base. The whole purpose of Ganci Air Base was to clean up the old airport and get communications back going in it, and clean up the flight line so we could get the aircraft in there to bomb the Afghan mountains in their pursuit of Saddam Hussein. Pretty much that's what I did.

KH: And that was right around 2001?

PF: Yeah, right around 2001.

KH: This was your first time actually deploying during a time of war.

PF: Right, yes.

KH: What was the difference? What did the difference feel like from your earlier stations?

PF: I knew I was going somewhere where I could die. I had no idea when I was coming back. I had no idea what I was walking into. And I had two children to worry about at home that—I had no idea when I'd ever be able to communicate with them again, and it was hard. When this all started my son was six months old. By the time the deployments—In between deployments I was being sent to all this special training for what I did, and pretty much, he was three years old before I saw him for more than a week at a time. The house I lived in with my husband, who became my ex-husband, I never unpacked my things. I never got to, between when I went to the tech school and all the other training they had me do. I was just starting to settle into my job. I still hadn't completely unpacked my house, so I had boxes everywhere when 9/11 happened, and—yeah, it was hard, because when I was at Kyrgyzstan I think I talked to my kids three times, and I was there almost a year. It was hard. And we were in the middle of a snow bank[?] trying to build communications, and it was just Comm, CE [Communication Enhancement], and cops. That's it. Until we got the runways cleaned off, and then the maintainers came, and the flight crews came, but they were always gone on their mission, which was to bomb the Afghan mountains.

KH: You mentioned this, but what would you say, during this time period, was the impact of all these multiple deployments on your family?

PF: And all the retraining. It was devastating to my first marriage. Pretty much, my husband believed that—even though the times are different and everything, he was brought up where his mom was at home with the kids. And even though he did marry a military person, we met during a time where it was kind of quiet, and when we were together as friends, neither one of us were going anywhere. Then when we got together it was just us together. And then we had Brianna and things were kind of mellow at Lakenheath until the retaining started happening. He felt like a single father and he didn't feel as if he should be the one home; that I should. And it was devastating to our family unit because he felt angry that he always had to stay home with the kids, and I was angry at him for being angry that he was where I wanted to be, for the most part. I mean, I loved being in the military. That's probably why I waited until I had my first child at twenty-seven, because I actually liked my job. And I did want to have a family. I wanted it all. I wanted it all, of course. But I didn't like being away from my children, and I kind of took offense at him acting like I wanted to be.

Even though we were both in the military, he was a maintainer of aircrafts and I was a, pretty much, creator of a base where that aircraft could go to, based on my job as

Comm and building virtual maps of areas, so my job was priority. He had a Secret clearance. I had Top Secret clearance. I had priority in that. And we actually should have been grateful, because they make you do a family plan [Family Care Plan] when you're military to military, and you're supposed to list who they can send your kids to if you both get deployed, and we never got stuck in that situation. They kept saying, "No, we're going to leave him behind so someone's with the kids. You've got to go because of what you do. You've got to go, but we'll leave him behind." But our marriage didn't make it through it. I came back from Kyrgyzstan with him asking for a divorce, and I wanted a divorce from him because we lost each other along the way. The only thing I didn't want to lose were my children. And by the time I deployed again, in between there, I had to go to Alaska for almost a whole month to go to—I don't know if you know this program or not—Oracle?

[All military members who have dependents and are either single or part of a dual-military couple must have a Family Care Plan. It is the means by which a military member plans in advance for the care of his/her family when they are deployed, TDY, or otherwise not available because of military duty]

KH: No.

PF: It's a platform for different servers and stuff, and it's a lot of code and things like that for building an actual platform in which you run all of your other applications on top of. I went to Alaska to learn Oracle for three weeks with Angie; my friend, Angie. Me and her had to go to these classes because we were the only two people that ran a program called Theater Battle Core Management Systems at Seymour Johnson. I was the NCOIC [non-commissioned officer in charge] of the unit, and it was small. We had a contractor that sometime went with us, and we had a couple of airmen that came and went, but it was mainly me and Angie. And we were busy girls. Let's just say that. So, yeah, everything affects everything.

During the time of my daughter Brianna's growing up, we had time to put up Easter scenes on the glass doors of the house, make cookies together, spend time together and everything. I didn't get any of that with my son until after the age of three or four. In fact, my ex-husband pretty much brought him up.

KH: And they were in family housing on base that whole time, or where were they?

PF: No, we actually—At Seymour Johnson, we got a house downtown; we lived in a house downtown. And even in England we got a house because there was a waiting list for actual base housing in England. It was so many people on the base, but there was only so much housing that you had to go on the downtown economy and find housing. To tell you the truth, the only time I actually lived on base was when I was in the dormitories. Once I became an NCO, I never lived on base again because of the housing situation. You got put on a waiting list and by then—by the time you find a house downtown while you're waiting for your turn through the housing list, you just prefer to stay downtown.

Why should I leave the house I'm staying in now? Most of the time I stayed off base, even in England. I stayed in a village in England.

KH: Do you think that changed your experience of your time in the military there at all?

PF: Sure. I got know the locals a lot better. I ate on the local economy, and became part of an actual community, outside of base. I still had my friends from base in England. I probably had a few people that I actually met on the flight over there that had small children, that were going to England, and we actually bonded on the plane over. We stayed four years. She worked in the dental. Her husband worked in transportation. And we stayed friends the whole time, for four years. In fact, I still talk to her. They're both retired now. We still keep in contact on Facebook and everything. I've watched her kids grow, and I'm a godmother to her youngest son, who—I was there for his birth while his father was serving in Saudi Arabia. I was there, and I took care of her and I cleaned the house and I cooked for her while her husband was in Saudi.

KH: Wow.

PF: Yeah, we're a tight knit crew. Even the active duty females stuck together. In fact, my ex-husband was deployed to France when I was in England. He went TDY. I shouldn't say deployed. He went TDY to France for a couple of weeks, and our car just decided to die, and her husband came out and we got a car because it died. It was gone. So I ended up getting a British car while I was over there, which was fine by me because I was used to driving foreign cars when I was in Japan. I kind of got off track there, didn't I?

KH: No, that's great. This is good. Okay, in terms of your time doing the Comm work after 9/11—you talk about your friend, Angie. Tell me more about how ya'll met and the early days of the work you did in your kind of last AFSC [Air Force Specialty Code; a code used to indicate a specific job] position in the air force?

PF: Well, when I met Angie she was just coming in the military, but she came in originally as Comm Actually, that's not true. She, actually, was a senior airmen, so she had been—I think she was stationed at Virginia for a short time, and then she came to Seymour Johnson. She, actually, was more adept at computers than me. The one thing about being retrained as an NCO, they expect you to be a supervisor, so I was supervising people and I didn't get the kind of training that the airmen did. Even though I went through the same tech school, I didn't actually get to get hands on as much as they did, so she was rather good at building servers and stuff, and we got to know each other that way. We ended up having to deploy several times together.

The reason why I bring up Angie is because she was—she didn't join the military until she was twenty-five, twenty-six. She was a caregiver; she used to take care of children. She stayed single. She was devout. She was religious, but she was never one of those people who preached to you or anything. She was a quiet person, and she'd never had a relationship, and I know she kind of longed to meet somebody that she cared for. I talk about Angie because she—there's no way that TBMCS would have ever took off without her. I mean, I needed her know-how. I had the drive and the hard work ethic, but

I didn't have her capabilities; her natural talent for working with the servers. So she made it happen, and she should be noted for it because she created something that no one else had done.

We got deployed to Qatar for an individual reason. We got called to go by a Lieutenant Colonel Justice who ran TBMCS as an officer in Seymour Johnson, and he wanted a virtual map created of this area, and for it to be put on the servers over there and to populate it. TBMCS can hold anything from how many beds you have in the dorms, and how many cans of beans you have in the chow hall, to how many aircraft, to how many bullets you have, and it's all virtual and it's real-time, so all the commanders could talk to each other. Besides the virtual warfare maps, it had the ability for them to know what resources they had from every office. And not talking on the phone, not anything. Everything was right in front of them on a classified computer. They could find out the capabilities of every single squadron for whatever they do, whether they be supply, or even the mortuary and how many body bags we had. I mean, literally, it was a very real-time program, and he wanted it there for the Iraq War. And we were the only two that could go.

We were enlisted military, and when they decided that they wanted TBMCS in Saudi Arabia, they had a whole team of highly paid civilian contractors of at least seven people working to make TBMCS work there, and me and Sergeant Tushev[?], Angie Tushev, made TBMCS work in a war zone; just us two girls. A virtual warfare map that all of the commanders used and ghosted over three hundred laptops for the program, and took them to all the different classified sites everywhere for everybody to use them. That's—that one picture I showed you—ghosting. We went through boxes and boxes of laptops for all the commanders. And I'm mentioning Angie because slightly after retiring in 2008, Angie stayed in the military and she moved on and she was having a great career, and she died of brain cancer, while serving.

KH: Were you trained in TBMCS, which is Theater Battle Management Core Systems, right?

PF: Yeah. I went through the training and everything, but she just had a natural ability to understand computer language better than me.

KH: This is while you all were in Alaska together, when you were trained?

PF: Yeah, and we also went to a class in South Carolina that was actually Theater Battle Corps Management Systems—an updated version of it—but they tried to teach us the actual platform of Oracle in case we had to start from scratch. That didn't really take with me at all, but she seemed to understand it better than I did. It's just that some people are techie and some people aren't. I had troops that would work on computers all day long in Comm We had everything from the help desk, to supplying computers, to fixing computers, to actually being the help desk to help people on the base with computer issues, just like any help desk. And these people would work on computers all day then go home and play on computers all night. I'm not one of those kind of people. I never was. And maybe I should have stayed a maintainer. [chuckles] But, yeah, I learned enough to do my job, but I wasn't talented, and Angie was definitely talented. Yeah.

There's a difference. Some people are talented with computers; they talk to them. I worked on them, I didn't talk to them.

KH: And you want people to know about your and Angie's work because it had an impact on the war. It changed things, or allowed the military to be able to do things it hadn't been able to do before. Is that right?

PF: Yeah. Another thing was the fact that two noncommissioned officers out of a small Seymour Johnson, North Carolina base could do something that they had seven contractors at a lot larger base do in half the time they did it. We never got props for that. Colonel Justice made a lot of promises and then he left before we did. [chuckles] And you know what? I didn't ever get that medal, by the way, sir.

But I guess I wanted people to know that there are women out there, like Angie, who did some pretty spectacular things. She created a computer system that allowed convenience and abilities to our maintainers, pilots, and commanders that they wouldn't have had without her help.

KH: You were in Qatar together?

PF: Right.

KH: What was that whole time period like?

PF: If you weren't eating dirt, you had it up your nose and in your ears and in your eyes. [chuckles] You had to walk about a half of a city block to get to the bathrooms. It was hot, dusty. We had sandstorms. It did create a lot of issues because it was hot, dirty, and stuff. It messed with all of our electronic equipment and things like that. It was a time of heightened stress because we knew eventually, the ways things were turning, that we were going to get back into a situation where we were going to be at war with Hussein again. I mean, we were over there waiting to find out whether it was going to happen, and it did. We had pallets and pallets—I should have gave you a picture of that—but pallets of cases of water next to the actual bomb bunkers, and we were always having to drink hot water and everything like that. There was no ice. And you had to walk everywhere. It was hot. It was long hours. Again, your days blended. You didn't even know what day of the week you were on.

We had this one area that we used to call the horseshoe or something like that; I can't recall. But it was one area—We didn't have TV or anything like that, but we had this one big screen in the middle of this area. I think it was a [unclear] maybe, I don't know. But they had a whole lot of plastic chairs with the white, plastic tables; the cheap stuff. And we'd go out there and be able to watch any kind of TV that they—Forces Entertainment Network—that they were playing because it was one big screen. We actually—As time went on, they actually let us have a beer. We had these little ration cards where you could only have a beer, and that's it—one beer and that's it—because they didn't want anybody overdrinking or anything because it was supposed to be a deployment situation.

We had an alarm system, and it used to come over the PA [public announcement system], and it'd be this "chip, chip" noise, and then they'd say, "This is a test of our alarm system, and if you hear this in the future, it means that we are expecting incoming bombs," blah blah blah. So they did all these tests, and then one day they said, "If you hear this, from this moment on, it's no longer a test. Testing is over if you hear this."

And we're in the middle of the whole corral area, and we were watching [Donald] Rumsfeld [Secretary of Defense from 1975 to 1977 under Gerald Ford, and again from 2001 to 2006 under George W. Bush] on TV. He was saying something here in America while we were over there. All of the sudden, I heard "chip, chip," of the announcement system coming on. And we had gone from just wearing our ABUs [Airman Battle Uniform], to all the sudden they were telling us to always wear our flak vests and helmets. And all the sudden I heard that noise, and one of the guys that was standing with me, that I was deployed with, went to say something to me. I was already heading to the bunker even before the sirens came on. And no bombs dropped. It was a illegal aircraft flying over our area. But they eventually got its ID [identification number] and everything like that, and it was nonharmful, but they didn't know what aircraft was coming over us at the time so they put on the alert, and people were running for the bunkers with all their gear, and everybody's trying to get the chem [chemical] masks on. It was like mass hysteria actually. Some people were laughing. Some people were joking. Some people were crying hysterically. Other people were just going about their business of putting on their mask and doing what they're supposed to do, and in those situations it's really strange to watch how people react to that kind of stress.

KH: How did you react?

PF: I got bossy, actually. I told a couple of people to stop laughing and goofing off and put their mask on, and blah blah blah. I just got really—kind of tyrant, actually. I got kind of mean. And then I put on my stuff. I did. I said, "I don't want to hear you guys laughing anymore. I want to hear chem masks going on right now." And it was—Then they called the all clear. But it was an interesting situation to be in a situation where you—It's like my current husband actually was in the war with actual bombing going on around him with the scud missiles. That was when I was PCSing back from Okinawa so I missed that war. That's where the F-4s went, and he actually experienced actually having bombs around him. I guess I was lucky. During my time in the military, I've been in a lot of hazardous fire zones, I've just been lucky enough where it didn't happen. I mean, could it have happened? Yes. Did we have the protection we should have? No. At the times that I was there, it could have been lethal. But it just didn't happen. I thank God for that.

KH: That was like in Kyrgyzstan, for example?

PF: Yes. When we went out there, we built our base in a farm field across from an old Russian airport, and if the enemy had the firepower, the airpower, or knew our location, they could have decimated us in seconds because we didn't have any kind of air cover. All we had were the MPs [Military Police] on the ground with us and that was it. It was considered a highly hazardous area. We were kind of like the ants at the beginning of the

ant hill. You know what I mean? You have to start somewhere and hope nobody sprays you before you get the anthill made.

KH: You were in the military both during Desert Storm and then again during the Iraq War, and because Saddam Hussein was a player throughout this time, what was the difference in the military? How did things change between that time and the Iraq War?

PF: Before all of that happened you could just have this little sticker on the side of your car and just go on a base and wave, and all happy-go-lucky and stuff like that. Now just about—I know here at Seymour Johnson, it's 100% ID checks all the time now. You can't get on the military installation without an ID card. Sometimes even when you get on base you still have to show your ID card to the different facilities on base. The times of just thinking that you were going to just ride out your time in the military without going anywhere—Like I said, we were AEW [Air Expeditionary Wings] when I was Comm at Seymour Johnson, and pretty much we were going and going and going, and finally—We weren't the only base in that situation, and Comm wasn't the only AFSC that were running their people ragged. Or even in the army or the other branches in the military, some people didn't see the light of day forever because they just went from deployment to deployment, or they deployed and they weren't seen again forever.

[Air Expeditionary Wings, or AEWs, are units activated under temporary orders by the owning Major Command (MAJCOM) for a specific purpose or mission. Once that mission is completed, these units are inactivated]

[The primary role of the Air Expeditionary Forces, or AEF, is to maintain a level of force presence in the Area of Responsibility (AOR), provide deterrence during periods of heightened tensions, and to augment the existing ground forces]

So they created this thing in the air force called an AEF, and it was an Air Expeditionary Force, and it's going on still today. AEF assures that if a person deploys, once their deployment is done—Now, this deployment can go on forever—how long it has to go—but they come back to the base, they have eighteen months before their number comes up to deploy again. I didn't have that luxury, and a lot of people in the beginnings didn't, and that's one good thing that came out of it. At least when people deploy—at least in the air force; I'm not speaking for the other branches—They created the AEF so people could have some downtime with their families, because it's really important.

Like I said, my son, Gage, was six months [old] when all this stuff really started to get crazy, and I really didn't see him again until he was three years old, other than pictures. And they started coming out with the phone talk stuff. I got to FaceTime some but it wasn't FaceTime back then. What was it? Skype [a telecommunications application software product that specializes in providing video chat and voice calls between computers, tablets, mobile devices]. Skype was starting to come up then, but it was a

rarity. And I'd come home for two, three days, you'd have to go do this cert training or that.

Our career field was really hard because we didn't just have a deployment and then come home and sit around. We had all of this training we missed while we were gone, because when you're in computers, you're constantly in training. Anybody that works with computers, even in the civilian world, will tell you that. It's a constant. It's a living document of your life that you'll always be in some kind of school. It wreaked havoc on home lives, especially in Comm. It did mine, and I know it did several other people I worked with. It was difficult on people.

KH: In terms of your being a woman during this time period, was there a change for women's lives in the military after 9/11? What did that look like over time?

PF: I would say, at least in the Comm—I can only say from my perspective—we became more equal. We didn't have a gender at that point, we had a mission. There was no gender anymore. I mean, I always felt a gender in maintenance, but when I got into Comm and we got in a warfare situation, I no longer felt like there was male military and female military. We were one. There was no gender anymore. You were expected to hold up your front whether you were a girl or boy, and they didn't want to see tears, and this or that. It was more—It was very, very oriented towards the mission. It was all about the mission and you didn't see gender anymore, at all. I didn't. We were all on equal footing as far as expectations. You know what I mean? Nobody got treated softer than anybody else. We all had a mission, and you either kept up your part or you got hosed. Everybody made sure that everybody did what they were supposed to do, and everybody did what they were supposed to do because we all wanted to go home eventually. And we were all in it together. It was hard, because when we went to Kyrgyzstan, General [Christopher A.] Kelly was there with us when we first started out, and also our Comm commander. And it's one thing that you will find—I don't know if you're going to want to keep this on here or this between—I don't know. You can utilize this.

[Speaking Simultaneously]

KH: I can pause it if you'd like.

PF: No, you can utilize this because I'm not going to use names, but one thing Comm always was, was a stepping stone for rank. I came in as a captain, all the sudden you're a major, all the sudden you're a lieutenant colonel, and then you're off. Now you make lieutenant colonel and you no longer are the commander and they stick some other major in there. It was a stepping stone, and one of the stepping stones, also, was, "Oh, yeah, I'll deploy my people. Oh, yeah, I'll take that assignment. Oh, yeah, that person can do that." Needless to say, that's what our AEW became, is a stepping stone for a lot of commanders, and we went over there to support General Kelly, who wasn't actually a part of Seymour Johnson. He was a general in the air force. I'm not really sure exactly where his station was, but it wasn't for—But we were there to support, and we went with our major

commander. And then an air national guard colonel came in and our major left because he had a vacation he was going on to France with his wife. Even when we were in Kyrgyzstan, he left us there, and then that colonel from the guard had people that weren't trained so she wouldn't let us go, and he was in France, and we were supposed to already be home. And we still didn't get to go home and we were stuck there. We got stuck there for three months longer than we were supposed to. And then the wing commander at the base—Seymour Johnson—said, "Where's my Comm people? Where'd they go?"

And "Uh, uh uh—"

"They should have been back." We were on a plane the next day after he got on that lieutenant colonel and said, "Where's my people? Give me back my people." That's—

KH: That's how you got home.

PF: That's how we got home, and we were only supposed to be there six months; we were there a year.

KH: Wow.

PF: Yeah.

KH: What was the impact of that? Because at this point, you had already gone through your divorce with your ex-husband, right?

PF: No, after Kyrgyzstan.

KH: That was after Kyrgyzstan.

PF: It was after Kyrgyzstan that we got divorced, and I hadn't actually gone to Qatar yet. That was in the [unclear] going to Qatar. And that's another thing that was really difficult, was—He wanted the divorce, I wanted the divorce, and yet he was angry at me because I was always deployed, so he tried to tell me that he should have more custody of the kids because I was always gone. And that actually—My deployments actually affected my custody for a long time. He had custody of my kids, because whoever has the kids overnight the most in North Carolina law has the custody of the kids. After I got back from all my deploying and put an end to it—we'll get to all that later—all the sudden, I had the kids all the time. It switched, and instead of taking custody from him, it went joint. But because of that law, a lot of people in the military lose custody of their kids because they served. A lot of people don't know that but it happens, because civilian court is the one that decides custody of children and they don't care why. All they care about is who has the kids the most overnight. I couldn't fight that. I was deployed all the time. It wasn't my fault, I was serving my country. But you know what? It made him look like he was the better parent. They just care about where they stayed. They don't care why. And that's a flaw in the system too.

KH: Do you think it impacts mothers more than fathers?

PF: Oh, most—Well, I'm a female, so I'd have to say yes, as a maternal instinct, especially because I wanted to be with my kids, yes. I can't speak for every woman in the world, but from my point of view it was agony being away from them. Yeah. You get in a situation where you're serving your country, and you're being sent away, and you're doing your duty, and if you don't do it—if you don't deploy when they ask you to deploy, you're actually risking your career, or you could actually end up in Leavenworth; you could end up in jail. So you deploy to serve your country and you get a disgruntled spouse. Next thing you know, this could happen to you. You could lose custody of your children. I did. I lost custody of my children.

KH: For how long?

PF: Huh?

KH: For how long?

PF: One year. Because after I got back from the Iraq War is when he won custody of them, because they couldn't really do anything while I was out of the country. But when I got back, he won custody. I had nothing to fight with because he had them more than I did because I was always deployed or at some school or I was away. So I came back and I actually asked my command to stop sending me places. I actually covered for other people that couldn't go places before, so I figured when my time came, when I needed to stay home, they'd let me stay home. What'd they do? They send me to Florida. They deploy me to Florida to NORAD [North American Aerospace Defense Command], like they couldn't find anybody else to take that. They sent me. I get there and I stayed for the first two, three months, and no one can tell me when I'm leaving, again. So I actually went and sat at the first sergeant's desk at that guard base and told them, "I need to be sent home. I need you to call my commander—" who was a new commander who didn't know me. New first sergeant back at my base too; didn't know me.

I used to call my shop when I deployed to check on my office, and the airman that would answer the phone said, "Ma'am, you need to call the help desk at number—" blah blah blah.

I said, "I am Sergeant Flores—or Sergeant Benway—and I am part of this squadron. I am Sergeant Freeman—" That was my ex-husband's name. "I'm Sergeant Freeman. I am NCOIC of this office."

"Oh, really?" And you hear muffled—"Oh, I'm sorry, ma'am. Who can I find for you?"

I would come back from deployment and have five people that I was writing evaluations on I'd never met.

KH: What was going on?

PF: I was gone so much, and the turnover of people; people PCSing, people leave. And I told you, once they were a major, lieutenant colonel [whew]. I can't even tell you how many change of commands I missed while I was deployed, and you get lost. That's what

happened to me. Here I am, battling a divorce, battling for custody of my kids, I'm asking them to let me stay, but they have all these new people in that don't have their mobility folders—that's what we call them—where you've had your dental cleared, your health cleared, and all this other stuff so you're cleared to deploy, and they check you in this out processing line to make sure your records are right before they'll let you deploy, and my stuff was always up to snuff, so it was just easy. "Take her folder. She can go. She can go." And I wasn't the only one this was happening to, of course. It was a small band of us. You saw that group of people. It was always us. It was always us. I got lost in the shuffle, because I sat down with that first sergeant at the guard station where I did the NORAD—

KH: Down in Florida?

PF: Yeah, down in Florida. And I told him, "I'm about to pop. I've been to serious deployments—Enduring Freedom, Iraqi Freedom—" blah blah blah—"and here I am sitting in Florida while I'm fighting for custody of my kids. I'm not a happy camper and I want to know why I'm here. I've already sat this out for, like, two months. I'm going on my third month. When I'm getting out of here, no one can tell me, and I want somebody to call my first sergeant back home and tell them I'm going to pop if he doesn't send me home." And all of the sudden, everybody starts reviewing.

"Well, how long has she been gone? How many deployments? How many schools? How many cert [certification] classes? How many this and that?" And two days later I was sent home, and that's where my battle for custody of my kids began. And guess what, since I was home, guess who got to deploy? My ex-husband.

KH: After you got back?

PF: After I got back, because I was no longer eligible to deploy for a long period of time because they got busted for me being gone so much. I'm serious. I'm not even kidding around.

KH: Wow. Do you think that your being an NCO at that point had an impact on your ability to get yourself back and, kind of, raise the issue of how long you'd been deployed?

PF: I wasn't the only one suffering. I mean, I worked with other NCOs that were in the same situation. I can name three right off the top of my head that were having marital issues, or struggling mentally with the fact that they were always gone. It wasn't even—I mean, we were scared that we might never come back in certain cases, especially Qatar, more so than Kyrgyzstan, believe it or not. For some reason I felt the fear more. But it's the idea that even when we were back, we weren't back. We were always off to some training or something. So, needless to say, all of us were struggling in that group. All of us were struggling.

KH: What was the impact on your mental health, or mental health of the folks around you, during that time?

PF: Same as mine. I know two of them went through divorces. One got out to save his marriage; got out of the military. Straight up got out. And there was a couple, like me, that—Well, there was a couple that their marriages survived, and stuff like that, through all of it. I really—You know what? That would be a story in itself. How many Comm people survived the deployment rage with their families intact? That would be a heck of a story, honestly.

I'd have to say that there was a lot of people messed up. I actually went—When I got back to Tyndall [Air Force Base, Florida] and sought counselling to come to terms with losing custody of my kids, because I had a hard time with that, and eventually I got the custody back because he ended up starting to deploy, and then he met somebody, and all the sudden he didn't have time. He was in a new relationship and stuff like that, and eventually I had them more nights than he did. All it took was for me to have downtime for a whole year. One year of my life changed the outcome of that custody. And while I was [unclear], I went to see the counselor because the counselor could put a hold on my deploying, too. Not only was I sent back and the current commander was aware that I had been gone a lot and that I needed some time down, I told them I needed counselling, and I went to a counselor and I told them straight-up, "I've been gone so much that I'm losing my family, and they deployed me even when I told them that I was losing my family." And he actually signed the papers, and keep signing them to make sure I didn't go anywhere.

KH: What was your relationship like with your supervisors, at this point, and how you felt about the military at that time?

PF: I was very angry at that time. I was very angry because I felt like I was always there for them, and then the time I needed them to be there for me and they weren't. But my supervision changed so often, it didn't really—Who could I be angry at at face value? My commanders changed out more than I could say. Our first sergeant changed out three times while I was at Seymour Johnson. And if you think about, it was a small space of time from 2000 to 2008—it was an eight-year span—and I had my first sergeant change out at least three, four times. My commanders never last more than two years. Never last more than two years because that's how fast they went up in the rank structure. So who to be mad at?

KH: Wow.

PF: And most of the other people I worked with were in the same boat I was or knew airmen coming through. By the time—If had a supervisor I'd have a problem with, they were usually PCSed by the time I got back from a deployment. Yeah. And that's the reality. And I forgot all about that until we just sat down. Calling back to my shop saying, "Hey, this is Sergeant so-and-so."

"I'm sorry, ma'am, you need to call the help desk."

"I work there!" Come back, find out I have—I'll never forget this—One time I came back and I had to write the evaluations of performance on people I'd never met before, and three of the five were named Jason. [chuckles] I'm not kidding. Jason Stewart, Jason Stubert[?] and Jason Levinsworth. And I remember that clearly because I

was like, "Are you kidding me?" But yeah, it was a crazy time. It was a crazy time. I was an E-6 swimming in E-5s [staff sergeant] when I came back.

KH: Were you a supervisor then, at that time, of other people?

PF: Yeah, but I would get RIPs [Report on Individual Personnel]. Pretty much they would look at the shop and see how many NCOs were available that outrank, and they would divvy them up and try to balance it out to all the supervisors there. And this was a tough time for Comm, because I had a friend of mine that was getting out of the military and they froze him. He couldn't get out of the military because there was such a shortage in Comm during the war. So he got frozen for a couple of years; he wasn't allowed to retire. This was a pretty extreme time frame. I'm sorry. What was your question again?

KH: Well, it was just about your being a supervisor of other people during that time.

PF: Oh, yeah. Once you go to Airman Leadership School, and go to the NCO Academy and such—well, more Airman Leadership School—you're allowed to actually supervise other people. Once you become an NCO, you can actually write the evaluations on other people. Pretty much, conduct, dress and appearance, ability to do the job, quality, quantity, such and such. And you're supposed to give them feedback. Say you were in my troop, I'd give you initial feedback and I'd tell you what I expect of you, and we'd go over the list of all of the stuff on the feedback form and tell you where I think you are now and where I'd like to see you be. Then you'd have a midway point, and I would talk about how you're doing with that and give you a chance to change anything I might put on your evaluation that's going to go in your records. I was writing the evaluation on people I *never* met because I was always gone.

[Airman Leadership School (ALS) is a twenty-four duty days long U.S. Air Force program designed to develop Airmen into effective front-line supervisors. ALS focuses on developing leadership abilities, the profession of arms, and building effective communication]

[The Non-Commissioned Officer Academy is a professional military education course that prepares NCOs to be professional, war-fighting Airmen who can lead and manage Air Force units in the employment of air and space power. NCOA focuses on leadership abilities, the profession of arms, effective communication, and organizational leadership]

KH: Right. So it was happening both with you as a supervisor, and to your supervisors who you didn't have a relationship with because they were constantly in and out.

PF: Right. Exactly. Right. It was a constant thing that was going on. It was an actual situation across probably everybody in the military during that time frame, but it was just crazy. I'd come back and, "Oh, yeah, these are your new troops." And if I was lucky, I was able to

get ahold of their supervisors at their last base, or their last career field, because we had an influx of people like me that retrained into Comm from different career fields.

KH: Right, right. Okay. I wanted to get to the time coming out of the military, but just a couple of questions about your time still in. One is, I know you don't know a lot of about the awards that you got, but do you just want to mention any medals or awards that you had got, decorations of any kind, even if you don't know much about what they were?

PF: Actually, I'm going to pull out the sheet. That'll help me out a little bit.

KH: Okay.

PF: Pretty much you get a good conduct medal for every three years you're in, but the awards and decorations I got was—I got a Commendation Medal, which is a pretty high achievement, for my time in service. I got that just prior to retiring. The Commendation Medal was for all of the time I was in the service and—see, each decoration—a lot of people don't know this—is—we get tested to make rank, right?

KH: Right.

PF: And each device is worth points, depending upon how much weight—A Commendation Medal is big points towards that. I made four Air Force Achievement Medals. I have nine Air Force Outstanding Unit Awards, with a valor device because of my time overseas and serving during war. I got five Air Force Good Conduct Medals, and I told you, that's a gimme as long as you don't get in trouble every three, four years. I got a Global War on Terrorism Expeditionary Medal. I got a Global War on Terrorism Service Medal. I got an Air Force Overseas Ribbon (Short [Tour]). I got an Air Force Overseas (Long [Tour]) with—two medals for that. Air Force Longevity of Service Medal [Air Force Longevity Service Ribbon]. Air Force NCO Graduate [Air Force NCO Professional Military Education Graduate Ribbon] because I went through the NCO Academy. And, of course, my Basic Training ribbon [Air Force Training Ribbon]. But a lot of my ribbons are over and over again, like the nine Outstanding Unit awards, because of all the—those came with our deployments, and, needless to say, our unit was outstanding because we always went. And valor was because we were in hostile territories.

KH: Yeah. What was your general impression—because you had been deployed after 9/11, you were actually fighting a war alongside other folks, and so what was your impression of the overall foreign policy decisions of the U.S., and what was your overall impression of what the war was for and what ya'll were doing?

PF: I felt, after 9/11, that we did the right thing. We had to show them that we weren't going to take any guff. I think my favorite time of being in the military was during Ronald Reagan's run. When I came in the military, I was promised free medical for life. I was promised to have at least half of my military pay if I bothered to retire, right? Which isn't a lot, to tell you the truth—to be honest with you—based on your rank and—your base pay based on your rank and time in service. And when Jimmy Carter was president, he

tried to take 10% away and make it so we only got 40% of our pay when we retire, which is crazy because they get full pay; presidents get full pay and full everything when they get [chuckles]—Needless to say, when Reagan was in charge, I enjoyed it the most. He took care of the military, and he had a "I-ain't-taking-no-crap" attitude. It was during the Cold War and he didn't put up with no crap from anybody, and I loved that about him, because I believe that a president has to have a strong hand and let other countries know that you ain't going to take their guff. You'll work with them and stuff like that but you're not a pushover. You definitely don't apologize for anything that you do for the good of your country, and that's one of the problems I have with our current president, is that he's too busy apologizing to everybody about what we decide to do with our country. Noneya [slang for none of your business], is what I think that is; it's none of their business. Just like you don't go over there and don't run their foreign policies, they don't have any right to come here.

As far as going over there, I think it was the right thing. I think that we should have never got pulled out. We weren't done, so everything that we did has been undone. Everything that I put my time and effort, and my time away from my children, was useless. We're right back where we were. We're no better off. They're still running everything over there. I mean, what it comes down to—how I feel about this—is either we completely pull out and we rely on American resources to fuel ourselves and all the underlining politics of the foreign fuel supplies and stuff like that, we take that out of the gamut and we rely on America only and we completely pull out money, let them take care of each other, or we go over there and we completely fix the issue over there. The first option I said would only last so long because sooner or later they're going to try and dictate how we live over here. There's no way around it because that's the way it's been all through history, and sooner or later, the bully on the other side of the world is going to come over and see if they can pick a fight with you.

So if you ask me about our foreign policies, I would say that I went over there for a reason. No one comes in my yard and starts kicking around my people. Do I think that we should have left? Do I like the way things are being handled now? No. I think we're setting ourselves up for huge losses. Something bad's going to really happen soon. I feel it coming, and we're not going to be prepared because our military's been picked at and decimated over the years.

I guess you can tell I'm a Republican. I believe in having a strong military, even if you don't utilize it. I hate to say it: we're dealing with men that act like they're two [years old]. Unfortunately, you know what? You can put a woman president in there but half the cabinet's still men. I mean, we're dealing with a situation where someone's always got to have a problem with somebody. Do I like that? No.

KH: You were around for the end of the Cold War and the period of time after that, what did you take away from that time, if anything?

PF: I took away from that time frame that the lack of communication built up the suspense on both sides to make it a lot bigger than it was. There's no way that we—I mean, maybe they did through operatives. Who knows? But did you have any idea, or did your parents have any idea, that the actual USSR was crumbling? That it was actually dying? No, because that was probably part of the Cold War, was the fact that they wanted to save

face that they weren't actually falling apart. There was a lack of communication. Here we thought they were being silent to build up against us, but all along they were just trying to save their policies and their government.

[The Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR), or Soviet Union, was a socialist state in Eurasia that existed from 1922 to 1991]

I'd have to say that if you can communicate—There's actually no communicating with the people we're dealing with over in the Middle East right now. There really isn't. We are the infidels and we need to be destroyed for this world to be safe, and that's how they feel about us. There's no, "Well, maybe we can talk this out with them." We need to go, as far as they're concerned.

KH: Okay, the next couple questions will kind of circle back to the big picture at the end of the interview, but I just want to make sure we talk about your transition out of the military. We'll come back to some of, kind of, overall, your thoughts on your service at the end, if that's okay. After your deployments, when did you actually leave the service?

PF: Well, my deployments ended after Tyndall, which was—I think it's on that page over there.

KH: This one?

PF: Yeah. That operation thing.

KH: Oh, did I have one? Oh, the certificate?

PF: Yeah, well, the [Operation] Noble Eagle thing.

[Operation Noble Eagle (ONE) is the United States and Canadian military operation related to homeland security and support to federal, state, and local agencies. The Operation began 14 September 2001, in response to the September 11 attacks, with the mobilization of thousands of National Guard and reserve personnel performing security missions on military installations, airports and other potential targets such as bridges, power plants, and port facilities]

KH: Oh, right. I don't think I have that in my pile.

PF: Okay. Well, pretty much my time after that, I got down to a situation where I was within a year of retirement, and how the military works is, if you put in your papers that you definitely are going to retire, then they won't deploy you anymore for one year prior to your retirement—that you get to stay at the base that you were at—and that's pretty much

what I opted for. There was a short period of time of three or four months in between my counselling, but that's when they also dedicated more of my time, instead of at TBMCS, into Information Assurance and I started doing IA a lot more. I actually was IA when I was doing TBMCS, but in 2005, I actually became the NCOIC of it and took over the whole process. I'd have to say probably about late 2006, they understood my intent of retiring right at twenty years, so they no longer deployed me anymore, and tried to keep focus on this. Because all the people kept deploying, they needed to have their Information Assurance office—to have somebody, kind of, steady there, because they lost—the civilian that they had working in the office had retired, so, they needed that NCOIC that could be there on a permanent basis to run the Information Assurance. That's pretty much what I did.

From that office, I ran, pretty much, the licensing of all the different offices that had classified computers to make sure that they had the safeguards and security to have a Top Secret—computers and locations, that they had them. And I actually did the whole—the maps, and the actual MSEC[?] [message security?], and all of these rules and regulations to get them certified to actually run Top Secret in different buildings. That's what I did for the last two years I was in. I'd say it stopped about 2006, but I actually became IA but they were still deploying me or sending me to different courses and helping with TBMCS. But they eventually just said, "You know what? She needs to just be IA."

KH: Okay. And then you retired?

PF: And then I retired as an Information Assurance. And since I didn't really take a lot of leave, and I had my retirement time coming to me, I took off—I think I left work at the end of March and came back for my retirement ceremony in June, so I was pretty much a civilian by the time I had my retirement ceremony because I had all that time off.

KH: Right. What'd you do during your time off?

PF: A whole bunch of nothing, honestly. I spent a lot of time with my kids. I actually took my kids on a cruise, and let them swim with the dolphins, and all kinds of things like that. That's what I did.

KH: What was the transition like overall, after you'd fought this intense custody battle for your kids and everything, and getting back from just being deployed all the time? What was your transition overall like coming back into civilian life?

PF: Believe it or not, I had a really hard time with the civilian life, because even though I really didn't talk about it a lot, I was in charge of multimillion dollar aircraft. I worked on multi—I was—And then when I was in the military, I was Sergeant Somebody. I was a sergeant and people answered to me and people looked to me for advice. I worked with generals. I worked with Top Secret stuff. To all of the sudden become a housewife was kind of hard. It was really hard. I had a hard time transitioning into just being mom and the wife. I started a garden, and I'd bake some bread, and I started to go to college, and at

first it was great; I've got all this free time. And then it started to feel like I lost a major part of myself because I was—it felt like I was somebody, and now I was nobody.

KH: Yes.

PF: Can you understand that? I was Sergeant Flores, I wasn't Mrs. Flores. I wasn't—It's really funny because it took a while. I mean, I've been retired eight years now, but sometimes I'll pull out my retirement card and go on Seymour Johnson to talk to people about hiring veterans, or see if there are veterans on base that are looking for work, and I come to the gate and the cops say, "Thanks, Sergeant Flores." And it kind of trips me out because I've been Paula forever now. It feels like it.

Yeah, I think that's a hard transition for everybody and I don't think that they prepare people for that, and especially—I hate to say it again, this might be kind of radical—but from a female point of view, I have a lot of female friends that are retiring, and they've—I've noticed because I'm on Facebook—like the one friend I had in England I told you about—we met on a plane there—she just retired last year, and I noticed that she had a hard time. At first, she was really excited. She got out of the military and she's like, "Oh, I've got all this time to do this and that." She's like, "Oh, we bought a house. We're settling here. I'm so excited to have somewhere to be settled. I'm fixing up my house, and I can wear my hair the way I want to wear my hair." And I watched her go through this transition. Then all the sudden it's like, "I don't know what I'm doing today. I guess I'll just sit here today. I don't know what's going on today. I applied for this job. I don't really know if I want that job. I don't know if they treat their people right." Just, you could see the change in her, because all the sudden, she realized she wasn't Sergeant Pechtel [?] anymore. You know what I mean? She was Lisa. She was Lisa.

You go from being the Sergeant Somebody to, all the sudden, just a housewife looking for—going to—She did the same thing I did. She went to school, and then she got a job, and she got—You could tell she's—Just like me, I'm just now starting to come to terms with that, just in the last couple of years. I mean, it was really hard. The first year you're like, "Oh, wow. I've got all this freedom and I can be me." I went out and got a tattoo all the way down my arm, up my back. "I did it. I can do anything I want. I can be wherever I want without anybody telling me where I have to be." Blah, blah, blah. And then you're like, "Oh, yeah, I've got all this free time. Let me make your lunch for you, and I'm going to do this, I'm going to make homemade bread, and I'll paint the shed." And all of sudden you realize you've made yourself somebody's servant. [chuckles] Seriously. It's a real thing, and I don't think they prepare you for that, and I don't think that—I don't know if they could. I don't know if anybody could prepare you for that. They definitely didn't discuss it in the TAPs program for getting out.

KH: What's the TAPs—

PF: Transition Assistance Program, that they give people that retire from the military. And when you go through the class, you're not really ready for that anyways. You got all this stuff you're worried about. They sit there and they tell you about—"There's people hiring here. You should go do this or you should do that."

And you just kind of blow all that off because you're worried about, "Where are the sending my stuff? When and how do I get my final check? When do I know—When are they going to tell me the results of all the medical exams I did for my disability rating?" These are the real things that you're worried about. What am I going to do about medical now because, guess what, they didn't end up paying for our medical even though that was promised. [chuckles] You want to worry about the medical and dental that you're not going to get for free anymore while you were in the military, and all these things are in your head, and the last thing you're thinking about is where I can get a job or anything like this. You're worried about what is the aftermath of coming out of the military, but you're thinking short-term, like, "Where's my stuff going? Where am I going to live?" And the TAPs class is when you're getting out of the military, but then when you're out of the military they have no more obligation to you. But honestly, what I think they should do, is do some kind of class about adjustment to civilian life for people, and they don't have one.

KH: I was going to ask you about support that you felt like you did or did not receive from the military in that.

PF: [Didn't get any?]. And even if they did try to give me the support at the TAPs class, it would have gone [indicates over her head], because you're too worried about all the stuff you've never had to worry about. I mean, I didn't have to worry about medical. If I was sick, I went to sick call and I got the pills for free, I saw a doctor for free, and it was done. That was it. You didn't worry about that, or you didn't worry about your dental. They made sure your dental was right, especially as much as I mobilized. That's one of the major things on mobility, believe it or not, for military.

KH: Dental?

PF: Is your dental. Yeah. They can't deploy you with bad teeth. [chuckles]

KH: That's interesting.

PF: Yeah. That's a little tidbit for you, but it's serious. I'm not even kidding around. It is; it's one of the number one things, is that your dental is good.

KH: Yeah. So you said they didn't give you everything that you thought you would get in terms of medical coming out?

PF: Oh, no. In fact, I pay for medical insurance just like you do and—

KH: Not through TRICARE?

[TRICARE, formerly known as the Civilian Health and Medical Program of the Uniformed Services (CHAMPUS), is a health care program of the United States Department of Defense Military Health System]

PF: Yes, through TRICARE Prime. I have TRICARE Prime for me and my husband. Needless to say, I pay a monthly fee, and then every time I walk in a TRICARE provider's office—my primary TRICARE provider—I still get charged twelve dollars every time I walk in the door. So, needless to say, I don't go see him any more than I have to. And right now, I don't even have dental coverage, because I was going through the State and they dropped me and didn't even tell me. They make the military look good, by the way; their dental program's awful. My husband works for Spirit AeroSystems, and their sign up isn't until Spring and we're going to go through his, but we have to pay for dental. I did not get free medical. I did not get free dental.

Needless to say, they lowballed me on my disability rating, and I'm actually going through the process of having my disability reevaluation done, because a big article came out with the Veteran's Administration, that they lowballed everybody on their disability ratings back in the eighties and nineties, and so I'm going through my disability rating again, and based on my percentage of disability it doesn't change my pay, because when you're retired, all they do is change the pot of money it comes out of.

When I got out of the military—A lot of people don't understand this, and this really ticks off even other veterans that don't know this. Say you get out of the military at three, four years, and you got hurt while you were serving, you get a disability rating of 10, 20%, so you get a paycheck that's nontaxable by the VA for life, for that percentage. If you're retired military—When I retired from the military, I got a retirement check from the military, but I got a 20% disability rating because I have stomach issues and I have loss of hearing from aircraft generation in one of my ears. And this is through *their* tests that they found it. So I got a 20% disability rating. They take that 20% out of my military pay and the VA pays me that 20%, nontaxable, but I don't get extra money.

KH: So it's not on top of it.

PF: It's not on top of.

KH: Right.

PF: So for me to get my disability rating redone—Say I end up with 50[%], I might get a free hunting and fishing license in North Carolina because that 50% I can get that [chuckles], but they are going to take 50[%] instead of 20[%]. Fifty percent of my military retirement and give it to the VA to give to me, tax free. I don't make any money and I'm retired. I don't get that on top of my retirement.

KH: Right. Wow.

PF: Where if someone had got hurt that doesn't get any retirement will get that disability; just plain get it.

KH: Right.

PF: And some people have a problem with that. I don't really care one way or the other. I just want the rating to be correct.

KH: Yeah. So that's what you got in terms of medical and retirement. And then were you able to use the GI Bill [The GI Bill provides educational assistance to servicemembers, veterans, and their dependents] for your college?

PF: Oh, yeah. In fact, that system works really good. When I was in the military, I actually used a different thing that they had going on for my associate's degrees. If the degrees are going to actually relate to your actual career field that you're in, then you can get the associate's degree where they pay for the classes completely. All you do is pay for your books, and it doesn't touch your GI Bill. So I got an associate's in Education Training and I got an associate's in Comm—Communication—for free, pretty much. I just paid for my books. And I got two associate's degrees from The Community College of the Air Force. And then [University of] Mount Olive was a satellite college on Seymour Johnson and I started going there, and that's when I started using my GI Bill.

But I was Chapter 30, and how the Chapter 30 works, is that you get the GI Bill money and you pay the school and you pay for your books, right? And then they switched it to the [Post-]9/11 [GI Bill; Chapter 33]. They were getting people—The thing is, I paid into mine. There's a difference. When I went into the military, you had a choice. Within the first thirty days of being in basic training, they throw a form in front of your face and say, "If you want to go to college, you're going to pay a hundred dollars a month out of your pay from this moment on for one year, and if you don't sign this now, it's going away forever. You don't get a chance again."

[Chapter 33: In July 2008 the Post-9/11 GI Bill was signed into law, and went into effect on 1 August 2009. It provides education benefits for servicemembers who have served on active duty for 90 days or more days since 10 September 2001]

So in basic training, the first thirty days—I'm not kidding you; this is how the Chapter 30 worked; you can ask other people, they'll tell you—you had to sign a paper that said that you were going to get a hundred dollars taken out of your paycheck for one year to have the GI Bill when you got out, or after you did your time. And it was based on a four-year thing, as long as you were honorably discharged. I just happened not to use it until later. You have within ten years. But I paid into the system. I paid twelve hundred dollars in. The new GI Bill—the 9/11 Chapter 33—people get it for free, coming in. Period. You do four years honorably you got money for college. You didn't pay into it or anything. All you had to do was do your honorable time.

KH: So you didn't receive any of the 9/11 GI Bill money because you had enlisted earlier?

PF: How it worked was, under the Chapter 30 I paid my hundred dollars a month for twelve months, because I decided to do it in basic training. I mean, you had to do it right then. Then I started using my GI Bill, but I used that under Chapter 30, and they kept trying to

get me to switch to the 9/11, which is Chapter 33. A lot of people didn't know this. It's just about dead now because, needless to say, I'm from the era that's out of the military anyway at this point, pretty much. But if you signed over to the new Chapter 33 without actually using the Chapter 30, you lost that twelve months you paid for. So I used all of my Chapter 30, all of my—how much was it?—three, four years' worth for the—And then as soon as it was over—I used every dime of it—I got a Chapter 33 for a year free. That's how I got my master's [degree].

KH: Cool. And you got your master's after your retired?

PF: Right. But I had to use every cent of my Chapter 30 money before I could get the free year from the Chapter 33. But a lot of people immediately went—that had Chapter 30, that paid in the system, just switched over and didn't even look at the—They pretty much got a lot of people for twelve hundred dollars that they signed in for. I was aware of it because I had been in school for a while. I was going to the college for my CCAF [Community College of the Air Force] degrees, and switching over to Mount Olive, and I was trying to figure out whether to switch from Chapter 30 to Chapter 33, and I got some good advice from people that were part of the education system, outside of the military, but knew what was going on. And that's kind of a sad thing that everybody didn't get to—Everybody I could possibly talk to knew about it. [chuckles]

KH: Right. Yeah, you told them about the twelve hundred dollars that the military still had of theirs.

PF: Yeah.

KH: Okay. And you got married to someone new, while you were in or after you had retired?

PF: My husband and I—When I was going through my divorce from my ex-husband, we met a couple of times, like, at the NCO Academy, and at different events, but we never said more than "hello" to each other. We met again during the Iraq War, and we both served over there, and he used to hang out with my crew once in a while. But after I came back from the Iraq War—He had already been divorced for a while, and he asked me out when we came back, and that actually became a problem for me, as far as—my ex-husband, I guess, even though he had moved on, didn't think I should have moved on. And I started dating him, and we were divorced, but we were still fighting over the custody of the children. I think that was part of why he gave me a hard time. Yeah.

But yeah, I met my husband in the Iraq War. I actually got to know him and he's a great guy. We've been together for, like, thirteen years. We met in 2003. Thirteen years we've been together, and I love him just as much, if not more, today than I did the day I met him. So it all works out in the end, I guess.

He was a senior master sergeant. He was a NDI [Non-destructive Inspection] troop. He was in maintenance and he was there maintaining aircraft. We had ran into each other, like I said, a couple of times, and then we started dating when I got back, and he was stationed at Seymour Johnson. We just didn't run in the same circles or know each other. We were different squadrons. Yeah, I'm happily married. I've got a blended family.

He had a boy and a girl in his first marriage that he had joint custody of, and I had a boy and a girl—joint custody of—and we have two dogs, a cat and a turtle together. Everything just—Now I'm a grandmother of four—

KH: Oh, wow.

PF: —because his kids are a little older than mine. My daughter, Brianna, is now twenty. My son, Gage, is sixteen. This is how much time has passed since all this, and now he was like—I was talking about him and he was only six months old, and three years old, and he don't remember any of that. It's clear as day to me. But yeah, he's sixteen and my daughter's twenty, and his kids are twenty-seven and thirty. I've got two grandkids a piece from them, and they call me granny and I am their grandmother. A blended family, but we made it work.

KH: That's great. Would you be supportive if your kids wanted to join the military?

PF: Yes, I would. I think when you don't know what you want to do—I don't know if I support a whole career in the military, per se. I ended up doing a whole career in the military because I really got into my maintenance job. Do I think I should have got out [unclear]? I had too many other things keeping me from thinking about that. Maybe I should have got out and went into another career.

That's the only thing about the military that I—the reason why I support it is because—you're probably not going to like this—but I think the kids are soft nowadays. I think they sit in front of computer screens. I don't think they—You never see kids riding bikes or doing anything physical anymore, really. I think that there is—with all of these different things about people saying, "Well, this is ethically correct. This is wrong. This is right. This is wrong."

I hate to say it, but there's a code of conduct in the military that can be utilized by society nowadays—I mean, just general society—that I would like to see my son be a part of. My son, right now, is part of the army ROTC [Reserve Officers' Training Corps], and I'm highly supportive of that. He is brilliant. He's been in advanced intelligence group classes since birth. I swear. I'm not kidding. I mean, hundreds, ninety-sevens; that's his grades and he's in advanced classes. He's already taking college courses in high school, but yet, he has no direction, and I think a four-year stint in the military isn't going to hurt him, will give him money towards college, and it might help him get grounded enough to decide what kind of career he might want, even if it's not the military.

So yeah, I do. I totally support at least some time in the military. I think everybody should experience it to know what people—I think people need to experience that level of—I don't know—being a team player, for one, and learning to—humble; it humbles you. I think people need that nowadays; I think people need to be humbled. People are so self-righteous and no one's humble anymore. I think it's a very humbling experience. It opens your eyes to a lot of things that are very important that's lost in our society. We have no patriotism anymore, no set ethics. Everybody seems to have issues with that, and, yeah, I find that very painful. I find people stepping on the flag very painful. I have friends covered with that flag come home. It's hard for me. It's hard for me to watch people take a knee during the national anthem. It's really hard. It disgusts me.

It's like people have no sense of self anymore, or America. I mean, we're all Americans. African American, Asian American, all this other stuff that people keep talking about. When it comes down to it, we're all Americans. This is our country, and if you don't like it, get out. Because I've been to those other countries and we are so lucky. I've seen it firsthand, like I said. I had to wear my combat boots for days because I gave my shoes away to a kid digging in the dumpster for their next meal. People don't understand that level of need, and I think it's an eye-opening experience to serve in the military. I think it's—I'm honored I did, but I think maybe [at] some point my chain of command got really messed up. There's points in the military that really anger me, but at the same token, I wouldn't take back a day I served. I wouldn't. I wouldn't. And that's pretty much my thought. I am proud of the time I spent in the military. I miss aspects of it. Is it all fair? No. Were promises broken? Yes, gazillions of them. But in the end, I think I'm a better person because of the time I spent in the military. I do have morals, I do have ethics, and I am a patriot, and I think all of us need to be that to be Americans.

KH: What's the advice you would give to a young woman, now, wanting to enter into the military? I mean, one thing that is in the news a lot around the military is sexual trauma, and these experiences that now, I think, it sounds like women are kind of coming to the foreground talking about things that they hadn't gotten to talk about before maybe. But what kind of things would you tell a woman wanting to join today?

PF: Honestly, I didn't experience it. I never had any kind of sexual assault. Actually, I did have one incident in a club in an air force installation where I wouldn't dance with a marine that wanted to dance with me, and he pushed me up in a corner and started getting handsy with me, and a whole table of guys chased him out of the club. That's the only time, and it was only once, and it was when I was a young airman. That could have happened in a club here in the States. It could have happened in downtown Goldsboro in a hip-hop place, who knows, or even salsa dancing somewhere. I haven't experienced it, honestly, so I don't really have a—And none of my friends ever mentioned it or had a problem with it. Really, I'm not even kidding you. I mean, I know that it seems to be prevalent in the news, but I think the doors are open more to the women nowadays than they were for me. Like I said, if somebody went through aircraft maintenance now, they would not be the only woman in that class, they wouldn't be a lone person on a ship, and they would be treated more as equals, I think, because nowadays people aren't as gender—hyperaware of female, male. I mean, you'd catch males trying to help females do their jobs when I was in the military, and stuff like that; "Oh, I can't lift that." But yeah, less of that. Everybody holds their own weight.

What I would tell a female is, you are a person. It doesn't matter whether you're a male or female; you're a person. If somebody approaches you trying to do bad stuff, you stick up for yourself, and don't be ashamed because you're not the one doing anything wrong. The person that's doing something to you is doing something wrong, so don't be afraid to scream it out. I would influence anybody that had anybody do anything wrong to them to scream it out. I never experienced any of that. I guess I was lucky there too. And I spent a lot of time around men. I spent 90%--Ninety percent of my time in the military was a definite four-to-one ratio, actually, so—and I never experienced it other than that

one time with that marine in a club who had been drinking, who was mad because I wouldn't dance with him.

KH: Was there anyone that you knew that experienced any kind of PTSD [Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder] coming out of the military or anything of those lines?

PF: Yes, yes. I know several people that have PTSD. Not everybody was as lucky as I am, even in Comm. Some of the Comm troops actually started going out in the army Hummers and actually getting experience with roadside bombs and stuff like that because they didn't have enough Comm people of their own. And I had a lot of—After I stopped deploying, a lot of my troops were deploying to a lot more violent areas. So yes.

I actually deal with people with PTSD on a normal basis now with the job I do now, and you can see it. You sit with somebody and you can almost feel it coming off them because they're different. You can tell that there's something off. I really don't think that there's actually a drug that's going to help with that. I mean, my personal opinion, Post-Traumatic Stress can't be dealt-with with drugs. Nothing can, actually.

And yes, I actually—During my counseling sessions they tried to give me pills. I'm going through this disability rating thing. I have psychologists trying to give me pills because they think I'm depressed. And I said, "No, thank you. No, thank you." And that is not—They still have a serious problem in the VA system where people think that you can solve your problem with a pill. It causes a lot more problems, and I've seen that more than I've seen PTSD. I've seen addicts coming out of the VA and the military because people keep on thinking you shove a pill down someone's throat it's going to fix them. If I've seen anything in the job I'm in right now, is addiction or—job loss or marital status loss due to addiction, and it's because of the military and the VA. You can X this out if you want, but straight up, every time I turn around, someone's trying to hand me a pill. That is not going to solve anybody's problems.

But yeah, I see a lot of people with Post-Traumatic Stress coming through, and it's really difficult for them to get work because you don't really want to be around people, and you can't really be around loud noises, and every day is a struggle just to get out of bed for work, so it's really hard for them to maintain a job. They try really hard. That's part of what me and my co-worker do. We work with military that has significant barriers to employment.

KH: Oh, this is what you're doing in your current job, not just finding jobs for folks, but also helping them transition into them.

PF: I have a co-worker. I'm a LVER [Local Veterans Employment Representative] and he's a DVOP. He's a Disabled Veterans Outreach Program Specialist and he works for the veterans, but I do in the background; I find jobs for them. Some of them are people with master's degrees, or even lieutenant colonels out looking for jobs. And then there are some that got kicked out of the military; some are former felons; some are people with PTSD that can't maintain a job because they're having problems focusing. And yeah, we have quite a few people from all different walks of life walk in our office.

KH: How long have you been with that job?

PF: Since June of 2007. Wait a minute, what am I saying? Excuse me. I started working there 1 June of 2015. I've been there just slightly over a year.

KH: Oh, yeah, because you didn't even get out of the military until 2008.

PF: I was like, I don't know where 2007 came from. Sorry about that.

KH: No, that's fine. That's fine. When you said that I realized that—

PF: Too many numbers. I was like, "Wait a minute. 2007? Where'd that come from?"

KH: Alright. Well, that's all the formal questions I have. Is there anything else you definitely want to make sure you say today?

PF: I'm glad that you brought up the situation, as far as, how deployments affect families, because they do. They cause a lot of havoc in the family. And I think that the AEF thing helped a lot, but my journey with the disability rating that I'm going through right now has not been easy. It's been kind of difficult, and I'm starting to realize what people go through. Because when I retired, they made me go through the whole disability rating thing, and then they told me what I got and I just went along because I didn't want to deal with it; I just wanted out of the military. I wanted to have my life and to heck with it. Straight-up. And that's usually how everybody feels. But actually going through this thing, trying to get the benefits of your disability rating changed, it's no cakewalk, and it's kind of sad because this isn't something that anybody asks for. They did their time in the military, and when—I have a veteran helping me through one of the organizations. I don't want to say who it is, but he works for the American—I mean, he's part of the American Legion, but I'm actually a member of the VFW DAV [Veterans of Foreign Wars, Disabled American Veteran], and I do suggest to anybody that is a veteran to actually become a part of these organizations. They do a lot for us in Congress and in the political realm. He's doing my record and one of the things I did, I drilled through my finger—

[End of Interview]