WOMEN VETERANS HISTORICAL PROJECT

ORAL HISTORY COLLECTION

INTERVIEWEE: Nicolle Brossard

INTERVIEWER: Therese Strohmer

DATE: March 16, 2014 via Skype

INTERVIEW PART TWO OF TWO

[Begin Interview]

TS: Hi Nicolle. Are you there?

NB: Hi Therese.

TS: Okay. I'm just checking to make sure we're recording. So I know—Thank you for doing this interview. I've got to talk about where we're at and all that good stuff. You ready?

NB: I'm ready.

TS: Alright. Well, today is March 16 [2014] and this is Therese Strohmer, and I am actually on a Skype interview with—I'm in Greensboro and Nicolle Brossard is—What city are you? You're in San Antonio?0.

[Speaking Simultaneously]

NB: San Antonio, Texas.

TS: There we go. To conduct a follow up to an interview that we did with Nicolle earlier and—So oral history interview for the Women Veterans Historical Collection at the University of North Carolina of Greensboro. Nicolle, why don't go ahead and state your name and we'll—then we'll go ahead and start the interview.

NB: Okay. I'm Nicolle Brossard.

TS: Okay. Well, the last time we talked you—we talked a little bit about growing up and your family and stuff like that, and at the time I think we ended that interview you were transitioning from one part of the army to another. You want to talk about that a little bit?

NB: Yes. After I had completed my degree in nutrition at University of North Carolina at Greensboro I was accepted into the U.S. Military-Baylor Graduate Program in Nutrition, and that program is in San Antonio, Texas, at Fort Sam Houston, where I am now. And so, I left in—I left Greensboro, North Carolina, in August of 2013, moved to San Antonio, Texas, and I did a Basic Officer Leadership Course, which was about eight weeks long. And it was just basic information about being an officer; about how military medical structure is; about army information. And then we had a three week field training exercise as part of that, too, where we did land navigation, and simulated trauma scenarios, and different levels of the army hospital, from the very front lines to a Level[?] III hospital, which would be a full complexed [*sic*] hospital.

And then in December I started the actual educational, or didactic, portion of my program and—with an orientation and classes, so it's a very condensed master's degree. We'll be completing about forty-six master's credits in nine months.

TS: Oh my goodness gracious. Do you have any time for something like a Skype interview? [chuckles] Not hardly, huh?

NB: Well, it's all about prioritizing in life?.

TS: I guess so. I guess so. So I—So you [are] enlisted or an officer now? How does that work?

[Speaking Simultaneously]

NB: I am an officer.

TS: What's your rank?

NB: I'm a second lieutenant—second lieutenant.

TS: Alright.

NB: O-1E.

TS: Yes, ma'am. [chuckles] There we go. Okay, well, I know part of what we were going to do, too, is that the last time we talked you talked some about the Fort Hood shooting.

[On November 5, 2009, U.S. Army Major Nidal Malik Hasan fatally shot thirteen people and wounded more than thirty at Fort Hood, near Killeen, Texas.]

NB: Yes.

TS: But you couldn't discuss certain details because the trial had not yet happened.

NB: Right.

TS: And you were a witness. So I know we're going to talk a little bit about that.

NB: Yes.

TS: Why don't you start out by telling me what was going on that day at Fort Hood for you and—and—if that's a good place to start, do you think?

NB: Definitely.

TS: Okay.

NB: So on that day, the fifth of November, 2009, we had just arrived in Fort Hood the previous afternoon, on the fourth, and had prepared everything; just unpacked and our bunks and stuff. And woke up on the morning of the fifth and gotten our breakfast and got ready, and we're going to go to—from one side of the fort where we were staying to the main part of the fort, which was about a forty, forty-five minute drive, to do SRP, which is Soldier Readiness Processing, and this was at the SRP center. And what is there is [*sic*] two large buildings—or excuse me—one large building and a small building, and they do everything from medical vaccinations, medical screening, personnel—your legal will or any legal power of attorney documents you need, finance to make sure everything—your accounts and stuff are in order, what—you have the right accounts for where you want your money to go. Basically just, kind of, checking off and completing all these things before you deploy since you're going to be gone for a year and may not have access to that.

So we were on our way there and—

TS: About how many—About how many of you were there—going?

NB: I want to say about forty to fifty of us in our unit—

TS: Okay.

NB: —in the 467th Combat Stress Control Unit [Detachment], and then we had a sister unit, which was the 1908th Combat Stress Control Unit, and they were going to Iraq. We were going to Afghanistan, and we had all pretty much been training together since that previous May.

TS: Okay.

NB: And so, I—Although it wasn't consecutively. We might have a weekend together; a few weeks here, a few weeks there. And we had—Before we went to Fort Hood, we had just come from a month of training in Fort Hunter Liggett, California, all together as well.

So we all had our formation and got on the bus to go to that main part of post. I think our formation was at 7:00 a.m. And I had sat next to my friend Amy—Staff Sergeant Krueger—and—on the bus, and probably my last, kind of, substantial memory was with her and singing the Zac Brown [Band] song "Chicken Fried." She apparently really loved karaoke, so whenever I hear that song now I think about her.

But we were just, kind of—any other day. We got there, we got off the bus, and we started going through our different stations, and the women and females were told to go down to a medical building—which is a smaller, rectangular, annexed building—first, to go and get our blood drawn for a pregnancy test. And so, we all went down there and then we were told to come back after lunch because that's when the results of our pregnancy tests would be in, and if—as long as they were negative we would then proceed and get the vaccinations that we required before deploying, and then complete a final medical screening checkout where the medical screener looked over all of our records to ensure that we had our hearing and our dental and any medical issues, vaccines, everything like that; kind of, the quality control—

TS: Okay.

NB: —of everything. So we did that and we went back up, and I went through the different stations up there, like hearing and legal and finance, and all of that; retention. And then it was after lunch and another soldier had told me that we needed to be down for some brief, or it was time to go back to the medical annex. And so, I was like, "Okay."

So I went down there and got, of course, my results back and was cleared to go ahead and get vaccinations. So we had walked in, I put my name on a list and then—What [I did it for?] I wasn't really sure, but I put my name on a list so it showed I was there. Then went, got vaccinations, along with a TB [tuberculosis] test, and had checked out of the vaccinations section, went up, and the room, I'm going to try just to describe it the best I can.

TS: Okay.

NB: If you imagine, like, a rectangular building that's sectioned off into, maybe, four areas—four areas with another side area. Like, if you walk in a set of double doors immediately to your right would be a check-in counter and restrooms, and then to your left would be the four areas separated by cubicles. And immediately to your left there'd be four rows of about ten chairs. Then cubicle walls. Behind that would be the vaccination and blood draw station. And then as you move farther to the left there'd be the vaccination checkout. And then in that—moving front again towards the entrance, on the far left would be the final medical checkout station. And—

TS: Okay, so it's not, like, a completely open area but there's some—it's partitioned in some ways that you just described.

NB: Yes.

TS: Okay.

NB: Yes, and when I provide you with my written statements you'll be able to understand the set-up more—

TS: Okay.

NB: —of the building. And so—So I had finished my vaccinations—

[Speaking Simultaneously]

TS: Were you by yourself? I mean, did you come back—

NB: I was by myself.

TS: Okay.

NB: Yes; yes; I was just moving through the stations by myself. And I had gone back up front to ask a specialist what I needed to do, and I had also asked him because we get a TB test, and I believe that that was a Thursday and they needed two days until they could be read. And so, he said he had a schedule, and go and check and make sure that nurses were going to come out to read our TB tests on Saturday, and we had kind of gone back and forth with that. That was the last time I saw my friend Amy, and I was waiting in the front—in front of that front row and had seen her and just, kind of, said hi. And then he said, "Yeah, nurses are going to come out on Saturday," blah, blah, blah.

"Okay."

So then I went to go to the back of those four rows of chairs and sit down, and I sat about four or five rows—four or five seats in on that last row.

TS: Okay. Was it pretty full, this—The—The place, was it pretty full at that time?

NB: It was pretty full, and the other three and half rows were filled. So now I've kind of turned my orientation [to] where if I'm facing, like, my twelve o'clock, then the doors to the building would have been my, probably, ten or eleven o'clock, if that makes sense.

TS: Okay, sure; yes it does.

NB: I had looked at the time and I remember it was about 1305 [1:05 p.m.], and I had told another soldier and his battle buddy, "Hey, you needed to go pick up some vehicles," and—"at 1300, right?"

And he was like, "Oh, yeah, I did. I totally forgot about that."

And so, those two left to go pick up vehicles, and I had sat down, and then there was another soldier who was going to sit to my right but he had to go finish something at legal so I was like, "Well, leave something. I'll move it along with me in these chairs."

And then after that I had opened up my book and started reading it, and the rest of that last row had started to fill up. There was one other soldier in my unit and two other soldiers in a different unit, and they had these patches with seahorses on them, so we were kidding them about that. [chuckles] That's all in these sworn statements too.

TS: Yeah.

NB: We were like, "Oh, what do you do?"

They were like, "We're engineers."

We were like, "Do you build aquariums? Do you know Sponge Bob Squarepants?"

TS: [chuckling]

NB: And they were teasing us back and saying, "We guard our sergeant major's aquarium and that's how we get this patch," and—

TS: That's funny.

NB: —stuff like that. So it was [unclear]—

[Speaking Simultaneously]

TS: Typical army humor.

NB: Typical army humor, yes. And then—So I was reading my book which, eerily now, was on murder; it was the title of the book. And being in mental health I was interested in just some of the different things—common trends that plague our service members, with killing—or excuse me, it was called *On Killing* [*:The Psychological Cost of Learning to Kill in War and Society* by Dave Grossman]; that was the name of the book; *On Killing*.

TS: *On—On Killing*? Okay.

NB: So—*On Killing*, yeah. And so, just—How is it justified that one killing in the United States may be murder, but you can kill in combat and that's okay and you're a hero? So going into a lot of the psychology with that.

And so, I was reading that, and then I heard a man yell, "Allāhu Akbar!" And I looked up to my left and probably at my nine to ten o'clock now and saw a man standing there. He had a shaved head, which struck me because they had taught us in training, "Be careful of people when you're overseas who are completely shaved because they are usually are preparing their body to go see Allah," and that had kind of stuck with me. And so, he was—

[Speaking Simultaneously]

TS: At the time you saw him?

NB: Yes. Yes.

TS: Okay.

NB: And so, I saw this man, he had a shaved head, medium build, more of, like, tannish brown skin, and he was in a military uniform and he had gold—whatever his rank was, it was gold. So he was in the army combat uniform and he had—was holding a gun out—straight out in front of him, and I saw two lasers; a red and a green laser on it too. And then he just started opening fire, and when I had looked over and he yelled, "Allahu Akbar!" [An Arabic phrase usually translated as "God is great"] and opened fire I also saw the lasers and a little bit of smoke.

So everybody was like, "Is this training? Is this not?"

I had immediately leaned forward to try to get my head into my lap as much as possible, and everybody's just panicked. The girl to my left and I are looking at each other and like, "Is this training or not?"

And she took her hand and wiped her head with it; said, "I don't think this is training. I'm bleeding," and she had blood on her hand and had shown that to me.

So I immediately got down on my right side and had looked—well, I had looked to my right and I had seen that people were funneling back into those cubicle areas behind us. And so, I was—And somebody else had brought down a cubicle wall, so I was going to go get behind that cubicle wall and then funnel back to those cubicle areas.

TS: They did that for protection?

[Speaking Simultaneously]

NB: So I crawled on my—

TS: I'm sorry, Nicolle.

NB: Yes.

TS: Okay, I'm sorry.

NB: That's okay. Yeah, no—no problem at all. Yes, so they had just, kind of, brought it down, and so soldiers were going under the wall as, I think, cover to get behind the cubicles.

TS: Okay.

NB: And so—Because it was laying [*sic*] flat on the ground, except for where people were crawling to get under.

TS: I see.

NB: So I was just on the ground and just low crawling on my side, and kicking, and I hugged up against other soldiers, or soldiers' bodies, and just—we all, kind of, got as close as possible and—going to under that wall.

By the time I made it to that wall, which seems like forever but I know it was probably just a moment, nobody else was trying to get under it. And so, I stopped moving because I didn't want to draw any attention to myself, and I just listened to what was going on.

At that point the room was seemingly dark, and so I was laying on my right side and just facing, again, my twelve o'clock, and the same direction and orientation I was when I was sitting in the chairs, and listening, and—and it sounded like .22 [unclear] and .22 caliber bullets. And I just kept thinking to myself, "Why would somebody who's trying to do, like, a mass shooting use a .22? It's really not that effective of a stopping power." And—And then—All types of thoughts go through your mind then.

TS: Right.

NB: So I was thinking about that, and I had just finished my will a few minutes before—like, maybe the hour before—and I thought, "Well, I'm really glad that I finished that, and I know where my life insurance is going to go, and I know where everything's going to go, and I'm glad I have that." That gave me an immense amount of peace actually.

And the thing about being in that situation is, it was the most peaceful moment of my life probably because you surrender absolutely all control to what is going on around you, and I really was powerless. I had no control over if I was going to live or die. In fact, I honestly felt like I was going to die. Laying there I had already felt the bullets in my body.

And so, I listened to him move around the room, after I got out of that cubicle again, because he had moved and he was moving now clockwise to me. So he was moving from that nine o'clock, ten o'clock, 11:00, 12:00, one o'clock, and shooting, and the room was quiet; all I could hear was his gunfire.

And then he had gone back from that one o'clock to 12:00, so counter-clockwise moving for me, and I thought, "Well, he's probably just going to go through and clear this whole room, and just kill everybody in here."

And so, my back and head were exposed and I was really worried about that, and breathing, and so I just made myself play dead. I controlled my breathing very shallowly, I made all my muscles relax, I made my head relax, and I just tried not to move. And then as he was going back around to that nine o'clock, 8:00, 7:00, 6:00, he opened fire again and—into what was that immunization and blood draw section. At that point, I did hear a woman screaming out, and I couldn't make it out, really, what she was screaming, and I just kept thinking to myself, "Just be quiet. He's going—You're going to make yourself a target." And he had just opened fire into that area and that's when I felt like he was going to come around to where I was.

And so, after that I guess a few people were trying to call out where he was, and kind of jump up and see where he was and call out to help other people. And I don't remember hearing that, but from other people's stories I heard that. The only thing I heard was, "He's gone! Go! Go! Go!" And I looked out from under the cubicle and I saw three sets of legs and boots running out, and so I got out from under the cubicle and ran straight out of the building. And I know that I jumped over somebody, or two, and the room was dark, and I later found out that it was dark because—not because the lights were off but because there was so much smoke in there; it had darkened the whole room from the gunfire.

And—So then I ran straight out, and there was another building in front of me and there was a soldier leaning up against it and he had his right arm on, like, his left shoulder and hunched up against it, and I yelled at him, "Come on, follow me, follow me," because I can hear Major [Nidal Malik] Hasan opening fire outside the building, but behind the building now. So I said, "He's still shooting. Come with me. Come on, follow me." And we ran up this hill and there was this white pick-up truck that was there, and I jumped in the truck and this other soldier came in and jumped in the truck after me too.

And so, he was there and I looked down and saw him and he just had blood all over his—all over his ACU [army combat uniform] uniform top in the—in his left shoulder and chest area. I was like, "Oh my gosh." So I started trying to apply compression and pressure and took off my blouse to apply pressure, and just pounded on the back of the truck. It was like, "We have somebody shot in the chest;" like, "We have to go." Because with all that blood you can't tell if it's in the shoulder or if it's in the chest and heart.

So we took off, and took off as we saw other people coming up trying to run away, too, and there was four of us in that vehicle and he's going—The driver is going to the hospital. We come to a stop sign—or stop light and I'm just pounding on the truck; like, "You need to go!"

TS: [unclear] through.

NB: "You need to go around! You need to run—" Yeah. And we start hearing the ambulances coming the other way, and so he is just honking on his horn, honking on his horn, honking his horn, and finally people move; we get through. We get into—Well, while

we're still driving there's another soldier, Mill[?], and he is telling me that he thinks he's shot in—in the stomach and he's bleeding. And then the one—the first soldier I'm trying to help who was shot in the shoulder and chest is going unconscious, and so he's needing my attention. So I'm pulling him up, I'm trying to elevate legs, trying to get more blood into—blood flow into the vital organs.

TS: Okay.

NB: And there's another girl. And I held this guy—I'm holding him into my arms and just thinking, "If he's going to die he's not going to die alone, he's going to die in the arms of a soldier; in the arms of his sister in arms."

And so, just still trying to apply pressure and help him, and the other girl that was there was really distraught over this soldier that I had in my arms and was helping. I was like, "You need to take off your top and find where he's bleeding," to this other person, and we couldn't find where the other person was bleeding but he said his stomach was hurting really bad and he was in so much pain and shot in his hip or butt. And I said, "All I have is my hand to give you but you can just squeeze it as hard as you want, okay? Just squeeze my hand," like, "we're almost there." So all he had was my left hand, and he was still talking and everything so he was fine.

And so, we finally are pulling into the—into the—

TS: Hospital?

NB: Into the hospital—Thank you—parking lot.

TS: Okay.

NB: And I just screamed for help; "Help! Help!" And two guys come running out, they throw down the truck bed, and they pull out—off the guy that was on my lap and they are carrying him in the hospital and the girl's going with him.

The other guy, number two, is saying he doesn't think he can walk, so I go, "Okay, can you get on my back?"

He said, "Yeah."

I said, "Get on my back." And so, I carried him on my back up to, like, this ledge of the hospital, because I wasn't going to risk climbing it with him on me, and there was other people who had come out.

And so, we transferred him in there, they carried him into the emergency room, and go in the emergency room and they're, like, asking, "What's going on?"

I'm like, "There was a mass shooting. There was a lot of shots.

They're like, "What—Where were you?"

"SRP."

And so, they're like, "Who's this person's name? Who's this person's name?" And I don't know these person's names.

TS: Right.

NB: And I'm running around just trying to help, and I'm pulling open every drawer looking for shears to just cut their clothes off to get—

TS: To their wound?

NB: Get to the wound. And I'm in somebody else's ER; I've never been in the ER before; just trying to do something. And they get enough doctors and stuff, because we completely blindsided them, and we were the first or the second group of people there, and just completely blindsided them. And—And so, they're providing them treatment, and at this point they're both unconscious now.

TS: Okay.

NB: And somebody comes in and is trying to help me and—like, to get me to take off my blouse because it just had blood all over it. I did and I washed my hands and they're like, "Why don't you go wait in the waiting room?" So they're taking me back.

I'm, of course, like, "Hey, I'm a mental health specialist. I can help with any type of grief/trauma counseling." [chuckles] I just—People who have a really—real heart of service, like, that's their go-to.

TS: Want to help do something productive, right?

NB: Yeah, they want to help. And so, as I'm going out I see another soldier from my unit that I know.

TS: Okay.

NB: I was like, "Hey, what happened," this and that. And I was like, "Here's where I was. This girl next to me, she was shot in the head."

He was like, "Yeah, this is what happened to me, and I ran out," blah blah blah.

So we really don't know anything else going on, and—or we don't know who's injured, we don't know who's dead, we don't know who's alive; nothing. So we sit in the waiting room just, pretty much, in complete shock, and I sent my first sergeant a message because my phone's about to die, and then send my friend a message and I'm just like, "Hey, we got shot up."

And he's like, "Yeah, immunizations are awful, aren't they?"

TS: Oh no.

NB: And I'm like, "No. Real bullets."

TS: Oh, Jesus.

NB: But it takes a few minutes for things to get in the news, and so then my phone died. And then they brought us back into the emergency room area and were collecting our information for, just, accountability. And so, the other soldier from my unit and I were sitting there giving them our dog tags, and I had been, like, kicking so hard—I usually wear my dog tags in my right pocket—that it broke off my dog tags, so they were just kind of in pieces there. And as we were there we were just asking, "What's going on? Who's who?"

At that point I had looked to my right and they wheeled by Lieutenant Colonel [Juanita L.] Warmen, and she's very—has very distinctive beautiful silver hair, and there's two paramedics with her. I was like, "I know her. I know her." Like, "Let me just go be with her and hold her hand. She, just, shouldn't be alone;" like, just that worry or ethos of you never leave a fallen soldier behind.

And they're like, "No, you can't go. You can't go."

And I don't know if it was a few days later or if it was a year later that I realized—and kind of the first time I told my whole story again to the prosecution—but she was already dead.

TS: When they were rolling her by?

NB: Because—

TS: Yeah?

NB: They were rolling her—her by and she was bagged with oxygen but they weren't pumping it and giving her any medical attention, and couldn't tell at all. So that was really hard, but I just didn't realize it in that moment.

And so, then we went to—they brought us back to this room of—an OB-GYN [obstetrics and gynecology] room to sit; just, kind of, a conference room, and we're kind of looking on the news to see what's going on. I call my dad, and I keep trying to call him, and I'm frantically trying to call him [to] just let him know I'm okay.

He's like, "Oh, okay. It sounds like you did the right thing."

And I was like, "No. You don't understand."

He's like, "Okay, well, I'll talk to you later," and he just didn't realize what had happened.

TS: The magnitude of it, right?

[Speaking Simultaneously]

NB: And neither—Yeah, and neither did any of us.

TS: Right. Right. Because at that point you didn't know how many had died and how many were—had been shot.

NB: Yeah, just in shock.

TS: Yes.

NB: And so, we were there, and then they wanted to bring us out of our uniforms, and so—because they just had blood all over them, and in the shoes and stuff like that. So—and—So they did and we changed into scrubs, and that's one of those times when I was really grateful we wore clean underwear; [unclear].

TS: [chuckles] Yeah.

NB: They brought us back in and two special agents came to take a statement, and that's my first statement and it's very—It's very abbreviated. And so, they took our statement, and then they left, and then one of the generals who was there, kind of with our unit and stuff—to see our unit or welcome our unit there—but he was really part of our command, not the Fort Hood command—had come in and we had told him what had happened and he was just in shock too.

So—So we're sitting there, we're waiting, we're waiting. We're kind of going back and forth, like, outside, into the hospital. We ended up seeing another girl, and she had the stuff of the girl who was sitting next to me, and she said, "Yeah, she here."

And so, she had ended up—the girl who was shot in the head had ended up being fine—like, living—and they just cleaned out her wounds. And then we saw another soldier a little bit later who was shot in the left thigh and—but for the most part it was pretty superficial. It had torn through some muscle and it—I think he had a thick book in there; he said that had slown [*sic*] it down a little.

TS: We you trying to get updates on the two guys that you had brought in with the truck?

NB: Not at that point; I didn't really know; not at that point. I honestly was thinking about my fam—my family; my unit—

TS: Right.

NB: —more, and different people in my unit, because I remembered in that front row there was Major [Laura] Suttinger, who was our commander, there was [Staff Sergeant] Amy [Krueger], and I had just remembered the different people in the front row and was asking about them. And so, they wouldn't tell us anything though. Nothing about the status at all on anybody. And so, that was really frustrating, too, to not know what had happened.

And then—And then we had gone to—We had a doctor come in, and I didn't want to leave. I didn't want to leave the hospital. I didn't want to go back to where our barracks were, because I was really scared, and I felt like our unit was targeted, because it was the second day we were there. And so—

TS: You didn't feel safe if you were going to go back to barracks; is that what you're saying?

NB: Yeah.

TS: Okay.

NB: We didn't—We didn't have any security or nothing like that there.

TS: Right.

NB: So we ended up staying in this Warrior Transition Unit, kind of, building; like, a vestibuler[?] building I guess. It's—It's got four rooms in it and a little kitchen, and they have a lot of them.

TS: Like a little quad.

[Speaking Simultaneously]

NB: And so, we stay—

TS: Something like that.

NB: Yes.

TS: Okay.

NB: Yes, exactly; yeah. So there was five of us that stayed there that night, and then there was somebody—our [unclear] command—who was there too. And so, we got there, they said, "Okay, females here, males there."

We're like, "No, we're all staying together."

And—So then—Yeah, we had got there and there—they—I remember they had provided us with, like, some sweats and hygiene stuff, because some people still had, like, blood in their hair, blood on them, and I remember that person—the sergeant from the medical command who was there with us, he stayed awake and sat by our door all night so that we could sleep, and that really meant a lot.

And our command came to visit us—our first sergeant and commander—and they wouldn't tell us anything about anybody, and they just said, "We have accountability of them."

"Okay," because we're all trying to figure out who was where, when.

And then we had tried to get some sleep, and that night the—I had dragged my mattress into the [unclear]—the guy who was shot in the left thigh, he was sleeping on the bed and I had dragged another mattress in there, and he said that I was yelling out

Amy's name all night, and yelling out, "Krueger!" And I feel like I kind of knew, but you don't know. I don't know.

TS: You hadn't heard from her so you didn't—you were insecure, for sure, about if she was okay, right?

NB: Definitely.

TS: Yeah.

NB: And she was my battle buddy.

TS: Right.

NB: And—So then the next morning we got up and we went back to the smaller post that's, like, forty-five minutes away [from] where we were staying. We got there and they did roll call, and that's when you go down [unclear] and you say who's where in the status, and right when I had got [*sic*] back, though, our other friend had come up to me and she hugged me and I was like, "Well, where's Amy?" And she just—

TS: Shook her head?

[Speaking Simultaneously]

NB: —frowned—frowned and shook her head and said, "No, she didn't make it." And I immediately, of course, started crying and just—disbelief.

TS: Right.

NB: And then we did roll call, and one of the people we had—we had known he was gone and—because somebody had seen him when they were running out and they knew, and then I heard about Amy. And then probably the hardest—another hard one was Major [Libardo Eduardo] Caraveo, when they called out that he was KIA [killed in action], and he had a really good friend who was there also, another captain—well, he was a first lieutenant at that time—and he had—I just looked at him, was like, "No, no, no."

And he was just like, "Yes," and it was—it was really devastating, and I knew that he had children and a family back home, and it was just really hard.

And then we went and they said, "Well, get your uniforms on. We have to go meet with some of our command now."

And so, we put on our uniforms, and it felt good to have a uniform back on again.

TS: Yes.

NB: And we went and marched down the road and were there, where we got, kind of, a briefing. I don't even remember what it was about. Then we went into a smaller building where just our two units were talked to by [Major] General [Lie-Ping] Chang, who was the general of the 807th; a little bit about what had happened. And I don't even remember what that was about. Then we got on buses and we went back to the main fort and were preparing for a ramp ceremony, and a ramp ceremony is where you carry your fallen—your killed in action—onto a plane, and it's the last time that you see them and you say goodbye, and they usually have a flag-draped coffin or casket, and it's just, kind of, sending off your battle buddy to go to their final resting place. It's more exclusive for the military because, like, a funeral's really—it is for the military but to us it's more for the families, too, and that's their time.

And this ramp ceremony was really hard for a lot of us because we weren't allowed to carry our fallen's bodies onto the plane, and that meant a lot to us. I understand now that we didn't have the training and we didn't have Class A uniforms and everything else like that, but it's really taken me until after the trial and four years later to really understand and accept that decision.

And General Casey was there—secretary of the army—John McCain[?] was there, a few other dignitaries were there. And it was just—you're in the sun, we didn't have water, we didn't have food, we were waiting. And they lined us up while they practiced with empty caskets, carrying them on and off the plane. Nobody said what was going to happen and gave us any information about what was going on. So it was just wrong, how it was done.

TS: Right.

NB: And so, we were there and—Let me go get a tissue, okay?

TS: Okay.

NB: Actually, I have one; never mind. Okay, so we were there. I remember we were really mad because people had on sunglasses, and you're not supposed to have sunglasses on in formation, and people were laughing and joking because they were part of units that didn't just experience this; they were there for numbers. And we were just so upset about everything. And we didn't get to go on the plane and say goodbye, or anything else like that.

So they did the final ceremony with the flag-draped caskets, and they had, of course, their toe tags on the casket on outside, so we could see their names, and "That's So-and-so and that's So-and-so." And that was it. The dignitaries went on the plane and said goodbye and did their final salute, but like I said, we didn't get to and that's something I'm bitter about, [both chuckle] to be quite honest—

TS: Yeah.

NB: —and cannot be fixed.

TS: No. No.

NB: Do you have any questions about anything up till this point?

TS: Well, the only question—because you did talk about some of this, not the specifics of what happened, in the last interview.

NB: Yes.

TS: You talked about some of it. I remember you talking about hearing that the—was it the Texas Rangers or something—

NB: Yeah.

TS: —was on the case or something and—

NB: [chuckles] Yes.

TS: Yeah? Well, how did you feel about—When you found out—When did you find out the magnitude of what had happened, besides just standing in—not beside, of course, but when you were in formation and they're re—they're doing the roll call? I mean, was there a time when it just really hit you, of the magnitude of how many people had been killed and wounded?

NB: Yes. I can't remember if last time did I talk about the memorial service?

TS: You did a little bit, yes, yes.

NB: Okay. So at the memorial service I had escorted my friend's family, her cousin, and uncles, and there were—we had gone in—this was, I think, almost a week later; all the days just blurred together.

TS: Right.

NB: We had gone in and had met with the president and other dignitaries, and the magnitude hit me when I walked out of that building and saw all of the people and saw all of the media that were there, because I hadn't watched TV, I hadn't really been on the internet; I still have a payment that's late on my credit report that I'm really upset about because [chuckles]—

TS: From that time frame?

NB: It was due on, like, November 7 and I didn't make that payment, clearly. And so, yeah, I just—I just wasn't engaged. I called my dad once a day but that was really about it.

And—And so, yeah, the magnitude hit me when I walked out and saw how many people and cameras and media and everything was there.

TS: Yes. Well, we—We talked a little bit last time, too, about survivor's guilt, right?

NB: Yes. Right.

TS: And so, when you think about that and you think about what—how do you—what is your coping mechanism for that? I mean, because you're still in the army and you're still around a lot of the triggers that have—have to do with that, and you're—you're in Texas again.

NB: Yeah. Yeah. I kept saying that I'm going to go and write goodbye letters and put them in the fence at Fort Hood around the building, but I haven't done it yet. I just—I can't say goodbye.

What my unhealthy coping mechanism—is that I feel like I lived and so I need to make this life count, and I do everything I can to try to be the best person I can be, and sometimes that means really working myself into the ground, or caring excessively about how others think and feel about me, and really weighing every interaction I have with other people heavily.

My healthy coping mechanisms, I went to the Vet Center for a year and a half, and counseling for about a year before that from a—from a psychologist in Oregon, and just really worked through a lot of the different triggers and beliefs that I had adopted. So since I was deployed for a year a lot of those beliefs got ingrained, and I kind of had to challenge them and work through them and change my thinking about it all. And accept that there's a part of it that's never going to go away. That's the hardest thing. It isn't that triggers come up, it's that I am bothered by triggers. I get mad at myself for being affected by the triggers. So, yeah.

TS: And you—We talked about this, too, and—how you decided to stay in the army but you had to switch what you were doing. I don't actually remember if we talked about that in the last interview, but do you want to speak to that a little bit; about why you switched what you were doing?

NB: Yeah. Before [I was mental] health and was on a path for pursuing psychology or [a] counseling degree, but I did switch to nutrition. Part of the research and stuff that I had done in undergrad was with health psychology and nutrition, and I really liked that but I didn't feel like I would be the—I didn't feel like I would be able to be an unbiased clinician because of what I had experienced, and because I couldn't separate that and compartmentalize that out from my core identity of who I am. And so, since I couldn't do that I didn't think that I would be able to compartmentalize it and say how it has affected me, and sift that out when working with clients in psychology in the future.

And so, there was going to be a lot of potential for a transference; counter-transference. I thought, "Well, what about if I have a client come in who had experienced a traumatic situation like those that I had experienced, either at Fort Hood or

while down range, and just death and loss. Would I be able to be objective to them and give them the best service possible?" And ultimately for me that answer was no, because I was either going to carry that internally and take it on too much myself, or I was going to not be able to—well, and wasn't going to be able to see that person and their experience exclusively for what it was to them.

TS: Right. Now, have you stayed in touch with people from your—your old unit?

NB: Yes.

TS: Yeah?

NB: Yeah, and that's been really helpful. Different people have definitely dealt with it different ways, too, and a lot of that—one big thing I noticed is, like, the people who deployed, I feel like it was almost healing because they found some purpose and they found people to identify with, and they found, kind of, a way to turn this horrible situation into a good situation, and relate to those other people going through—going through trauma.

TS: Right.

NB: The people who stayed home, I think it was harder for them because they wanted to go and now they couldn't, and then they were constantly bombarded by the media and different reminders of the events and everything.

TS: Were the ones that couldn't go the ones that were wounded, or were there others that couldn't go as well.

NB: Yes.

TS: Mostly the wounded?

NB: Yes. Everybody who was not wounded volunteered to go.

TS: Okay.

NB: Even though they were—everybody was given the option to stay. So the ones who couldn't go were the ones who were wounded.

Also, like, it's been—for some people it's been just now that they are facing—really facing it all. One girl had—that I stay in touch with, she had taken a class for social work and she had to take it, she couldn't get around it, and it was death and dying. And so, on the first or second day of class they had to go up and share with the class their experiences on death and dying, and she had really never told anybody that—knew that she [unclear] about everything and that she was involved in it.

And so, I told her, "Number one, you need to wear waterproof mascara if you're going to do that." [chuckles]

TS: Right.

NB: "Number two—" I was really proud of her, and it's really opened up a lot of healing for her, too, and growth.

TS: Good. I wouldn't want to be the person who had to follow her. [both chuckle]

NB: Yeah. The thing that she said, which I feel like—I feel is very true although—it's very true for eventually in life, is that everybody has an experience with death and dying, probably not as public and catastrophic as ours, but she said that she had realized that everybody has that experience. I just feel like, for my age, it's pretty young to have so much experience, and that usually people have it as they grow older; they have a lot more. I'm—I'm seeing that with some of my friends; they are having more of those experiences. Now I'm going off on a tangent.

TS: No, that's fine. I was going to ask you about the public—I'm getting a feedback there—the public part of it with the trial.

NB: Yes.

TS: And so, you had to wait for the trial—

NB: Right.

TS: —for a really long time.

NB: Yes.

TS: And lots of different things happened.

NB: Yes.

TS: I don't know how much you want to talk about that.

NB: Well, Therese, I'll tell all.

TS: Yeah?

NB: [chuckles]

TS: Alright. Well, why don't you first talk about—Well, because there is controversy about how it was being prosecuted, and how the particular event itself wasn't labeled as a terrorist act—

NB: Yes.

TS: —but a workplace shooting. Do you want to talk about that at all? Or can you?

NB: I can just, kind of, factually.

TS: That's fine.

NB: Yeah. Yeah, so there was—it came out—reports—a congressional report that Nidal Hasan was communicating with Anwar al-Awlaki, who was a known terrorist in Yemen, and he was American born, I believe, and had moved to become affiliated with Al-Qaeda, and he was, like, the leader of Al-Qaeda in Yemen. And he had gone to the same mosque as Nidal Hasan, and they had emails from Nidal Hasan to him asking him information, asking for his guidance, asking him if—and I'm paraphrasing here—if he were to do something and innocents were killed would that be forgivable for him. And he communicated with him that he was sending him funding and money too.

Those were intercepted by both the FBI [Federal Bureau of Investigation] and the CIA [Central Intelligence Agency] months before this incident, and nothing was done about it or communicated. There was no communication between those agencies and there was no communication between those agencies and the military. And also, he had just really poor performance. People said he had poor performance and people said that he would present on topics about—that were—I forget the exact topics, but they were just about Islam and the military, and being in the military, and, kind of, the wars and stuff, and they thought—they thought those were inappropriate for medical school. But all of his evaluation reports said he was a great officer and said that he had great conduct. So there has been some officers who were either relieved of duty or forced to resign out of this, too, for pushing that through, is my understanding.

Additionally—So what the controversy is, is that this act should have been labeled a terrorist act because it was—he had yelled, "Allāhu Akbar," his communications with that terrorist, his religious extremist views; had all pointed that he had conducted this act to try to promote a religious or political ideation. And in the opening of the trial he had said that he had killed and—these service members because they were going to fight against Osama bin Laden and they were going to fight against the Taliban, so he was protecting the Taliban and that's why he did this act. So it was really clear to a lot of people that it was terrorist act, but they would never label it that way. And we were told for a while that they weren't going to label it a terrorist attack because then he would be, like, an inter—he would be a terrorist, he could possibly go to GTMO [pronounced "gitmo"; Guantanamo Bay Naval Base, Cuba], it adds more burden of evidence, and just all the complications with the trial, that pretty much getting him on thirteen counts of murder and thirty-two counts of attempted murder was going to put him away, and there's nothing else that could really add to that.

And so, they focused on those things and that was very controversial, but what hurt the most was that if it was labeled a terrorist act in a combat action then the service members who were wounded and killed would receive benefits that would be the same as those who had died overseas fighting in combat, which would mean they would get purple hearts, they would go up in precedence for waiting for benefits in the VA [Veteran's Affairs], so their wait would be shortened, they would receive more educational benefits, their survivors would; just a lot of other benefits that come along with that.

And the people who—there's two people who had interfered and tried to stop Major Hasan, and they would have received probably, like, the Medal of Honor for doing that and sacrificing their own lives to do so. There was a lot of other things that went along with that. And, like, for one service member, [Staff Sergeant] Shawn [N.] Manning, who was shot numerous times, he worked as a civilian contracted employee in Fort Lewis [Joint Base Lewis-McChord, Washington], and so he would receive this differential pay between what he was getting paid on active duty versus what his job was actually paying if he was wounded in combat, and that was about $60,000, so—

TS: Right.

NB: —at the—at the time. So there's a lot of controversy with that. It still hasn't been reclassified [On 6 February, 2015 the army announced that it would award Purple Hearts for military and the Defense of Freedom Medal for civilians who were injured or killed in the Fort Hood attack. The decision was made possible by an amendment to the 2015 National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA)], and Officer Kimberly Munley [Civilian Police Sergeant Kimberly Munley], who had shot Major Hasan the first time and interfered, she is just spearheading tremendous efforts to get it reclassified. There's a lot of bills that have been put on the floor—the Senate floor—House floor for a vote for purple hearts, just saying, "Hey, we're going to give the Fort Hood victims purple hearts," not even reclassifying it, and President [Barack Hussein] Obama has said that he will veto any of those. So that's the controversy with that.

TS: Right, okay.

NB: And then there's lawsuits—numerous lawsuits also going on to get benefits that—well, because the government was negligent in stopping him, and also to obtain the benefits they would have received if it would have been classified a combat action, but those have just been, kind of, stalemated in the whole judicial process.

TS: They're stalled right now?

NB: Yes.

TS: I see.

NB: Yeah.

TS: Well, why don't you talk about the trial a little bit?

NB: Okay.

TS: Because you had—you were a witness in the trial. So you couldn't actually sit through it or anything, right? You—

NB: Right.

TS: Okay. So tell me about—Well, you can talk about your frustration in waiting for it, too, and leading up to it certainly.

NB: Yeah, so we had come back from Afghanistan a year later in—the end of October 2010 and had been waiting for the trial, and it was supposed to start in January and then was delayed, and it was supposed to start that following July [and] was—Excuse me—delayed. And it was delayed another—so from to the time of the incident it was almost four years that it was delayed. And it was really hard because it would get pushed back, like, four, five, six months at a time, and every semester that I had in college I had to tell my professors, "Hey, I have this trial. Here's my subpoena. I'm probably going to have to be gone for a week or two during your class for this. How can we work around it?" And then it would get delayed, and it was just the door was left open; there was no closure with it and it was really frustrating.

And it was hard to move on from the whole incident mentally, too, knowing that—It was hard because I felt like I had to remember all the details, and I had to be that star witness. I reminded myself I wasn't the only one there, but you want to do the best that you can, but time's also moving on and details are also being forgotten, or new information's put in and—

TS: Right.

NB: So it was really hard to try to remember it all, but then forget it too.

TS: Did you ever write anything about it?

NB: I did. I wrote in my journal a few days and weeks after everything, but then it was more of just trying to push it aside, until I wrote about it in counseling later.

TS: Right.

NB: So then when the trial finally did happen it was in August of 2013, and a lot of moving parts to it. I had gone down—flown to Fort Hood, and it was just all the nervous anxiety again flooding back. I didn't understand why I was going because I didn't really feel like I had that—seen that much, or that big of a part of it, and—But we went down and—

TS: Did you want to testify?

NB: Not really, no.

TS: Okay.

NB: To me, it had just, kind of, kept this open door, and if I could have said, "I don't want to testify," and I closed that door, I would have been the one empowered by it. There was nothing I could say or do that would bring any of my friends back; there's nothing anybody could do that could rectify this situation. The only thing that could happen is that he could stop getting all of the perks that he was getting being in the Bell County Jail, and that justice would finally be served, I guess, through that. But I knew we haven't executed somebody for almost fifty years, so I didn't have a lot of promise in the hope that he would be executed either so it didn't really mean a lot to me.

And so, I think I had flown down on a Tuesday, I did trial prep on Wednesday, and I was supposed to testify on a Thursday. For the trial prep they just asked me questions, went through my testimony, and that was it. After the trial prep, though, on that morning I believe, or the day I was supposed to testify, they had—there was some type of problem, because the opening statements were on the day I had flown down, and so that next morning they had gone into session and his defense counsel didn't want to represent him anymore because they felt it was unethical, since he was clearly trying to get the death penalty. Because he had gone in and he was acting on his own behalf as his own defense attorney and said, pretty much, "I was the shooter." I had done it. "Here's why. Here's what I believe. The trial will be gory and details and—I ended up—" the famous quote was, "I ended up finding myself on the wrong side," he said.

And so, the defense council didn't want to represent him, and the judge said that they needed to provide support and legal guidance to him. So they had a day where they were on recess, and then they had started the next day and had proceeded with the testimony, and then—but they had to get a lot of people out because we had the weekend, so they had to go through more witnesses a little quicker.

And then I testified. So my—my time there was pushed back. [chuckles] I was—

TS: So you're delayed.

[Speaking Simultaneously]

NB: —again, very frustrating.

TS: Right.

NB: So I had to stay another day. And then I had testified on Friday, and I had just—was sick in the morning. Luckily, I met my commander, Major Suttinger. She took me out for

breakfast and coffee in the morning for a little bit and we spoke and—before I had gone in, and that was very uplifting.

So we all got in a van and went to the courthouse. And another thing that bothered us was that there's massive security around the courthouse but we didn't even see an MP car around our hotel the whole time we were there, and we felt like we were the victims, or I was worried about a copy-cat attack or something like that. But luckily that turned out to be frivolous worry. So I—

[Speaking Simultaneously]

TS: Did you tell anybody about that worry though? I mean, had—Did you—Was that a—Did you verbalize it?

NB: Oh yeah.

TS: So what—what kind of response did you get to that?

NB: I was a common feeling amongst us there.

TS: Yeah?

NB: Yeah.

TS: I mean, did you tell anybody in authority—that you—that you wished that you had more security?

NB: Nope, not really.

TS: Okay.

NB: So.

TS: So you get to the courthouse and you see all—

NB: Yeah.

TS: Okay.

NB: We go in, and as I'm walking in I see Amy's mom and just immediately started crying, and hugged her and just said, "I'm so sorry."

And she's just like, "Be strong," and just, "Really be strong. It's okay."

And so, we had waited in a room, and just, kind of, waited and waited in a little room. And then we got called to go in and it was very quiet and orderly in there for how

much hype there was with it. So we went in the gallery and—in the gallery area, and then around and up to the stand. I did my oath and took my seat, and saw Major Hasan there. And he—Other people had told me, but I saw it for myself, that he really looked like death. He was just so pale white, really skinny. He looked like he was aged by thirty years; very sickly. And so, he was there and it was weird and—to see him again, because really—

[Speaking Simultaneously]

TS: What kind of emotions did you have for that?

NB: Well, I was more concerned and just feeling pressured because—I didn't process the emotions with seeing him until afterwards, and the emotions I had in the end, after a few weeks, were that it was probably—it was good, because up until that point he had been just, kind of, this evil spiritual being in this room. And—But then seeing him actually as a weak person took a lot of that power that he had away, if that makes sense.

TS: Sure. Yes.

NB: And when I got in there it was a lot of high ranking officers, so [chuckling] ask anyone who's been in the military, you just, kind of, get a little stupid around high ranking officers; like, "No, ma'am. Yes, sir," and you don't want to mess up. So there's that. And then, like I said, there's the pressure of remembering all the details, and I never wanted to let what other people said influence my [unclear].

And so, we had gone up there and sat down and just went through where I was, and they had a picture of—a diagram—or they had a model made of the building and then they had a picture of that model on a screen and we could say, "Here's where we were. Here's where we saw this."

TS: Okay.

NB: And then they asked me to identify Amy, and the picture they had was actually—I knew the picture; it was actually a picture of her—It was the last picture taken of her, and it was at the SRP that day, waiting in the line for legal. And so, she had on a big, bright smile, and in uniform, and I had just said how I knew her, and it—the prosecutor was really kind, and I had spoken to him the night before about Amy and he had asked me how I knew her and I had said that she had helped me through a lot of the struggle [recording error] whenever my mom had died [recording error] It was 2009, and we were on training together when that had happened.

TS: I have to tell you that that just broke up on the—on the sound. [both chuckle]

NB: Okay.

TS: Can you repeat that? I'm sorry, I know—very emotional.

NB: That's okay.

TS: You were saying how the prosecutor asked you how you knew Amy.

NB: Right, and I had—was able, under oath, to say that she had really helped me with my mom's death and—because my mom had passed away in August 2009 and we were on training together when that occurred, and she was really supportive of that for me, too, and we had been friends since then.

So—And then he asked me how I knew—he said that he would expect his infantry soldiers to know the calibers of weapons but not me, [both chuckle] and how I knew, and I said, "My dad was a gun broker." So I was glad to have that on the record.

TS: Your dad was probably happy to hear that.

NB: Yes. And the caliber of weapon—or the caliber he used was actually a .257 Hollow Point round, which Hollow Points go in and around in the body and cause a lot of damage that way, they don't cause[?] through and through.

And then he had just asked, kind of, about the gunfire and I had rapped my hand on the desk about the rate of the gunfire, and the judge asked Major Hasan if he had any objections to that and he said, "No," and that was about it. It was really just ten minutes, in and out.

Then I was, of course, crying and there's all of the victim's families in the—in the gallery there, and Amy's mom came out and talked to me and it was really sad. I wish I could have taken her spot in a heartbeat.

And so, Amy was—from what I know—she was in the front row, and I believe she was shot two times, and the other people around her weren't able to pull her back around the desk for cover, and that she had, just, bleeding, and then vomiting, and they couldn't clear her airway and control bleeding.

And so, her mom asked, "Well, did she say anything; like, 'Tell me mom I love her'?" And that just crushed me, and that's just such a part of the grieving, too, is—it's death isn't for the dying, it's for the living, and moving on past it. And how do you live past such horror and such tragedy and go on with your life? And so, I think everything just happened so fast, though, and I don't remember anybody saying that to me, and it's just really hard to hear that.

The Department of Justice, one of their representatives who had also worked on the Oklahoma City Bombings with the victims advocate, she was a victims advocate for us, and she was there and she presented me with a coin from the Department of Justice, and the date of the shooting on it, and—as a token of their appreciation for testifying against Major Hasan. And there was really a lot of ambivalence of a lot of us; we really didn't want to. And it's hard because—

[Speaking Simultaneously]

TS: You didn't—You didn't want to testify, you mean?

NB: Yeah.

TS: Okay.

NB: We're being asked to do something in a very uncomfortable situation by, essentially, an agency that we feel doubly betrayed by, or the government—

TS: Right.

NB: —in general, because it wasn't—They didn't try to stop it and they didn't label it a terrorist attack.

TS: Right. So before and after you feel like you were violated by the government?

NB: Yeah. Well, yeah; CIA, FBI. Not the generalist government as a whole, but those people in those agencies that made those decisions.

TS: Right.

NB: Yeah, and that's been something that's been hard, too, is that—do I feel betrayed by the army? I don't know. I had to really sort that out. And my people have said, "Well, why would you stay in the army after all of that?" But to me the army isn't about that. It's about serving those who served, too, and it's for the people to your left and to your right, and that's why you're here. Because ultimately there's always going to be a military to protect the United States. Me leaving doesn't mean that's going to dissolve, but me staying means that I have that heart of service and that I want to help others who serve.

TS: That's—Go ahead.

[Speaking Simultaneously]

NB: [unclear] be a part of that.

TS: Well, it's interesting that you mention that, Nicolle, because so mu—so many people think of the army—the military—simply as this force of—well, a militaristic force, right? That that's all there is about it and that's—everybody's a trained killer [chuckles] or something.

NB: Yes.

TS: And the fact is, is that almost all—the majority of the people who are in the service are supporting other soldiers, or airmen or sailors or marines, right?

NB: Yes.

TS: Is that what you mean by serving others?

NB: Yes.

TS: Is that what you're talking about?

NB: Yes. I feel—I think I've heard it's, like, there's six people for every one infantry soldier; there's six support elements. And to me, I've been too changed by the military to totally want to be a civilian again, but yes, it's all the people in the military and the—Yeah, we take care of each other; we're each other's families.

And even though the United States president hasn't declared this a terrorist attack, that doesn't mean that there aren't people who haven't supported me within the military, and who haven't gone out of their way to try to do things to support service members financially. I've heard that Ross Perot [Henry Ross Perot is an American businessman best known for being an independent presidential candidate in 1992 and 1996] is one of them who has paid for people to go to the Mayo Clinic [A nonprofit medical practice and medical research group] and get medical care, and there's a lot of other people out there who have really supported us.

TS: In the private community?

NB: Yes. Yeah, and within the military, so yeah. So I'm here. I love the army but I love the people of the army more.

TS: There you go.

NB: So then after that they asked us what we wanted to see happen with the building, and I think that I had said, like—I mean, I didn't really care. It was how it was, apparently, from the day that the shooting happened, just removing our personal effects from it. And so, I'm happy to report that a few weeks ago the building was demolished.

TS: I saw that.

NB: And that—So that was really good, and they're going to plant trees there and—

TS: Like, a memorial?

NB: Yes. Yes. So that's good. And also hearing the guilty verdict was good. Because we had so many ups and downs and felt victimized repeatedly, having heard the guilty verdict and that the panel clearly felt the same way that we did, and that he was guilty and deserved the death penalty felt really good. And there was some people who was [*sic*] like, "No, he should rot in jail forever," but the message that the death penalty says, I feel like, means a lot to me because they're saying that this is the worst possible thing we can do to somebody, within their power. And that was really relieving to have that and know that it was finally done.

TS: Yes.

NB: For—I wasn't prepared for how upset and bothered I was going to be at the trial, but I was equally unprepared for how happy I was going to be hearing the verdict.

TS: Really? It was unexpected that you were—had some sense of happiness about it?

NB: Yeah.

TS: Even though I'm sure it doesn't feel like closure.

NB: No, it doesn't. So he was moved from the Bell County Jail to [United States Army Garrison] Fort Leavenworth, and his beard that he had forcibly—or that he had grown against regulations for his religious reasons were sh—was forcibly shaved off, and that just, kind of—Leavenworth is making things right. [chuckles]

TS: I read a lot about that; about the issue of shaving. Why is that so important, do you think? To you.

NB: To me?

TS: Yes.

NB: Because it's part of wearing a uniform and what we all say that we're going to do, but in terms of this trial it added a certain circus-like element that the defendant gets whatever he wants and can be however he wants and acts, but we all—the rest of us and the victims all have to follow all the rules, but he doesn't have to.

TS: Right, and after all, he still was in the army, right?

NB: Yes, and he was still collecting a paycheck the entire time.

TS: Right.

NB: Yeah. So that was tough[?]. And we receive—I received a letter from Leavenworth that said that he's there and they'll notify us of any retrials or—Excuse me—if he passes away there. [chuckles]

TS: We had video on that but no verbal. That was a joyous look on your face. And two fists pumps I think.

NB: Yeah, two fist pumps. Come on, come on, come on.

TS: Well, does it—is it still difficult, though, when you—like, if you just pick up a newspaper or go online and were browsing and you see something about the Fort Hood shooting. I mean, does that still—is it—I'm sure that it is still difficult, Nicolle.

NB: Yeah, it is.

TS: Yeah.

NB: Almost because it's so forgotten now. Not forgotten, but the world's moved on, and it's been this, kind of, like—I was known a lot, especially at UNCG, for having gone through this and survived it and within my unit—my combat stress control unit and stuff for that, but now it's kind of like, "Okay, that's not what defines me anymore." So you kind of got to find new things.

And the triggers are still there. I—We had a professor who used a green laser pointer. Like I said, Major Hasan had a red and a green laser on his weapon, and the laser pointer really bothers me and I can't get over that. And that's what I'm talking about. I'm not bothered because it's a trigger, but I'm bothered and I'm mad at myself because it still elicits a physiological response. And it's not mental. Like, my stomach will be upset, it will start cramping, I will start sweating, and it's just—

TS: It's a physical reaction.

NB: Yeah, and it's stressful to still undergo it. Yeah.

TS: Does it bother you that you're always going to be connected to this shooting at all? I mean, in a way—What I mean [is] as part of your identity, right?

NB: Yes.

TS: Does that bother you?

NB: Somewhat. It bothers me how it's changed me, but I'm trying to remember how I thought I was before and work towards getting back to that.

TS: Yeah?

NB: Somewhat, yeah.

TS: So what's a good day for you, to get back to that? What would be—What's a good day for you?

NB: A good day, like, for me now or—

TS: Yeah, a good day, like—yeah.

NB: Well, in the graduate program [both chuckle], twenty-four masters credits at a time.

TS: Right.

NB: I think a good day is no nightmares, because there's Fort Hood, but that was reinforced by all of the other deaths in Afghanistan.

TS: Right.

NB: So in some ways they're separate but in some ways they're the same; the deaths. So some mornings I wake up and there feels like a dark shadow of death over me, and I just, like—in my mind are the losses that we experienced, of everybody; Fort Hood, Afghanistan, the losses of people I worked with that they experienced, and stuff like that.

So a good day for me is just waking up without that, which is almost all the days, and just being grateful for my boyfriend, and seeking gratefulness for those things I have, and striving to continue to serve within the military.

TS: In the nutrition program that you're in right now—

NB: Yes.

TS: —it's interesting—I actually think about it a lot because I recently took up running again, right?

NB: Right.

TS: But I was thinking a lot about how much—that you can affect a soldier's life with that, right?

NB: Yes.

TS: By helping them learn more about how to eat better and how to have a healthier way of thinking about it too.

NB: Yeah.

TS: Do you find yourself talking to people, even now before you finish the program, about a lot of those things?

NB: I don't have time to talk to a lot of outside people [chuckles] [unclear] but it is serious. But yeah, don't have a lot of opportunities to do that, but I have, like, family members that have.

TS: Mostly that's what I've been thinking, [chuckles] about how you tell your family.

NB: Yeah, they're—Well, my dad actually had hypertension and was on a medicine but then—he's like this model patient and has changed his diet and reads labels and exercises. He's trying to do, like, the—the army ranger physical fitness workout routines, and trying. [both chuckles] He—

TS: That's very admirable though; oh my goodness.

NB: Yeah.

TS: Wow.

NB: He does really good. I think one of the rewarding things—And see, that's one of the hardest things, is I'm in school but I'm in a military school. But it's not the real military so I don't get, really, any contact with a lot of service members now.

TS: Okay.

NB: And so, it's really—

[Speaking Simultaneously]

TS: Oh, that's true, right, right.

NB: Yeah.

TS: I forgot about that part, right. Okay.

NB: So it's really hard but—to do that. But one of the most rewarding things I did here is, they have teaching classes—or cooking classes for the warrior transition unit. So at Fort Sam Houston they have their—their hospital, San Antonio Medical Center, and the other supporting medical units take a lot of the wounded soldiers from Afghanistan and Iraq. So they're either going to go—when they get wounded and go through Germany and are ready to come stateside, they're going to go to Walter Reed or they're going to come here. And they have a very state-of-the-art, prominent burn patient unit, too, and so they work

with a lot of that. They have a Fisher House, and a few different houses and community centers for, like, the families of the service members to learn cooking skills and do crafts, and just community based support. And so, one of the NCOs [non-commissioned officer] here does cooking classes and she invited me to attend, and that was really rewarding to do that.

TS: That's really great.

NB: Yeah. So I'm—I'm excited to get out in the military again; I can't wait.

TS: How long do you have before you graduate?

NB: I have—In October I will be going to Fort Lewis, Washington, for a forty week internship, and then I'll graduate in August 2015.

TS: Alright.

NB: God willing.

TS: God willing you're on your way.

NB: Yeah.

TS: Well, I did want to ask you one more question about Fort Hood, and that's if you think there's any misconceptions that the general public has about that incident or the people involved in it that you'd like to talk about?

NB: I think that anybody who has been through something that's been in a news event, you know the real events that happened, and then you see what the media presents, and you see what people take from it or not. I know that—it's funny because it comes up in so many different—I've heard some random guy on Dr. Phil talking about why he didn't have anger problems because he wasn't like Major Hasan, and I've heard other people bring it up, and it just really comes up at interesting times. I've heard a lot of it with gun control.

One of the misconceptions most frequently that I've heard is that people have the perception that since we're military and on a military base we're armed the whole time. And they say, "Why didn't anybody shoot him?" Well, we didn't have weapons. We were defenseless. So there was—

TS: Which Major Hasan knew.

NB: Yes.

TS: Right.

NB: Yes, which he knew. And so, there was no way to fight back with that. And sometimes I'll read comments on news stories about what people say and they really are pretty much in our favor, so. I can't think of any misperceptions or anything the public has, other than I'm very worried that it will just be forgotten in time, and that—We went from the trial—We thought after the trial we would get, maybe, a combat action ruling that it was that way, but from the trial, a few weeks later we went into sequestration of the government and then that, and Obamacare [The Affordable Care Act] became the biggest political issue of the budget, and so this was in the media for a month but it was quickly overshadowed. And so, I'm just really worried it's going to be forgotten and that it will never be changed to what it should be for the victims and their families.

TS: As a terrorist event?

NB: Yes, terrorist event, combat action.

TS: Right. Well, how about for you personally, when you meet somebody and they find out that you were there?

NB: Yes.

TS: Is that difficult, still, to maneuver; to talk about?

NB: Not really. I'm pretty comfortable with it. I've had people who have randomly Googled me—been like, "Oh, I Googled you and I saw you were at Fort Hood."

I was like, "Yep, I sure was."

They're like, "Oh, you're such a badass." And I don't get what, like, living through an event like that makes me a badass, but for a lot of people in the military, they've never been shot at that close proximity, so I appreciate that recognition. [chuckles]

TS: Are there things that just make you cringe that people say?

NB: No.

TS: No?

NB: Not really.

TS: No?

NB: No, because most of the time they want him dead, too.

TS: Right.

NB: And they think it's horrible what happened, too.

TS: Right. So people aren't being rude about it?

NB: No. No.

TS: That's good.

NB: Yeah.

TS: And you're in a pretty military environment, even though you're in college, right?

NB: Yeah, that's the thing. Other than, like, my class mates, I have a lot of—even within the system there's people who have deployed, like instructors or other friends that I have here, so I can find a lot of support in them because they get it, and what "it" exactly is I can't really define. But they understand the sacrifices made, they understand why we're here, they understand what it's like to be in the military, what it's like to lose a brother or sister in arms, and therefore they don't get me, and so—

TS: Right.

NB: Yeah.

TS: Well, why do you—Why do you think it would be more difficult—well, not more difficult, but you mentioned this, kind of, earlier—difficult to go back into a civilian-type environment?

NB: I think that so much of my values have really been strengthened through—through this experience and deployment; about sacrifice and about living a purposeful life. I kind of talked about kind of feeling guilty with living and stuff before, with what it means to really serve others, what it means to serve your country, what it means to put others before self. And it is a struggle to have a lot of those values, and the other things that go along with being in the military, like being attention to detail oriented, and being disciplined, and not—

[Speaking Simultaneously]

TS: Showing up on time?

NB: Huh?

TS: Showing up on time to things?

NB: That I don't quite have down. [chuckles]

TS: No? [chuckles] Okay. That's because you're in the academic thing; you've been in that a little while, right?

NB: Yeah, I've been in that too long.

TS: Yeah.

NB: Never—I miss that [unclear]; getting to [unclear] that sense of purpose; moving with a sense of purpose in basic training. But yeah, like, a lot of the things—those things about being a service member that are so engrained in you, I don't know how to deprogram them, and I'm not ready yet too.

TS: Right. Right.

NB: So—And I still feel like I have a lot to give. And being in the civilian sector I feel like I would have to, kind of, say goodbye to a lot of that and just not live that way anymore.

TS: Right. And you feel like maybe, in some level, you maybe still owe that?

NB: Yeah.

TS: Yeah?

NB: That's safe to say.

TS: Yeah.

NB: Yeah. I still wear my memorial bracelet that says, "Who will go for us? Here am I! Send me!" And I think about the sacrifices that those five people in our unit made, and why they joined the military, and why they wanted to deploy, and why they wanted to serve. And in some ways I feel like I carry on that mission for them too.

TS: I think you still are, yeah.

NB: Yeah.

TS: Yeah. Well, is there anything else you'd like to add?

NB: I don't have anything else, no.

TS: Well, I'm so glad you talked to me today. I know it's been a while before we've been able to get together but—

NB: Yeah.

TS: —thank you so much, Nicolle.

NB: Thank you so much, Therese. I really appreciate it.

TS: Alright, well, hang in there in Texas, alright?

NB: [chuckles] Okay.

TS: Alright.

NB: I'll do my best.

[Extraneous comments about dog redacted]

[End of Interview]