

WOMEN VETERANS HISTORICAL PROJECT

ORAL HISTORY COLLECTION

INTERVIEWEE: Tina K. Morrison

INTERVIEWER: Therese Strohmer

DATE: March 12, 2014

[Begin Interview]

TS: Today is March 12, 2014. My name is Therese Strohmer and I'm at Jackson Library in Greensboro, North Carolina to conduct an oral history interview for the Women Veterans Historical Collection at the University of North Carolina of [at] Greensboro. Tina, would you please state your name the way you'd like it to read on your collection.

TM: Tina K. Morrison.

TS: Okay. Well, Tina, thanks again for joining me today. I really appreciate you coming in and talking with us. Why don't you start out by telling me a little bit about when and where you were born?

TM: I was born in High Point, North Carolina, December 27, 1979, so I'm a late Christmas baby. I've pretty much lived and worked here for most of my life. I've lived in other places but High Point is really my home; my family's still here.

TS: Do you have any brothers or sisters?

TM: Yes, I have a—I'm the youngest. I have a older sister and a older brother. My sister's ten years older than me and my brother is seven years older than me.

TS: So you're the baby?

TM: Yes. Yes. [both chuckle]

TS: Okay. So what—What did your folks do while you were growing up?

TM: My mother raised us as a single parent. My parents separated pretty much when I was born so I didn't get the experience of that whole family situation that my brother and my sister did. So it was kind of rough the first eight years of my life because we lived in a cramped apartment, but later on after my sister moved out and—and my brother, he

was—he was older and so he was in and out of the house, and so we moved into another bigger house so it was—it was much better and my mom was doing better. They never got divorced; that was the only thing. [chuckles]

TS: Oh, yeah?

TM: But—So I—I used to see my dad of—every week or so, and sometimes I would stay with him because my mom worked third shift, so—

TS: What—Where'd she work at?

TM: She worked at—Well, back then it was—she worked at Slane Hosiery Mills, so, textiles. My dad, he—at that time he worked at Marsh Furniture [Company], which is a furniture place, but he—he drove trucks for them. He eventually moved on to Snow Lumber Company—they're now called Builders First Choice [Builders FirstSource?]
—and he drove trucks for them until he retired. My mom worked at another hosiery place but I di—I never knew the name of it; I can't remember the name of it. But she passed away in 2001.

TS: Your mother did?

TM: Yes.

TS: Oh, I'm sorry to hear that.

TM: Yes; that's okay.

TS: Yeah. Well, did you—What was it like growing up in High Point? Like—So did you live in High Point?

TM: Yes.

TS: Okay.

TM: Yes.

TS: What was it like?

TM: It was—I mean, I guess I liked it. I'm not a—like, a real big city girl or anything like that; it's just the right size for me. And then you could go to Greensboro, Winston [Winston-Salem], or—It—It's—And I like living in North Carolina because you're in the middle of the east coast; I love the east coast. So it's not too far to drive up north or down south.

We pretty much—My mom was a very quiet person. She didn't do too much. She was a homebody, so it was pretty restricted in my household, especially for me, probably,

because I was the youngest and she didn't have any real help in trying to raise me, and so I was pretty restricted, but I was into the books.

TS: Were you?

TM: Yes, it—

TS: Like reading, you mean?

TM: Yes.

TS: Okay.

TM: It was my way of escaping. It was pretty mu—TV got boring so I read a book. I hated the summertime because I never got to go over friends' houses, so I would read books. So I was very much into school; I've always been into school. And I—I also realized that where my mom wouldn't let me go over to a friend's house, if it something to do with school I could do it.

TS: Okay.

TM: So I—that made me get into leadership. [chuckles] And so, I was—I ended up being president, like, every year of my class, and I was student body president my senior year, and really it was so I was able to leave the house.

TS: Yeah?

TM: Yes.

TS: So you could get out and do something.

TM: Yes.

TS: But did you enjoy what you were doing?

TM: Oh, yeah. I enjoyed it.

[Speaking Simultaneously]

TS: Okay.

TM: I enjoyed it. It was a way for me to socialize with people; I learned a lot of skills; I got to learn a lot about my school.

TS: What school did you go to?

TM: I went to High Point Central [High School] in High Point.

TS: Where'd you go for elementary?

TM: Fairview Elementary [School].

TS: Okay.

TM: Now, I will say, it wa—it was kind of a culture shock going from elementary school to middle school because my elementary school was a poorer elementary school, mostly black, and I was in the Academically Gifted Program. So when I went to middle school, that's when they separate you by intelligence, I guess, and it—instead of being in a mostly black class when I was in elementary school, I was only one of six black kids out of thirty kids in the class.

TS: In that class?

TM: Yeah, and so it was a real big cu—culture shock, and, like, all the white students, even if they didn't go to the same elementary school, their parents ran in the same circles or the same churches or organizations or whatever so they knew each other but we didn't know them.

TS: You kind of felt like you were on the outside a little?

TM: Yes, yes. So I noticed, like, going on through the years, all the ones that were considered quote unquote "smart"—the black students—they drop—they would drop out of the academically gifted classes because they didn't feel close enough to the other students. I, myself, I stayed in. I just—I—My teachers kind of—I look back on it, and they really discouraged me from going bad.

TS: Oh. [chuckles]

TM: Well, okay, I was in the Academically Gifted Program, and the program that was right up under it was called GAMSAT[?], and GAMSAT—on Saturdays they would go and—to A&T [North Carolina Agricultural and Technical State University] and get refreshers on math and science. Well, I thought this was a good thing. I liked math and science so I was like, "Why can't I be in GAMSAT? I want to go to A&T on Sat"—I thought it was a privilege.

And my teacher's like, "No, you don't want to be in that program."

But now, looking back on it, it was—they didn't want me to—I don't know if they wouldn't want me to be with the other black students or—I don't know what the deal was but they really discouraged me from doing that, so I pretty much stayed in the

academically gifted, and honors, and stuff like that throughout school and I had to stay. It was a culture shock. I will say it was kind of—It was very hard.

TS: How did the other students treat you?

TM: They—I got along [chuckles] with some of them; I got along with some of them. My best friend is a white male; we've been best friends since grade—eighth grade. And I think he used to get a lot of the flack for it, as opposed to me.

TS: Yes.

TM: Like I said, they—everybody pretty much got along with me and—and I was so involved in school that I was out there a lot but he had—he had a few things called[?] to him.

TS: Yeah.

TM: And when we tried to bring it to the attention of the teachers they didn't do anything about it. I—I—Sometimes you just wish that you'd known what you know today. Back then I really—I should have been more vocal as a student.

TS: Like things about bullying and—

TM: Yeah. Well, not—Yeah, that, but it was more, like, the—the teachers; they didn't do anything about it. It wasn't—I wasn't mad at the students, I was mad at the teachers.

TS: Because they had authority.

TM: Yeah.

TS: Kids are being kids, I guess you could say.

TM: Yeah, yeah, and that's pretty much how I felt, but—because I can remember a time where there used to be this rap group out called—What was their names? Well, they—they used to wear their clothes backwards [referring to the American rap duo Kris Kross], and one day me and some other black kids, we came to school with our clothes on backwards. Well, other black students had been [doing] the same thing, but they weren't in the gifted classes, and so they came to us and told us we needed to change our clothes, we're too good for that and all that, but you didn't tell that to the other black students. And so, it would just be little things like that, that—

TS: There's, like, a doub—double standard.

[Speaking Simultaneously]

TM: Double standard.

TS: Depending on where you fit academically?

TM: Right.

TS: Interesting.

TM: It was such a double standard. And I can reme—There's just other little instances that I went through coming up, and I guess I would not have noticed them if I was in lower—in lower levels, like reading and stuff like that. I noticed it because I was the only black student in the class, so—

[Speaking Simultaneously]

TS: Like what? Like give me an example.

TM: I would be the only person called out. Anytime it was something dealing with race, not even—it didn't even have to be with black students, I would always be the one called out for my opinion. Let me see. Oh, man, it—it's [chuckles]

TS: So you were put on the spot a lot—

TM: Yeah.

TS: —to, like, be the representative voice—

TM: Yes.

TS: —for, like, racial issues—

TM: Yes.

TS: —and things like that.

TM: Yes.

TS: Yeah? Where there a lot of women—girls in the class?

TM: Yeah, I don't mean[?]-That wasn't a problem.

TS: Okay.

TM: At my school it—it was actually the females that did a lot.

TS: Okay.

TM: Than the males. That—I know when I was in Student Council—like I said, I was the student body president when I was a senior—and one thing they do is—normally for officers you run for those offices and you have to go through elections. Well, they also have appointees that the—our advisor would appoint to Student Council; they don't have to run. And so, you have to apply to that separately, and she was asking me, "What's this person like? What's that person like?" And she would ask me their race, because people who ran were usually white females. So she wanted to try to get other races, and even white males to come in it, because there was more white females. So th—She tried—That's what the appointees were for, to try to put diversity into it.

TS: I see.

TM: Yes, so it's just amazing how these little things—you see these little things later on, but I mean, it was great that she did stuff like that to try to make sure there's diversity. And I—

TS: Did you get appointed or did you get [unclear]?

TM: I—I was—I was elected.

TS: You were elected.

TM: Yeah, yeah. Now, but I was—when I was coming up to my position as student body president, I got—I was in on the selection process for the appointees, and so—

TS: I see.

TM: —I got all my friends to come [unclear]. [both chuckle]

TS: Hey, no, it worked.

TM: Yeah, and I mean it was easy because they were black. So because they were black they were able to do it, and I—I mean, I used to encourage people. I've never felt like my race or my gender has been a hindrance to me; I have always used it to my advantage, because I know there's Affirmative Action [employment programs designed to remedy discriminatory hiring practices of members of minority groups] but I also do have the credentials to back it up.

TS: Yes.

TM: So when I would make speeches in front of the school, I would make sure that I would say that I'm a black female to make sure that those black females will vote for me; just little things like that. But I'm not going to use it as a hindrance; I—I used it as a gift.

TS: Yeah. So to empower?

TM: Yeah, yes.

TS: This is, like, the mid-nineties, really.

TM: Right.

TS: In that time—

TM: I graduated in '98, yes.

TS: Ninety-eight, okay.

TM: Yes.

TS: Very interesting. Well, what kind of subjects did you really like in—in the classes that you had?

TM: I always wanted to be a actress when I grow—grew up.

TS: Really?

TM: I mean—Yeah. Since I can remember that's what I had wanted to be, so anything dealing with performing, I—I did it. Coming up through school it was chorus because they always put on performances, and then in high school I did drama as long as I could. They only offered it for three years at my school. But I'm—I'm kind of good—[chuckles] kind of good in that, but I haven't done that in so long.

TS: Well, so what—what have you been in?

TM: Well, I—They actually told me I'm better at, like—at directing, but I would be in—I always wonder why my teacher didn't put me in, like, lead roles, but looking back, I see why she put me in certain things. [It probably wouldn't even know?] what the certain plays were but she would always put me in a cer—It would be a standout role, not necessarily lead role, but one that you would remember.

TS: Yes.

TM: Like you'd be, "I remember that—that girl up there."

TS: Right.

TM: So she would put me—

TS: Like somebody who steals the show or something.

TM: Right, right.

TS: Yes.

TM: She would put me in those roles because normally—Well, back then, especially when I was a freshman in high school, I seemed very quiet, I didn't talk too much, but we had to do a monologue for class. We practiced and practiced and practiced these monologues and—but you just practicing—just sitting—like were doing—sitting at a table just reading it, so you don't get to see it until they actually perform it. So I remember the first day that I performed this—my first monologue in class and I blew everybody away because they weren't expecting that to come from me.

TS: Because you're the shy—shy, quiet—

TM: Yeah.

TS: —kind of person.

TM: Yeah.

TS: Yeah.

TM: And so, that's where it all began and—But when I get up in front of a room—I don't have any problems with getting up in front of a room of people; I don't even really like to prepare, I just do it.

TS: Yeah.

TM: I just do it. So I have no problems with doing speeches or getting up in front of people; I don't have—I don't have a problem with it. So that used to be my favorite subject: drama. History; I love history; love it; love it. I like to know about the history that's not in the books. I want to learn—If you tell me about one person, I want to know, like, the little things about them that made them tick. Last year I got to go to the Martin Luther King [Jr.] historical museum in Atlanta. [The Martin Luther King, Jr. National Historical Site] Oh man, if you've never been—

[Speaking Simultaneously]

TS: I have not.

TM: —you've got to go; you've got to go. You tour his—his childhood home, and it's, like, the tour guide there telling the story like they lived with Martin Luther King. [chuckles] But they were telling just little stories; Martin Luther King was a little hellion when he was a child, and you wouldn't think stuff like this. He jumped out of the top window of the house one time, almo—almost broke his leg. It's just, like, little things like that. You wouldn't think that this person that was all about civil rights and all this about brotherhood was out terrorizing people [both chuckle] as a child.

TS: He grew into the man he became.

TM: Right, right, right, right. So that's those things that I love about history; I love history. So pretty much those two subjects. Science; I loved science, too, but I didn't really get into that until later. I like astronomy but as—I took that in college at GTCC [Guilford Technical Community College, Greensboro, NC] and, boy, that was probably the hardest subject I ever had to go through. I love it but it was, like, the hardest subject ever.

TS: Tough.

TM: So, yeah, those are the things I like.

TS: Well, when you were—So when you're growing up and you're in High Point, and you're in this gifted class—

TM: Yes.

TS: —pretty much through your whole school—

TM: Yeah.

TS: —years.

TM: Yeah, yes.

TS: What kind—What did you think about your future? What did you think was possible for you to do with your life?

TM: I had no idea.

TS: Did you think about it at all?

TM: I thought that I was going to be a teacher. I still even—I—I don't know if I've grown up yet to know what I want to be, even at this point, because I still don't know. I've always

thought that I might want to be a teacher because I do like sharing knowledge with people. I guess that's what I thought when I was getting out of school, but I really wasn't focused, and one of my teachers even told me that, because I wasn't really applying to a lot of schools and he was very surprised that I wasn't. I actually applied here and I applied to UNCW [University of North Carolina at Wilmington], and I ended up going to UNCW but I dropped out. I didn't know—I really didn't. I didn't know what I—I wanted to do.

TS: Just wasn't ready for college yet?

TM: I don't—I don't guess so, but I really—I didn't get the support from my family that other people got, being with—having a single mother. And then I decided to go all the way down to Wilmington to get away from home and I still need rides to get back home, though, [both chuckle] for Christmas or something like that, and it would just be issues and—Like, my dad's a truck driver, and he used to just talk junk about coming to pick me up, and I'm like, "You drive a truck so what does it matter coming down here." And he would drive down to Wilmington; that was one of his delivery points.

TS: So it wasn't out of his way.

TM: Yeah, so it was just I didn't get support from my family. It was like they expected me to do it—to do certain things—but I didn't get the support in behind it; like, it was expected of me to go to college because of how I did in school.

TS: Yes.

TM: But it was no encouragement, like, "What are you doing to get into school?" or, "What do you want to be?" It was never asked in my hou—household, never.

TS: You were on your own—

TM: Yes.

TS: —to fill out applications and figure out financial aid and—

TM: Yes.

TS: —everything like that?

TM: Yes.

TS: Did it seem a little overwhelming maybe?

TM: It—Yeah, probably was; it probably was back then. I—I mean, I was raised pretty much to be independent. Well, I—or it maybe turned out that way, for me to be—because I'm

very independent; like, I don't even like to be helped by anybody; I'd rather try to do it myself first. So I was pretty much raised like that. And I would—There's one thing I would like to bring up that—as far as with my—my schooling—

TS: Yes, sure.

TM: —that was different than my brother and my sister's. My brother is very smart, very smart, and he pre—he went through the same things that I went through but I didn't know about this later—until—

[Speaking Simultaneously]

TS: He had—He went through the gifted programs?

TM: Yes, he went through the gifted programs. And so, whereas with me I decided to stay in, he—he made sure that the—the next text— test that he took, that he wouldn't score well on it; like, he did poorly on it on purpose so that he would be put in a lower class. He did that on purpose, and I didn't know this probably until a few years ago. And it is just so amazing how you never know when somebody else is going through the same thing. He went through the same thing I went through in transferring to another—to the middle school. But I—I'm—I decided to stay in and he decided not to, so it's this—it's this—

[Speaking Simultaneously]

TS: But it's not something you ever talked about as brother and sister.

TM: We never talked about it, because he—he was so many years older, and my brother, he went—he went to the navy, so by the time I was going into middle school he was going into the navy so it's not something that we were really talking about at that time, but it just—somehow it just came up in a conversation and I was like, "Oh, my gosh, this [is] what I went through too; it's what I went through." But he went through one path and I went through another. I decided to go through another, so.

TS: Why did he say that he wanted to go back—not pass the test so he'd be put back?

TM: So he would be put with his friends; with the other black children. It was the same way—He did—He—He—It was a culture shock for him when he went to middle school.

TS: He felt kind of isolated.

TM: Yes, yes, and I'm very sure that it would probably—because a lot of times females will—younger—it'll be more females doing these things than males. So he was probably one of the very few black males in there, because even when I was going through—

TS: That would have been, like, the mid-eighties, or—

TM: Yeah.

TS: Yeah.

TM: Yeah. I mean, because when I was going through, like I said, it was six of us but there were only two black males, so it was probably the same situation for him.

TS: Yes.

TM: And I can just imagine him having to go through it. But, I mean, I guess I was a little bit more accepting of it, and I was just, like, "I'm just going to get through it; I'll just get through it; I'll just get through it. Because I know when I go home I'm going to have these friends and they're going to be there, and—" But it—It's just amazing that me and him went through the same thing and had no idea about—about it till a little later.

[Speaking Simultaneously]

TS: No kidding. That's true.

TM: Yes.

TS: When you—When you went to Wilmington—

TM: Yes.

TS: —UNC-Wilmington, right?

TM: Yes.

TS: And you—Then you said how—how long before you dropped out?

TM: I was there for a year.

TS: Okay, a year.

TM: Yes.

TS: And so, then what did you do after that?

TM: I came back home and I worked a little bit. That's when I started thinking about joining the military. Now, when I was in high school I tried to do ROTC [Reserve Officers' Training Corps]. They had just started and I tried to be in that first class but I had to change my classes around because I was involved in so many things; I had—

[Speaking Simultaneously]

TS: Oh, right.

TM: —to change my classes around. So I was so upset by that—

TS: It just didn't work out—

TM: Yeah.

TS: —schedule-wise to do it.

TM: Yes.

TS: Okay.

TM: So—Oh, I was so upset by that because I really wanted to be in ROTC. I wanted—Because they started it—Our class would have been the first graduating class, so I so wanted to be in it and I was so mad to see everybody walking around in their uniforms and I didn't get a chance to.

TS: What was it that appealed to you about it?

TM: I don't—I don't even know. It was—I—I really don't know. It was the marching. I don't know. [chuckles] Because I was in the band.

TS: Okay.

TM: So—And our band was a military-style band, and so, I don't know, it was just something about—

TS: The discipline?

TM: Yes, it's something about it; I have no idea why I would have wanted to be in it.

TS: Were any of your friends doing it?

TM: Yeah, but like I said, it was the first year.

TS: Okay.

TM: So we were all—we were oblivious to what it would be like.

[Speaking Simultaneously]

TS: What it was going to be like?

TM: Yes.

TS: Right, okay.

TM: So—A—And, I mean, my brother was in the navy but he didn't—he hated it; he hated the navy. So I—I have no idea why I would have wanted to do—I don't—I have no idea.

TS: No background; your father wasn't in the service?

TM: No.

TS: No.

TM: Nobody close to me that was ever in the service. I have no idea why I chose to go in.
[laughs]

TS: Okay, so when you get back and you're, like—you're working and you start thinking about it again—

[Speaking Simultaneously]

TM: I started thinking about it because I was thinking about going back into school.

TS: Okay.

TM: And I was just always seeing things about doing military and school at the same time and it will help you get money. That was the big thing; getting money for school. And so, I thought about it and thought about it and I—I just never did it, and I had a friend, she went—she went in, went through basic training, and—and couldn't take it and came back, and so she was telling me not to go in.

TS: Was she in the army?

TM: Yeah, she went in the army.

TS: Okay.

TM: So I was like, "Wow," so I forgot about it, and then my mom passed away. And I think that was the big reason why I was like, "Okay, I'm going to go," because there was nobody there that I felt like—I mean, I don't think she would have had a problem with me going, maybe because I'm a female, but I don't think she would have had a problem with it. But after she passed I wasn't doing anything. I wasn't working, I wasn't—I—I was probably very depressed. I just wasn't going anywhere with my life so I was like, "It's either military or school and I don't have money for school right now, so—"

TS: Right.

TM: "—it's pretty much going to have to be the military." So that's pretty much what encouraged me to go. I—And I needed to get away from High Point, North Carolina for a little bit; I needed to see the world.

TS: And, like, a fresh start?

TM: Yeah.

TS: Clean slate sort of thing.

[Speaking Simultaneously]

TM: Yeah, yeah, pretty much.

TS: Where you don't know anybody and you can—

TM: Yes. Yeah, I needed that at the time, yeah.

TS: Well, how did you pick the army?

TM: Oh, I had a friend at the time. She—She had been in—I—I did have a lot of friends that were in, and out, but she—I worked with her, and she used to be in and she was considering going back in but she was flip-flopping because she had kids and she was like, "I'll go up to the recruiter with you and—whenever you go up, and I can go with you and I can tell you the things that they could be BSing [bull-shitting] about."

TS: Right.

TM: So she really encouraged me and we were supposed to come in on a buddy program but she didn't end up doing it. But I—I understood, because she has kids, but it was probably her because she was in the army before.

TS: Yeah. Did you consider any of the other services?

TM: I didn't really—The only other one was—was air force that I ever would have considered, and I—I didn't feel like doing that either. I—I—I guess because I felt army was going to be more work for me. I'm not a person that shies away from work so I guess I wanted that challenge. I felt like—probably felt like air force wasn't going to challenge me like the army was, so.

TS: You mean like—

TM: Physically and mentally.

TS: Okay, both?

TM: Yes.

TS: Okay.

TM: Yeah, so.

TS: Well, what—how about physically? Were you—Were you, like, in shape? Were you—Did you feel like you didn't have a problem with that?

TM: Not one bit.

TS: Oh, really? Okay.

TM: [laughs] I hate working out.

TS: Had you ever played any sports or—

TM: I ran track—

[Speaking Simultaneously]

TS: Oh, wow, okay.

TM: —but it was, like—it had been many years before, and I was a sprinter.

TS: What's "many"?

TM: Well, by the time I went in, it at least had to have been six, seven years since I had ran on the track.

TS: Okay.

TM: But I was a sprinter, not a long-distance runner.

TS: Gotcha.

TM: I was not in shape at all; I could probably—and I tried. It was probably three or four months bef—From the time I enlisted to the time I left I probably worked out twice during that time. [both chuckle] I could probably do, like, the bare minimum requirements.

TS: Yeah.

TM: I wasn't ever worried about my run or anything but I didn't think I ever had any upper body strength. A push-up? Are you kidding me? So I tried a few times and I say, "You know what?" They only want you—your initial, I think back then, was, like, three push-ups. I said, "As long as I can do that I'm fine," so I can do the three.

TS: Really?

TM: Yeah, I can do the three initial and that's all I worried about and I said, "They're going to whip me into shape [during that [unclear]?] [chuckles].

TS: I'll wait for that to happen, right?

TM: Right.

TS: [chuckles]

TM: Right. But I—

[Speaking Simultaneously]

TS: Don't want to do that prematurely.

TM: Yeah, the physical part was probably actually the one thing that I was most apprehensive about.

TS: Okay.

TM: And, I mean, I pretty much been the same size all my life so the recruiter was like, "You shouldn't have a problem; you're not, like, overweight or anything, so—"

TS: Yes.

TM: "—you shouldn't have a problem even if you don't work out. They'll work you out to where they"—Yeah, and they really did, so.

TS: Well then, did—did you sign up for a particular job or anything like that?

TM: Well, at that—at that time I thought that I wanted to go into computers so I—I asked them to put me into something dealing with computers. I wish I would have—You know, my recruiters really didn't school me on the different—

TS: What was available?

TM: —computer type—

TS: Yes, I see.

TM: —things that I could get into.

TS: Right.

TM: Because I didn't find out until later that I would have—I should have went into this other MOS [Military Occupational Specialty] instead.

TS: Which one?

[Speaking Simultaneously]

TM: At this point—

TS: You don't have to say the number, but what did it do?

TM: It—Well, it—I wanted to do—We—I—You know what? In—When I went through my schooling I couldn't really tell you what I really worked on because we worked on software and hardware.

TS: Okay.

TM: I think I would have rather worked on software, which is what I did end up doing when I went to my unit, but not enough that I felt like I really learned anything.

TS: Yes.

TM: Because everything I learned in my AIT [Advanced Individual Training], I didn't do; I didn't do any of it. I mean, we did troubleshooting for computers—desktop computers, things like that, but—

TS: Was it like a basic—

TM: Yeah, it was—

TS: —general course, like, a catch-all sort of thing—

TM: Yeah.

TS: —and then when you get to your unit it's more specialized for whatever they're doing?

TM: No, it was—

TS: No?

TM: Like, we worked on—We worked on old military equipment. Now, we did work on some desktops, but we worked on old military equipment, which I never even saw anytime. We—I mean, the things that I worked on was nowhere near what I learned in AIT. Now, I don't know if some units still used some of that old stuff, but I guess going to Fort Hood [Killeen, Texas], they're going to be at the top, and when I went there—when I was there they were just running this new operating system and all that, that I had to learn.

TS: So you were trained on the old equipment, is that what you're saying?

TM: Yes, right.

TS: And then when you went to your duty station—

TM: I had to do something totally different.

TS: —it was much newer equipment. I see, okay.

TM: Yes, and even the things that I was doing I didn't do at all in AIT. And then what happened was, I got put into an electronic maintenance shop, and so in that shop they

worked on radio, night vision, telephones; any kind of communications equipment like that. And so, I had to cross-train on a lot of that stuff, and pretty much what my job was, there was a program—It's like GPS [Global Positioning System] and communications together, so instead of just only seeing yourself on the screen you can see everybody in your convoy, and so you can do overlays on the screen and communicate through the screen where you could say, "Okay, that third vehicle, circle it. Move it over here to this coordinate," and they could see in that third vehicle where you—exactly where you wanted to put them. And so, it made communications easier. You kind of—You really didn't even have to talk if you didn't have to.

TS: Wow, pretty neat.

TM: Yeah.

TS: I didn't know they had anything like that.

TM: Yeah. Yeah. I mean, it was new when I—when I was coming out—coming in, and so like I said, I didn't learn any of that [both chuckle] in AIT. They just teach you, like, the old, old stuff—

TS: Yeah.

TM: —and then you have to learn the new stuff when you get to your unit.

TS: Well, let me ask you a little bit about basic training—

TM: Yes.

TS: —before we go into more of that. Oh, I—And also, I wanted to find out about—How did your—your dad, then, feel about you joining the army, and your brother and your sister?

TM: My dad, I don't know, we'll—we'll get—You can ask me about his reaction to Iraq—

TS: Okay.

TM: —when we get to that. But he really didn't have too much of a reaction to me going in.

TS: Okay.

TM: My brother, he was probably the last person I told, because when you're—

TS: Yeah.

TM: —when you're in high school you get those—ev—everybody sends you stuff. And so, when I was getting that stuff in high school he was like, "You better not ever go into the military," because he—he di—he went AWOL [Absence Without Leave] from the navy.

TS: Oh, he did?

TM: Yeah, but I think it was just the navy for him. I think if he would have went into a different service he probably would have liked it. I don't think he liked being on those boats.

But—So he was very—He really didn't want me to do it, and my sister, I mean, she's pretty much like, "Whatever you're going to do; whatever you're going to do." But I was more concerned about my brother because he had always told me not to do it.

TS: You're, like, on the bus leaving. Okay [unclear]—

TM: Almost, almost.

TS: Yeah. [both laugh]

TM: So, yeah, they were all pretty—they were all pretty okay with it. I know everybody—Because when I came in, I—I left to go to basic training a month after the war broke out in Iraq, so it was, like, leading up to that, I know everybody was very worried about it—about me going.

TS: Right.

TM: And I know about a month before I—I was pretty apprehensive, but I think everybody does when you're getting close to it. And my—my recruiter was like, "Oh, it'll be over with by the time you get out of all your training. You won't have to worry about it." I was there a year later. [chuckles] So—But—I—That actually was—That wasn't really what I—I was more concerned about leaving my family and leaving somewhere that I knew. I didn't know if I just made this hasty choice just because my mom wasn't around anymore.

TS: Yes.

TM: And I was going through a lot. So I—I was just apprehensive then, but everybody pretty mu—they sent me away.

TS: Were your par—Were your friends supportive?

TM: Yeah, pretty much. They didn't want me to go at—Everybody's pretty liberal that I—I'm around, so they're pretty much against war and everything like that, and so they didn't understand why I was going to go and fight in wars and—

TS: Yes.

TM: But I felt like I needed to do something bigger than myself, and actually have my life mean something, and even if I'm just going to be in for these three years, even if I'm not deploying anywhere, I can say that I was in the military, that I did something that's—My friends are never going to do that; they're never going to do that. So I felt like it would put me apart from everybody else instead of just being ordinary.

TS: Yes.

TM: So.

TS: Shape yourself a little.

TM: Yeah.

TS: However in a different way.

TM: Yes.

TS: So it was April of 2003 that you—you [unclear].

TM: Yes.

TS: Okay. Tell me a little bit about basic training then. How did that physical exercise go?

TM: It wasn't—I realized very early on the game; it's all a game. Because I overheard some drill sergeants say, "Oh, we're going to smoke them today, right? We're going to smoke them after they eat, right"?

And so, it was, like, that day the light clicked on and I said, "Just get through it, because it's all a game. It's all a game. They have to do this to us; we have to go through this; they have to tear us down to bring us back up."

So I was actually very amazed with the stuff. Not the PT [physical training] test but, like, going through obstacle courses—especially the ropes course. When you're up there so high, and it's just that one single rope, and the little itty-bitty net [chuckles] beneath you, that was probably the one thing that I was really excited about finishing because I'm never going to do this again. I—I've never done this and never going to do it again. And so, I really felt like I accomplished a lot when I did—when I did things like that; those kind of physical activities. When we had to rappel down a wall I'm like, "Wow, this is great." So, I—

TS: You're kind of excited about it, too, while you're doing it.

[Speaking Simultaneously]

TM: Yeah. I was more excited about it, and I'm the kind of person—I don't like to fail, so.

TS: Yes.

TM: Like I—I can remember going through the—rappelling down the wall. They—They teach you before you go up how to tie your knots and everything, and so before you rappel over they—the drill sergeant checks your knots. And so, he was looking at mine and he was like, "Morrison, who did your knots?"

And I was like, "I did, Drill Sergeant."

He was like, "Oh, I don't know if you're going to make it."

And I was, like, all upset and he was like, "I don't have time. I've got to send you over."

And I was like, "Wait a minute, wait a minute!" [laughs]

But he was just messing with me. But he could tell how upset I was and he was like, "Are you scared about going over?"

I said, "No, I just want to do it right."

TS: Right.

TM: That was my only thing; I just wanted to do it right.

TS: Right.

TM: So when he said my knots were wrong, I was like, "Oh, my God, I did something wrong already?"

TS: [chuckles]

TM: But that was just pretty mu—I was jus—I was excited about it.

TS: Yeah.

TM: Because—And all these people that hadn't done it before were—they're going through, too, and so it was just exciting for all of us. It wa—I—I—You probably know this, but basic training is probably the best part of the military. Not when you're going through it, but when you think back on it, that was, like, the most amazing ni—nine weeks of my life. It—It really was. I mean, you—you are put through so much physically and mentally, and just to make it through is—is great.

TS: Yes.

TM: It's great. So that was the best part of—Well, one of the best parts of my military experience was basic training, yes.

TS: Yeah. What about your mental—like, academic work that you had to do?

TM: Well, when we went to—Oh man, that was kind of hard when I went to AIT.

TS: Yes.

TM: It was kind of hard because you go through stuff so quick, and especially being in a program that was, like, math heavy and working on electronic equipment, and I—I just—Now, that, I did feel kind of lost, because I—I mean, I passed but you don't really feel like you know it, so that was my only thing about that, because really, like, one module you have one week on it and you—

TS: So you got through that day—that week—

TM: Yeah.

TS: —but how much did you retain?

TM: Yeah, I felt like I didn't really retain anything.

TS: Yeah.

TM: But then again, I didn't need it when I went to— [laughs]

TS: And maybe that's—they knew that, too—

TM: Yeah, yeah, probably so.

TS: —when they were training—

TM: I just needed to know basics of things that kind of helped me out. But, yeah, it was—going through that, it was kind of difficult, because I'm not—I wasn't used to learning things so quickly like that, and if you don't pass that module you get kept back. I'm not getting kept back; no, no, no; I need to leave here. [both chuckle] So that was my only big thing, just making sure that I pass everything the first time and getting through it; that was probably the hard—hardest part about AIT for me.

TS: Now, had you been away from home before?

TM: Yeah, I mean—Well, Wilmington. When I was away—

[Speaking Simultaneously]

TS: Oh, right.

TM: Yeah, when I was away at Wilmington I—like I said, it was—I didn't really get too much support so I would stay down there as long as I could, until they kick you out of the dorms. [chuckles]

TS: And now you're in—you're in Fort Jackson [Columbia, South Carolina] for your basic and then you went to Fort Gordon [Augusta, Georgia], so you're not really that far away.

[Speaking Simultaneously]

TM: Yeah, I'm not—I'm not that far.

TS: Yeah.

TM: My brother would come—When we would have vacations or four days or whatever he would come down to pick me up.

TS: Yeah.

TM: Yeah, and he did not mind at all. If I paid for his hotel room he would come down and pick me up. [both chuckle] So there was not a problem with him coming down to Georgia to come get me.

TS: Yeah.

TM: It wasn't a big deal, so.

TS: Well, now, how about, like—Do you remember the first time you put on the uniform?

TM: Yeah, that was a big deal. I was one of the fir—because I went to Fort Jackson, I was one of the first ones to get to the base training, out of our group, and so we're all like—They gave us PTs [physical training gear] first, and we were all, like, waiting and waiting, like, "When are they going to give us—" because back then there was BDUs [battle dress uniforms]—"When are they going to give us the BDUs?" That's when we were going to feel like we were really soldiers, but we had to wait until everybody got there so it was another day or two.

And I do remember going in, getting fitted for everything, and then finally getting that uniform and putting it on and it's just like—and it has my name on it, and you feel official, and that's how you start to respect the uniform. And you know that when you see people—Like, if I see people in fatigue it kind of gets to me a little bit, but I'm okay. [both chuckle] I'll be okay, but it—

TS: You've worked through that.

TM: Right, I worked through it, but it really started to make you respect the uniform, and even like today we—like for Veteran's Day, we wanted to encourage students to wear their uniforms but I know they're—some of them are not, like, physically, like—Like there's one guy, he has lon—a lon—long hair and a long beard and for him to get in his uniform, I don't want anybody have to say something to him, but he should be able to wear it on Veteran's Day. So that's—That's the respect you have for the uniform, that you have to really think about, "Should I be wearing it—Even though it's Veteran's Day I should be able to wear it." You— From day one you start to respect the uniform and what it means and you don't want to dis—disrespect it in any way. And so, I—I will say that I got that out of that first—that first time of putting it on it was a good experience; I enjoyed it.

TS: So you're not thinking anywhere along the line of—Your basic and then your advanced training, you're not thinking, "What am I—What did I get myself into?" That ever cross your mind; anything like that?

TM: Yes, at AIT. People were getting their duty—their duty stations and I hadn't gotten mine yet, but a friend, he did and his—he was going to be stationed in Alaska, and that's when I—I was like, "Wait a minute. They may put me in Alaska? Wait a minute!" And so, [chuckles] I think that was when I really felt like, "Oh my God, what did I get myself into? Am I going to have to go to Alaska?" They—I mean, they sent me to Fort Hood so that was, I guess, better. [both chuckle] I didn't have to deal with the cold.

TS: Right.

[Speaking Simultaneously]

TM: But—

TS: Did you have, like, a dream sheet? Did they you'd have choices or anything like that?

TM: They didn't really—This—This is why I really wish I would've had better recruiting, because what I was told was because I had a quote unquote "good" MOS [Military Occupational Specialty] that—and plus the time when I was going in I—they wouldn't have places for me, because I wanted to go to—down the road; I wanted to go down to Fayetteville.

TS: Yes.

TM: But Fort—They said Fort Bragg [Fayetteville, North Carolina] wouldn't have the spaces available by the time I got out of training—something like that—so I was just like—pretty much like, "Okay, I'll just go anywhere," but luckily I didn't have to go to

Alaska. [both laugh] That is the only place I'm like, "Thank you; thank you I didn't have to go there."

TS: There might have been a few other cold places they could have sent you to.

[Speaking Simultaneously]

TM: Yeah, it was—it was, but that's the pinnacle right there. [chuckles]

TS: Well, tell me a little about, then, Fort Hood—

TM: Yes.

TS: —and what it was like when you got there, and like a typical day or something.

TM: The—When I first got there my unit was actually going to training out in California; they call it NTC [National Training center]. Fort Irwin, I think, is out there; that's where they go. But they—The day that I got to my unit they were leaving. If I would have got there the day before they would have rushed me to go get my gear so I could have left the next day. So my first experience at Fort Hood was not a good one because there was nobody there.

TS: Everybody had gone?

TM: Everybody was gone, so for, like, a month I really—it—it was very lonely.

TS: They put you on, like, a temporary duty?

TM: Yeah. I mean, really not even that. I got to ta—they was like, "Go ahead and try to take classes," so I took little computer classes or a class for this or a class for that, that I could take, and that pretty much filled up my time, but at the end of the day, at five o'clock, close of business, I don't have anybody to hang out with. And, I mean, one lady, she kind of took me up under her wing, but she lived off camp—off post and she had children, so I didn't want to put her out for anything. But it was just very lonely that first month because nobody was there.

TS: So, like, you're—where—you're living in the barracks, right?

TM: Yeah, I was living in the barracks, so nobody was in the barracks.

TS: Right, because in the army you're like—you live in the same place with the people that you work with, right?

TM: Right.

TS: So it is literally empty, right?

TM: Yes, and then they were, like—the people that were left back weren't—were undesirable per—people; like, a lot of them might have been on extra duty or they were getting ready to get out because they had got in trouble, so there were—people were like—even—even though there's people in the barracks, you might not want to hang out with them.
[chuckles]

TS: Gotcha, gotcha.

TM: So yeah, it was just very lonely up in the barracks; I was very lonely. I was just waiting on them to get back [unclear]. So I don't know which would have been worse, me going out there and being around people that I didn't know or staying back. I did—I don't know which would—

TS: Yes.

TM: —which would have been worse, really.

TS: Yeah, you kind of in a tough spot there.

TM: Yes, yes.

TS: When they got back did it get better?

TM: A little bit, beca—When you—When you are a—an E-1 or E-2 [rank of private], you pretty much are put on any kind of duty they want you to be on. So they got back, and pretty much immediately when they got back I got put on different duties here and there. I was never in our shop; I was on—I was on some kind of guard duty. And so, that's kind of how it was for the first few months when they got back. I didn't even really get to—I—I was starting to get upset with myself for signing up—

TS: Right.

TM: —because you get put on all these duties and you don't even get to do your job and—I mean, I know that's the process but it was just—I guess because I ca—when I came there weren't people there and then I still can't meet these people who—like, I would go to morning formation, I'm looking down the line, I don't even know these people. I don't even know—because I had to go to some random duty later on, so it was just—

TS: Tough to bond with people?

TM: Yeah, it—it really was; it really was tough to bond. I felt very lonely; I really did; I did, but it was just the circumstances. But I think as we—as we got closer to deployment we had to take a lot of classes, things of that nature—especially for us, because of the equipment that we worked on, everybody in our shop—we had to make sure everybody was trained on it, no matter their MOS. We went on a lot of classes together, so we got to learn a lot and I finally was able to interact with—with my squad. Man, they were great, too, I'm so glad.

TS: What was the mix of, like, men and women?

TM: Well, in my—in my company—was a maintenance company—

TS: Okay.

TM: —so it was pretty much mostly mechanics. We were—Other than, like, our—our head platoon—our alpha platoon—everyone was pretty much mechanics except for us. So it was mostly males. The most females out of our whole company were probably in my squad.

TS: Oh, yeah.

TM: Yeah.

TS: How many were in there?

TM: One, two, three, four, five; like five of us. It was five women that—in my platoon, it was another girl [unclear], and then there was maybe, like, five—it might—if it was twenty women in—It might have been twenty women out of the whole company, if that, so.

TS: And how many's in a company?

TM: At least a hundred in ours. So, yeah, twenty women.

TS: A small percentage.

TM: Yeah.

TS: Yes. How was the racial mix?

TM: That was a—Now, I will say that is the one thing about the military that I really enjoyed; it's very, very diverse. I always had a commander or a sergeant major that was a minority, whether they be female, black, Asian, whatever; I will say that about the military. And so, in my units there were actually a lot of Hispanics. Now, it probably was because we're in Texas, too, but I had a lot of Hispanics in my company, a lot of blacks. It was very—It was probably more minority than anything else.

TS: Top-heavy on the minority?

TM: Yeah.

TS: Mi—And so, the Caucasian whites are, like, the minority.

TM: Yeah, yeah, and that could also be because there were mi—mechanics too. I would say in my—Because we considered ourselves the smarter ones [chuckles] because we—we worked on computers and radios and stuff like that, so—and we—you also had to have a high GT [General Technical] score to have been in one of our MOSs, so I will say there were more white folk in our—in our squad, in our section, than compared to other sections.

TS: To the rest of the—

TM: Yes.

TS: —company. Gotcha.

TM: Yes, yes. We had more diversity in our section than any other one.

TS: Now, you had mentioned you're—You're going to deploy. What—What did you learn about—When did you learn that you were going to deploy?

TM: It was always kicked around, but really—

TS: Because [the] Iraq [War] is already going on and the Afghanistan War—

[Speaking Simultaneously]

TM: Right, right.

TS: —is already going on.

TM: Right. It—It was—It was back and forth, back and forth, and then I think when they really—like, very soon after they got back from training it was pretty much set in the stone that, yes, we were going. Now, that December, that's when they captured [President of Iraq] Saddam [Hussein].

TS: That was December of—

TM: Of '03.

TS: Two thousand and three, okay.

TM: Yeah, so that December they captured Saddam, so I remember—I can remember my friends being like, "Oh, my God, you won't have to go to Iraq," and I was like, "No, just because you get the leader does not mean that [chuckles] the situation is diminished."

So I—I knew we were still going to go; I knew we were still going to go. And so, yeah, by that December I was—we were like—we knew; we knew, and we left in March; left in March. So we pretty much knew that whole time, because I think I got to Fort Hood around September or October, so by the holidays we knew for sure.

TS: So you told me to ask you about your dad's reaction to—

TM: He—We're not close—me and my dad are not close—so even though he lives around I've just never been close to him like my brother and sister were. They grew up with him, I did not, so it's always been something between us. So he—The day—We got pushed back several times, so the day that—the first—

TS: Your deployment date—

TM: Yeah.

TS: —got pushed back?

TM: Well, it was—it was like—more like a twelve hour—They kept pushing us back for twelve hours.

TS: Oh, okay.

TM: Twelve hours, twelve hours—

[Speaking Simultaneously]

TS: When you're—

TM: —on the day.

TS: Oh, oh.

TM: Yes, so—

TS: Okay, well that's—

TM: Yeah, that was weird, I mean, because we were living out—out of duffel bags; those of us that lived in the barracks, we were living out of duffel bags. So it was—When we were supposed to have left the first time, I talked to my dad and he was crying on the phone, and that was probably the closest I felt to him. The only time that I felt like he cared was when I was going over. He talked about he didn't want me to go, and he knew that we didn't have a good relationship but he still loved me, so that was—that really got to me because I didn't really think he cared.

TS: Yes.

TM: Or maybe he was just showing that he cared; I don't know. My dad's kind of an emotional person so I don't know if it's just that—because he's just emotional. So that was probably one of the few times I felt close—close to my dad, was at that point. Now, when I was deployed I didn't ever get a letter, so I don't know how you want to take that. [chuckles] And—Because as soon as we got there—Because, like a month later, it was his birthday, and my sister, when I talked to her, she was like, "Oh, you know it's your dad's birthday coming up." I made sure to send—Because we had that interaction, I made sure to send him something for his birthday, and that was at the very beginning of the deployment. I never got anything else back from him, so, yeah.

TS: Was he ever much of a letter writer or anything like that?

TM: I mean, I wouldn't know, but he could send a postcard or something.

TS: Yes.

TM: Everybody else sent something, so.

TS: How about your brother and sister, and your friends?

TM: Yeah, they—My friends are all—They're just not supportive of a war, so I don't know; I didn't get too much feedback from them while I was deployed. I mean, I always talked to them but you're in a whole other world, and there were certain times when you—when you're over there where I would really—because I would call at the same times—I would really make up excuses not to call, because they were going through so many problems and then I would have to hear about it. I don't want to hear it. I'm over here—

TS: You've got something else going on.

TM: Yeah, I have something totally bigger than what's going on with you.

TS: Yes.

TM: And I—I keep to myself a lot—a lot of my feelings, a lot of what's going on with me, and so when you're calling back home and you hear all these stories about what's going on

that's bad, it's like, "Well, when am I going to have a chance to talk about what's going on here?" And so, it was just I never—My family doesn't really know what really went on over there. My friends don't really know. I—If something comes up I might bring it up, but I—

TS: Nobody asks?

TM: No, because they probably think I'm going to be upset about it, but I'm really not; I'm really not. I would have liked to have shared it while I was there.

TS: Right.

TM: But I didn't get a chance to because everybody had their things going on, so I was just like whatever.

TS: Did you keep a journal or anything?

TM: No, I did not. I regret that because I—I've had conversations with friends that I've been over there with and things have happened that I totally forgot about, and I don't know if I did that on purpose or it was just my subconscious—I didn't want to deal with it. So I kind of wish I did, but even in the realization of some of the things—like, there was something me and my friend were talking—I went to visit a friend over Thanksgiving and she was like, "Remember that time that thing happened?"

I was like, "Oh my God, I totally forgot about that," and it was a very significant thing that happened; it was very significant. We were—We were—Our—Where we were at on our camp was kind of near our cafeteria, and so me and my friend were going to dinner and rockets started coming. Now, mortars you can't hear them until they hit, but rockets you hear them coming because you hear the whistle. That was probably the scariest thing for me over there. I don't want to hear it coming; I don't; I don't want to hear it coming.

So the rockets were coming, and then they were very close to us because we could see them hit. And so, by this point in the deployment we were—everybody pretty much had walkie-talkies, so if—if something was going on, like mortar or rockets coming in, you had to check in with your people to let them know that you're okay. And so, since we were walking to the cafeteria we didn't know whether to walk to the cafeteria—

TS: Right.

TM: —or run back, because our cafeteria was thi—that's probably what they were aiming for.

TS: Yes.

TM: Because out of all the buildings it was a big white tent; just a big old target. So we didn't know whether to go ahead and run that way or run back to where we stayed so—and I remember we—I was so scared. That was probably the only time where—Well, no, the

first time I heard rockets was probably the—another time when I was real scared. But we were trying to dodge. We were trying to really dodge and we didn't know where to go and it—that was probably the scariest point.

TS: Where did you end up at?

TM: I think we ended up going back to—beca—Like I said, the cafeteria was just—

TS: A big target?

TM: Yeah, it was. I don't know how many times it hit our cafeteria.

TS: Did you feel like you were prepared for that kind of experience?

TM: It's kind of surreal because you don't—I—I'm the kind of person I don't really think, I just deal with it; I just go with the flow. So I never thought about dying; I never thought about having to do combat; I never thought about those things. I just was like, "If the time comes and I have to react, I'll react." So I don't feel like I was trained properly; I really don't, because I'm fresh out of training. I have only been in the military not even a year by the time we got over there, and so I—I really didn't feel like I got any true preparation.

Now, you—when we went you have to go to Kuwait first, and we had, like, a three-day training in Kuwait where we learned how to shoot from vehicles; yeah, we had to learn how to do that. Just different things. Yeah, driving and shooting. [laughs] Yes, I was driving and shooting; that was crazy. With an M-16 they teach you how to do it; the proper way to do it.

TS: What's the proper way?

TM: It's like you have—you—You're driving with this and then you have—you have to steady it.

TS: So you've got your left hand on the steering wheel.

TM: Yes.

TS: Okay.

TM: And then you have to—you kind of have to lay your weapon on—

TS: Like on your—on your elbow or [unclear]?

TM: Yes. yeah.

TS: Okay.

TM: And, like, you brace it with this, and also you have your—your window is right there, too, so that also helps to brace it.

TS: Okay.

TM: So they—they teach you to brace it with that and you have it over your shoulder like—

TS: So you—you're just driving like that.

TM: You're just driving, and I mean, you're not aiming. [chuckles] It's just pretty much to cover fire.

[Speaking Simultaneously]

TS: To have cover?

TM: Right, yes. So, yeah, that—we had the three-day training on that.

TS: Was that like a little bit of a wake-up to where you were at?

TM: Yeah, because while we were going through this training my—my sergeant—my section sergeant, as a matter of fact—he—I was driving him, and he said—he asked me—he said, "If we get into something, will you be able to do it?"

And I was like, "Yeah, yeah. That's why I came in the military." I mean, you don't know until you're in that particular situation, but I feel like I had the mental capacity to do that—Excuse me—to defend myself if I—if I needed to, and pretty much everybody felt like I was the tough one, because I—I could take stuff; like, I'm pretty calm and collected in certain situations. Normally if—if something goes wrong people come to me.

The—It was, like, the third day we were there. One of the first few days we were there on our camp and we were sitting outside, it's—I mean, just chilling outside and we suddenly hear mortars. It's the first time we hear something since we've been there. And so, my friend was sitting—my friend, she was like, "Oh my God, did you hear that? Oh my God; oh my God!"

And I was pretty much like, "Well, it's not hitting right here so—and they haven't told us to get our gear on, so I'm just going to sit here and just sit." [chuckles]

TS: Keep doing what I'm doing.

TM: Yeah, I'm just going to keep doing what I'm doing. And that would pretty much ha—Any time that there was, like, some mortars or something like that would come in I would be the calm one in the room, because I'm like, "Okay, I'm just going to—What—What can I do? There's nothing I can do for mortars or something like that. I'm not going to run

outside. [chuckles] So I'm just going to sit here and hope they end and hope none come this way," because, I mean, what else can you do?

TS: What—Was there worries by any of the men that the women weren't going to perform properly because it was a war zone, or—

TM: Yes. We—Before we got deployed they were talking about putting females with some cavalry scouts to help search females when they go out on patrols, and one of my friends, she really wanted to do it and I was like, "Don't do that."

And when we got to Kuwait they were really like, "We need some females for that." Like, "You'll be tasked out to do this the whole deployment."

And I really just didn't—I didn't want to be the only female in a male—I didn't; no. So that's kind of the only reason why I didn't do it, and I just felt like it would really suck. [chuckles] And—But my friends, they ended up doing it and it was a little bit of apprehension, because they say females have never been in combat situations, but the fact that we're over there puts you in a combat situation so I don't know what people are talking about, to say that women have never been in combat situation, but my friends went out on patrols with cavalry scouts. They did the same things that they did. When they got fired on they had to deal with it.

TS: They fired back?

TM: Yes, fired back, and they were with them the whole deployment, so—And I'm talking about—

[Speaking Simultaneously]

TS: So they're with the cavalry so they're helping[?] it.

TM: Yes, yes, yes. [chuckles] And so—And I'm talking about—Especially one of my friends, she is—I don't even think she was five foot [tall], if—she might be a hundred pounds soaking wet, and she was one of the girls that was—that were out there and—

TS: And she did it.

TM: She did it; she did it. And I'm a little—Really, like I said, I just felt like it would suck; which it did. They had, like, crappy hours they had to be out, and really that was the only reason why I didn't do it, is because I didn't want to do the harder work. [laughs] But it's not like I didn't have the mental capacity to do it; it's not like I didn't feel like if I got—ever got fired upon that I wouldn't ever be able to do it.

TS: Yes.

TM: It was just—

TS: It wasn't that you were scared to do it.

TM: Yeah, it wasn't—it wasn't that I was scared, because I did go on a few, but I mean, we didn't run any[?], we just went out to some family homes, but I—I didn't—I never felt—

TS: Did you have to search any women—

TM: Yes.

[Speaking Simultaneously]

TS: —and do that sort of thing? What was that like?

TM: Yeah, and we—we—It was kind of crazy because of the hygiene situation, and—Yeah, and then—

TS: What does that mean, Tina? I don't know what that means.

TM: The hygiene situation. You don't really want to touch them but you have to.

TS: Okay.

TM: Because they don't bathe the same way that we do, and then it's just awkward, especially for the more traditional women; they have on so much. And then I know it's awkward for them to be touched by somebody else, so it was just really awkward situ—it was very awkward situations. Whereas here, when you go into search—certain situations you know that you might be patted down. They don't—just don't react in the same way.

TS: They don't have the same expectation for—

TM: Right, yes.

[Speaking Simultaneously]

TS: —a search.

TM: Yeah, and they—

TS: Different cultural—

TM: —don't think that you're going to be thorough, and—

TS: Who's "they"?

TM: The women, or the men. They don't think that you're going to be thorough, like—

TS: Oh, I see.

TM: They don't think that you're—They just think that you're going to go through real quick and that it's going to be—No, we have to check. [chuckles]

TS: Oh.

TM: That's why there is a female checking a female—

TS: Got it.

TM: —because, yes, we have to check, and before we got deployed we were actually—they taught us women—they took us to the side and taught us and we had to teach others how to search properly. And now, I thought that was really amazing that they did this because we had to tell the guys how to search too. So—And, I mean, they put us in dis—different situations, like how to search vehicles, how to do—search the person, and I—I would always—because I'm real sneaky, so I would always be the one—

TS: Hiding something?

TM: Yeah, hiding something, and I would always pick some awesome places. And not even, like [chuckles]—not even like up underneath a bra or something like that, but I would just pick some awesome places and you would never look; you never would.

TS: They—So they wouldn't get them and—

TM: They wouldn't get them; they wouldn't get them. And so, we—I felt really lucky to be on that little detail right there, being a woman, and having to tell the guys how to search. That was really great; that was really great.

TS: And then when they didn't find it you're like—

TM: Yes. Yeah, "See."

TS: You're not so good at this.

TM: Yeah, right, right.

TS: Interesting.

TM: So it—I really liked going through that training but—Yeah, I went one year—Actually doing it, it's kind of awkward, and like I said, with—the—the more traditional women, they have on so much that it's, like, kind of hard to search, because you're like, "Is that part of the fabric or is that—" You don't want to disrespect anybody.

TS: So what would be an example of, like, when you had to actually do a search? What—When would those opportunities present themselves?

TM: Well, especially when they're coming into the gate. Checkpoints; if somebody felt somebody was—a car was suspicious.

TS: Not everybody got checked?

TM: No. At checkpoints, like, they would just be checking to make sure you had identification on you or something like that. If—Excuse me—If you for some reason looked like your vehicle was modified in some kind of way to where it could be made into a IED [improvised explosive device] they might pull you over. I mean, just, like, rand—it would just be random; sometimes it would be random how we would pick vehicles out. So, yeah, usually we would pull them out and search them and, of course, if they didn't have anything they could go. I—

TS: Did you ever find anything?

[Speaking Simultaneously]

TM: Not—Not when I went out; not when I went out.

TS: But your unit did?

TM: Yes. Yeah, the guys that went out, they—they did sometimes. It would just be weapons, but they would have to make sure that they would have a weapons card on them; they used to have to have—carry weapons cards. They can have—Because that's how they celebrate different things, like—What was going on? It was, like, some soccer game going on and it was Iraq against somebody else, and they were, like—they straight up told us—they said, "You're going to get a lot of shooting this evening because they're—especially if Iraq wins," and so—but's that's just how they cel—

TS: Like the World Cup or something?

TM: Yeah, it was something like that going on, so that's how they—just how they celebrate; wedding, sporting event.

TS: Gunfire?

TM: Yeah, with gunfire. We may use fireworks over here but they'll shoot; they'll shoot. So you just have to ma—had to make sure that if they did have a weapon they had a weapons card on them. Just like how we—this country, a lot of people are all into guns and being able to protect themselves, they're the same way over there. They want to have the same rights that we have, too, and we—I mean, we didn't have any problem with it, you just had to make sure that you had your weapons card.

TS: Interesting. What were the living conditions like for you?

TM: We stayed at one of the better camps.

TS: What was it called?

TM: Camp Cuervo [now called Camp Rustamiyah].

TS: Okay, that's right.

TM: It was named after the first—the—the unit that was there before us, the first person that died on—from their camp, that's who they named it after. It's probably went through several, several names since, before and after—

TS: Right.

TM: —we were there. But—

TS: Where in Iraq was it located?

TM: It was in Baghdad.

TS: Oh, it was in Baghdad, okay.

TM: Yes, yes. Now, when I—Our living conditions were actually okay. They were trying to fix up the camp more, so it was very cramped at the beginning and at the very end because we were leaving; we were trying to compact things. But—Now, I think for most of the deployment I stayed in a room. I think it was, like, four or six of us, but the room was actually kind of big.

TS: What kind of room? Like in a—

TM: It was just a big old room.

TS: Like in a building?

TM: Yeah, it was—that—it was kind of like—

[Speaking Simultaneously]

TS: Already [unclear].

TM: Excuse me. [unclear]

TS: The army didn't make it? It was—

TM: No.

TS: Oh, okay.

TM: It was a old, like, officer training camp for Saddam.

TS: I see.

TM: They had, like, old rem—You could still see some of the old remnants of it; so—some of the old shrines that they had. When we first got there they still had some of the stuff there, so it was, like, old shrines to Saddam and all this other stuff. So, yeah, it was a old military training camp for them. So what they—Our—Where we lived at, it was kind of like motel sty—style.

TS: Okay.

TM: So you could get to your rooms from the outside. That's what we were trying to fix up, and so we ended up staying in them.

TS: To make it more secure?

TM: Yeah. So we ended up staying—And see, my company, since most of them were mechanics and they work at a motor pool, we—we—our living area was the motor pool where they keep the vehicles and repair them. So we were kind of secluded from the rest of the camp, which we liked; we liked it. And we knew if somebody was coming around this way you either going to get a vehicle fixed or, "What are you doing over—What are you doing over here?" [both chuckle]

TS: Right.

TM: So we had—we had a good—we—we had a—Oh, yeah, and there—while we were fixing it up, they was like, "Oh, put some basketball courts out there." We put basketball courts,

we had a volleyball pit with the sand and everything, so we—we—we had it pretty good compared to other people I know. Other people, it sucked. We had—We did have laundry service there. Some people were able to get some washers and dryers. I don't know how they did it but they got it. [chuckles] So some—somehow—

TS: So you had good electricity.

TM: Yeah, our electricity—

TS: Washer—I mean, like, showers and—

TM: Yeah.

TS: Traditional showers or—

TM: They were trailer—Well, when they were fixing up the area that we were staying in they—there were some inside showers but they didn't work as well as, like, the trailers that they had.

TS: Yes.

TM: Now, the trailers, they were kind of touch and go, too, because the trailers, if the hot water runs out that's it for the day. And even if it was hot water, it would just—it would be coming out in spurts so—Yeah, five minute showers. We really did; five minute showers. If you had to use the bathroom it was pretty much Porta-Potties. That was pretty much it. The one—Like I said, the ones that we tried—the bathrooms we tried to get on the inside, they really didn't come until later in the deployment so we didn't get to experience that.

TS: In your, like, housing units and then—

[Speaking Simultaneously]

TM: Yeah, because they were fixing them up so—

TS: I see.

TM: —as we were there, so we really didn't get into those things until, like, mid to late deployment.

TS: Got it.

TM: Yeah, we were pretty much just using the trailers and Porta-Potties most of the time.

TS: What was some of the hardest things you had to deal with there?

TM: When I first got there—And now, I told you I did not want to be permanently on that—

TS: The cavalry?

TM: Yeah, I did not permanently want to do that, but since the first day, I was so angry. I'm thinking I'm going to be working in my shop. No, no. They start putting people on details, and—but the detail that I had to be on was tower guard. That was probably the hardest thing I ever did because it was boring. I did it for six months; I thought I was going to go crazy standing out in the tower and just looking out and waiting for something to happen. Yes. Two, four hour shifts a day.

TS: Were you by yourself or somebody else with you?

TM: At least there was somebody in there with me. You would have to have a partner, yes. So that was the only part that made it okay. And we would do little thin—Like—Like I said, everybody had walkie-talkies so everybody'd get on the same walkie-talkie station and be talking to each other at night. [chuckles] But that's how we got through it, because those—it was probably one of the harder on you mentally, because we never—you never got eight full hours of sleep. I worked a 10:00 [pm] to 2:00 [am] shift. We would have to be there by probably 9:30, and then, of course, you never get off on time and so you never got a full eight hours of sleep. I never got a full eight hours of sleep at any time. There was never really any kind of re—relief or switching out of people.

So I did that for six months and they were, like, "Okay, do you want to go on your R&R [rest and relaxation] to come home, or what do you want to do?"

And I was, like, "I'm going to go ahead and go home for two weeks."

And so, when I got back my section sergeant was like, "You know what? We really made a mistake because we had you on tower guard for six months and if we continue to keep you on tower guard we just realized that nobody is going to be in the shop when we get back from Iraq. Everybody's going to be either getting out, or they're going to be moving on to another duty station."

It was only going to be three of us that were still going to be there and we were all on other duties.

TS: Oh, so nobody was—were doing the work.

TM: Right. No—Nobody—

[Speaking Simultaneously]

TS: Or nobody was trained to do the work—

TM: Right.

TS: —is what I mean, yeah.

TM: The—The—With the new folk—We were all on duties, and so there was nobody new that could learn this stuff that could carry it on.

TS: Oh, gotcha.

TM: So he—And especially me because, like I said, I told you what I worked on.

TS: Yes.

TM: So we—Mine was very important; mine—like, because I was the hub of that; my MOS was the hub of that. And so, he was like, "We really did make a mistake because nobody—none of—you all new folk are not going to know how to do your jobs when you get back to the States." So he was—He gave me a choice when I came back: "Do you want to go back to do tower guard or do you want to come back to shop."
I said, "I—I'll come back to the shop."

TS: Yes.

TM: And so, it's—I still didn't get a lot out of that, because I would still be—if there was a duty that came up I would be the one.

TS: Because you're the green, young—

TM: Yeah, right.

TS: —lowest ranking probably—

TM: Right, I'm the lowest ranking so I'm the first one to go. Also, I was so—Now, when I went on my leave, I was like, "Wow," looking at the countryside. I had never—I had not left camp for six months; I had been on that camp for six months.

TS: Did you have any days off?

TM: No. Six months every day on the same camp doing the same job.

TS: Not a single—Not a—

TM: Not—

TS: —like a half-day or anything?

TM: Nope, nope, nope, no, no, no. My first day off was when I went on that leave.

TS: Yeah, and—and so where did you go for leave?

TM: I came back home.

TS: Okay.

TM: Came back home.

TS: So you're driving through the countryside on your way out?

TM: Yeah, on my way out and I'm like, "You know what? I have not even experienced anything." I couldn't tell you—They talk about these other camps that are near; I wouldn't know. I don't know this street. [chuckles]

So I—I was—It was actually kind of—It was a coincidence that he said something because I was thinking this when I was leaving to come back home. And so, I'm like, "You know, I'm not getting a—an experience out of that—this [unclear]. I'm going to be a tower guard this whole time? I'm never leaving the camp?"

And so, when he was like, "Okay, we'll put you back into the—back into working."

And I was like, "Oh, man, great. This is going to be great," because it—things that we could not fix, we used to have to take them to civilians which were at another camp that was two hours away, so I was, like, "Oh my God, I'll be able to leave camp, because that's part of my job, to take it to the civilians."

So every time there was a convoy going and we were supposed to go, they always had me on some duty or it would always be some excuse and I really, really felt like it was because I was female; I really do. That was—I—It was always some kind of excuse. And so, I went above my NCOs [non-commissioned officers] and I went straight to my first sergeant and I said, "Anytime—" I said, "First of all, if they ask for a girl to go out with the cav [cavalry] scouts, if they need another girl, I'm going to do it. Second of all, if you're ever going out on a convoy I want to go because I'm so tired of being on this camp," like, "I'm not getting any kind of experience out of this—I know I'm a soldier; let me be a soldier." So my first sergeant really—he probably saved me from going crazy, because every convoy from then on I was able to go on.

TS: Really?

TM: With him, yeah.

TS: How—What part of your deployment were you at [when you talked to him]?

TM: I mean, it was—it was closer to the end; it was closer to the end; a few months before we left. But even that small point was just something to me because I felt like I was going

crazy just seeing the same parts of the—I felt like a sitting duck. If mortars or rockets come in, it doesn't matter where you are. I—I kind—That was making me upset. I felt like, if I'm a soldier let me go and do soldier-type things like going out on convoys. I mean—And I'm not even doing my job—Every time we—I have to learn how to deal with civilians, and what needs to go to civilians. I have to do these same things—things in the States, so I really need to learn this; I need to have a rapport with them; I need to know what I'm doing. So I just took the responsibility myself and I went above my superiors. I didn't follow my chain of command and they probably hated me for it, but I needed to get off that camp.

TS: Had you ever talked to, like, the NCOs before you went to the first sergeant—

[Speaking Simultaneously]

TM: Yeah, I mean—

TS: —and said, "Hey, what's going on?"

TM: Right, and I would tell them—And it would be, "Hey, tomorrow when they're—instead of this person going, can I go?"

"Oh, yeah, sure." Then somehow something would happen to where I wouldn't go.

TS: And you wouldn't go?

TM: Yeah. I remember on my birthday—

TS: Yes.

TM: —on my birthday, they were supposed to be going on a trip up to—the place was called [Logistics Support Area] Anaconda—the camp—and so they were going up to Anaconda and they were taking a Black Hawk [helicopter]. And I was supposed to go on there on my birthday. I was, like, "Oh my gosh, I'll be able to go on a Black Hawk on my birthday," so they put me on a duty. Yes, on my birthday, yeah.

TS: You must have been very upset about that.

TM: I was very upset, and I think that was when—I think that incident made me go to my—

[Speaking Simultaneously]

TS: That was the trigger to say—

TM: Yes.

TS: "I'm going to—"

TM: Yeah, because I really felt it was because I was a female they didn't want to see—They already had these other females test out from—from my section, and so I would have been another one to be leaving, and so I think they just really didn't want to see females doing anything like that. I don't know.

TS: They wanted to give you the low level jobs.

TM: Yes, yes, and I don't even think it's—it's that, per se. I think it's just more placing me in—in danger is really what they had—Like, if—if whatever I needed to do was on that camp, oh, they would have been fine with it. If the civilians were on our camp and I had to deal with them on our camp then it would have been fine, but it was just the point of—It's putting me in danger by putting me on this convoy and having me travel two hours away. So anything that had to do with danger they would not let us do it.

TS: Why?

TM: I just really felt—feel like it's—it was a female thing; it's because we were females.

TS: Do you think they were being protective of you or—

TM: Yeah.

TS: —did they think you couldn't handle it?

TM: I think it was more protective.

TS: Yeah.

TM: Because, I mean, everybody knows my attitude. I'm pretty much, "You can't do nothing to me. I—I'll live through it; I'll get over it; I really will." I've always been that way. But I just really feel like it's because I—the fact that I was a female.

And see, there were—there were two other females that were in my section and they were nothing like us younger ones, because us younger ones were like, "Oh, yeah, we want to do it," but the older ones there, they were happy with their little jobs. They were fine staying on—on camp, do a little duty here, a little duty there. I didn't want—No, I don't want to be on these duties; I want to do something. I want to be like—I want to have some stories to tell. That's why I was so apprehensive about doing this because I was like—I really—I didn't have too much. I—I'm kind of bitter about the whole Iraq situation just because I didn't get to do as much as I felt like I could have

done. I couldn't really serve my country in the way I could have. I felt—I mean, nothing put against tower guard, but for six months, I think it was just a way to keep me on that camp.

TS: And plus you're not working in your MOS.

TM: Right. Right, exactly, and that was another thing. And it was just after a while, of being on tower guard, I kind of accepted my place and I didn't try to fight it because I—I mean, you've got some perks for being—They didn't bother you at all, like, for stupid things. I didn't have any other duties except for tower guard when I did that, so that was wonderful; they didn't bother you. And so, I think that's another reason why I decided to stay on it for so long, because we didn't get bothered. But I just—After a while you—Some people can handle staying on that camp for a whole year but I would not have been able to do it. I was very close to staying with the unit that was replacing us just so I would have an experience. I was—I—I mean, I was very close but I—I felt like, I came with this group, I might as well leave with them. I mean, they're my friends.

TS: Right.

TM: So I felt like I wanted to have that experience of coming back with them so that was pretty much the only reason why I left—[unclear].

TS: Otherwise you think you would have stayed?

TM: Yes, I would have stayed in Iraq.

TS: Would you—Did—Was your experience, then, different after the time you talked to the first sergeant and said, "Hey, I need—"

TM: Yeah, I mean, like I said, I was able to go to things, and, I mean, I know my first ser—like, I told you there was only a small group of girls that were in my unit and there were about six of us that were very, very close. They—They called us "banana split" because we're all different races. [chuckles]

TS: Really?

TM: Yeah, they called us the banana split crew. And so, our first sergeant, his—his last name was Harvey[?], and he used to call us Harvey's Angels because we were badass chicks with weapons and all this, and so he used to call us Harvey's Angels. And so, when I came to him and told him, I know he probably looked at me like he was my father and like, "I don't want her going out on—I don't want you all doing that," but he allowed me to do it, so I just really thank him because I just really would have went crazy. I think he really saw that, "She's bored of being on this camp; she really is. She wants to do something else."

I mean, allowed me to—"Let me do something else. I mean, you need a body? Here, I'll go." [chuckles]

TS: What kind of things did you get to do then? That's when—Is that when you started doing the searching?

TM: Yeah.

TS: Okay.

TM: I did that just a few times if they needed somebody. Then I would go out on convoys if fir—If our first sergeant went out on convoys I would just go; I didn't have a purpose.

[Speaking Simultaneously]

TS: Really?

TM: He would just let me go.

TS: Where would you sit?

TM: I would sit—Sometimes I would sit in a vehicle with him. I think one time I drove, but you usually have your own driver; usually a first sergeant or somebody, they have their own driver. I think one time I drove for him but I—I would just sit wherever I could. I didn't have a purpose; I had no purpose. And that—that was another thing that I was just so amazed by, that he'd let me go on these convoys, because I didn't have a purpose on going.

TS: Maybe he was just making up for—

TM: Yeah.

TS: —you kind of just being out there and nobody really taking care for you—

TM: Yeah.

TS: —for so long.

TM: Yeah, so I just would get to go and just see the other camps and I'm like, "Wow." I would see how—There was one camp, I was like, "Wow, they're—they're living totally different than us. They are li—living in tents. We're living in buildings and they're living in tents."

TS: Right.

TM: So it really puts it in perspective, because I kind of had it good. We had a lot of amen—amenities on our camp where other camps didn't. So I mean, that helped me out a lot, putting what I'm doing in perspective; that not every soldier is getting this special treatment. That really helped me out a lot. It—It made my experience better. But yet when I went out on those convoys I didn't have a purpose of going; he just let me go; he just let me go.

TS: Was it, like, all day or for a few hours?

TM: It just—It depends on where we were going.

TS: Did you ever—Were you ever afraid or nervous about it?

TM: No. Just, like, one or two times that I was in a convoy that a—yeah, it was twice—where there was IEDs.

TS: That exploded?

TM: Yeah.

TS: Okay. [unclear]

[Speaking Simultaneously]

TM: One missed our—Like, it was after the convoy went through. The other one wasn't strong enough to really do anything but it did stop us, and I think we were in the city when it happened, which is worse because it's hard to maneuver and there's people around so you don't know who's the culprit or if they're even around or whatever.

So—But I'm—I am so cool, calm and collected. I just—I'm just like, if somebody tells me to do something I'm going to do it, or if I need to react I'm going to react, but there's not—there's nobody around, there's nobody doing anything. I never was really—I was never really scared; I never was. And I—I felt like I wasn't in—ever in any positions where I needed to be scared, and I think that's another reason why I wanted to go out on convoys, because I felt like I wasn't getting the same experience as other people. I felt like I needed to have that experience of being scared. I—Although I really didn't, but—

TS: Did you feel that you weren't doing enough?

TM: Yeah.

TS: Is that—

TM: Yeah, yes. I was wondering what my purpose was. And they—I mean, they have to remind you why you're there. They sa—They gave us little cards that said, "We are here because—We are in Iraq because—" I don't even know; we had to keep it on us. And—But me as an individual, I did not know why I was there. I was there to do—I felt like I was a body doing tower guard, or doing some ignorant duty that—

TS: Your capabilities were—

TM: Right.

TS: —higher than—

TM: Yes.

TS: —what they assigned you to do.

TM: Yes, yes, and I tried to—I tried to be like, "Okay, I know I'm a private but—" I—I got my E-4 while I was over there so I kind of felt like, "Okay now, I am a E-4 now so I should have some kind of responsibility or I should be doing something."

TS: Right.

TM: And so, I di—I just—I think a lot of the hindrances is because of my rank and because of the fact that I was a female. I just really think those two things.

TS: How about being a black female? Do you think that had any—

TM: No, I don't think my race—

TS: Just the—Just the gender.

TM: Yes, because my—Most—I ain't going to say most. My section sergeant and my—I forget what they're called—my foreman—I think is what they're called—they were both black.

TS: Well, I mean maybe they were more protective of you because of that.

TM: Oh, okay.

TS: I mean, I don't know, I'm just saying that—

TM: I don't—I honestly think it's because we were females.

[Speaking Simultaneously]

TS: It's hard to say. Yeah?

TM: I really do; I really do.

TS: Who were the—the ones that went out on the cavalry?

TM: Now, my friend Dee[?], she went out. That's the one that's, like, five foot [tall].

TS: Right.

TM: The small one. And then Chavalier[?], she went out. Those were the two permanent ones. I went out on a few, and then our other friend Stevens[?], she went out on a few. Stevens, she—she felt like—she was in the same situation as I was but she got out of that—the situation sooner.

TS: [unclear]

TM: She started on tower guard, too, but she got out of it sooner and she went and helped them—the guys out sooner, but she was not in the same section that I was so they didn't really care. Because either way she was going to be on a duty so they didn't really care about it. They didn't care. They didn't care as much as my section did about who was doing what, so—and plus she—she was just able to get away with more stuff than I was. I just could not—I didn't have that freedom like she did. And I—I don't know. But yeah, pretty much the four of us, we did the patrols, but they were the two girls that did it every day.

TS: Well, it's interesting that when you—when you say that about your one friend, Dee—

TM: Yes.

TS: —was the smaller one?

TM: Yeah, she was the main one that wanted to do it too.

TS: It—So you hear the argument sometimes that women, they're not strong enough, they don't have—they can't carry the pack, they can't—the guys are going to protect them.

TM: Yes.

TS: Well, how do you respond to that when you hear that kind of argument; about women being the weaker sex and not being able to do those kind of things?

TM: [chuckles] Then I don't know what females that you know, because I'll tell you one thing, the fact that I was in—a female in the military, you cannot tell me anything at this point in life that I cannot do. Don't tell me that I can't do anything, please. [chuckles] And now, me and that girl, we—me and Dee, we're, like, best friends and we got very close when we were in Kuwait getting ready to go to Iraq, and that was the situation. She says that I kind of helped her out, in being stronger, and it helped her make that decision to do that. We were—We were about to come to Iraq [by the?] the convoy and—

TS: From Kuwait?

TM: Convoy up to Iraq.

TS: Okay.

TM: So we had to get all our stuff to the vehicles and everything, and some guy—our—our vehicle was probably like a mile away—they were a mile away from us—so some guys were like, "Oh, we're going to bring some Humvees over and you're going to put your stuff on here and we'll just drive the Humvees over to—to where we're storing all your stuff."

TS: Without you?

TM: Right, which was fine; it was fine. And so—But they were just taking forever and I just wanted to go ahead, because we could be doing other things but we were just waiting on them to come back because they were unloading and loading stuff up. So I was like, "Let's just walk over there." And it—it became difficult, I will say, because we're carrying multiple bags. And so, yes, it was probably a bad idea but [both chuckle] I didn't feel like waiting anymore, and I was like, "We can do it; we can do it."

And so she's, like, lagging behind, she's complaining, and I just finally stopped and I say, "You know what? You're going to complain or you're going to fucking get your stuff up and you're going to walk with me and go take—We are already halfway there. I don't want to hear any more because you agreed to do this with me."

And so, that really woke her up, and she said that that one little phrase that I said to her really made her want to do it, because she's like, "This is what I joined the army to do."

I mean, that's what you—supposed to come in having that idea that you might have to fight, whether you're a male or a female, and so I think that—I think the thing with females is that when you're in a situation with males, males automatically want to protect females, and so instead of focusing on the mission they're focusing on protecting this female right here. And I guess I can understand that. Even if you feel that men and women are equal, you—men still have that—there's the whole protection thing, so I guess I get that; why a lot of people say that women—maybe women shouldn't be in and stuff. But I mean, we have the capability of doing anything you want us to do. I mean, we can lift whatever you want us to lift, I—do whatever you want us to do. [chuckles]

I mean, I—You—But when you keep hindering, when you always put women into these situations—and, of course, they're going to be used to it, and they're going to try to continue to stay in it, and I will say there were some sorry females; some sorry ones that didn't want to do anything; some sorry ones that got pregnant while they were over there so they would get to come back. Yes, it happened, but I don't have anything to do with them. They're their own person and I don't—

TS: It's not a reflection on all women.

TM: Right. It's—

[Speaking Simultaneously]

TS: It's a reflection on—

TM: —that woman. Yes, and there are sorry people all over in whatever business or company or whatever. You're always going to have sorry people. So just because those few did it does not mean they're all—the toughest people that I can remember from deployment were the women.

TS: Really?

TM: Yes. Another one of our friends, she's probably about five foot herself, she was a gunner—.50 cal [caliber] gunner on the gun truck. Gun truck platoons, they pretty much chaperone. So if a shipment needs to come in, or mail or something like that, they'll be, like, the chaperone. So she was on the gun trip platoon the whole year. I probably would have loved that but I didn't—I didn't know the weapons [unclear]. I didn't have that training so—I didn't get to train on other weapons like other people had the opportunities to, but I probably would have loved that. Now, I mean, you are a sitting duck because you're in that turret, but I would have loved it.

TS: Yeah.

TM: Try me. I would be like, "Try me if you want [unclear]— [both chuckle]

TS: You had that temperament and the mentality.

TM: Yes, I do. I really do; I really do. People think I should go into law enforcement but I—Ew, no. But I—Like, I do have that temperament. I would love to do something like that, yes.

TS: How about—You hear a lot about the issues of sexual harassment, assault, those kind of things. Did you know of any of that going on, either just in the time you were in the army or es—specifically when you were deployed?

TM: I was actually very surprised that I didn't run into a lot of that. I'm really, really trying to remember if there were things that came up but—

[Intercom in the background-Interview paused]

TS: Okay, sorry about that. We had a little warning of the weather. [both chuckle] So we'll—

TM: But—

TS: —see what it's like when we get out there.

TM: —yeah.

TS: So you were talking about sexual harassment.

TM: Yeah, I really did not see any, or remember any points where there were any types of sexual harassment. Now, I'm very, very sure that it—it does go on and—Now, you do have to watch yourself because you're—a lot of times you're the only female in a situation. Even if you're with—out with friends, most of your friends are going to be guys, so you do have to watch yourself. So there were times when I was, like—I was just—I had to make sure that I was in a right mind before hanging out with all these guys.

TS: Do you set certain boundaries, perhaps?

TM: Well, I will say I—I am a lesbian, so everybody knew that, so there was nothing going on with that. Everybody—

TS: Was this before the—

TM: Yes.

TS: —repeal of "Don't Ask, Don't Tell"?

TM: Yeah, I've been this way for a long time, so that was another reason why my friends didn't want me to go in; because I'm a lesbian. So they didn't really—My best friend is like, "Why would you want to be a part of an association that doesn't accept who you are?"

TS: Right.

TM: And you pretty much—As I like to say, you had to sign the gay away back then—

TS: Right.

TM: —when you sign the paperwork for "Don't Ask, Don't Tell." But I will say that pretty much everybody knew, because my friend, Dee, she is also lesbian, and when we got back from the deployment she brought her partner back and we got a—an apartment together, so—

TS: Back to Fort Hood?

TM: Yes.

TS: Okay.

TM: So everybody pretty much knew—A—Actually, they thought that me and her were together, but [chuckles] everybody pretty—

TS: Just because you hung out together.

TM: Yeah, yeah, we were just so close. But it—it—People didn't cross that line because they knew that about me.

TS: Okay.

TM: And so—And they knew my temperament, and if you do anything to me you're going to get something back in return. [chuckling]

[Speaking Simultaneously]

TS: Well, it was—

TM: It's going to be a hard fight, boy.

TS: Well, it seemed, though, that at that time—that if everybody knew—

TM: Yes.

TS: —that there wasn't anybody that wanted to get you in trouble.

TM: No. There was one—There was a girl; I didn't even know her. She did get out during the deployment because she told them that she was gay. But—Excuse me—I think she

wanted to get out because—just to be with her girlfriend or whatever. But everybody pretty much knew or had an idea about us. I don't know how we got away with it. I think it was just because we were female, and I guess that's the—the advantage of being a lesbian because they don't feel threatened. Of course, none of the females that knew about it, they didn't really care.

Now, you do have to be—you do have to be mindful of who you tell because from basic training, oh man, that was just—I would—it—it would just be hard to try to tell somebody. It would kind of have to be if something gay came up. [chuckles]

TS: So how would you decide who you were going to tell?

TM: It would pretty much be the clo—the people who I was closest with. When I was in basic—When you're in basic training you have to have a battle buddy; you have your main battle buddy. And so, we probably would have been cool for a few weeks, and I think she said something about an aunt being gay, and then that—I felt that that was my opportunity.

TS: Opened the door?

TM: Right, so that's kind of—That's always how I came out when it was to military folks; it had to be something gay that would happen.

TS: So you think—You've always felt like they would be positively receiving that.

TM: No, I did—I didn't always think that.

TS: No?

TM: No, I—

TS: You would risk it—

TM: Yeah, I risked it.

TS: Really?

TM: Yeah. Yeah, I risked it.

TS: Interesting.

TM: I—I just felt like I couldn't be—If I felt like I was getting close to certain people I just felt like I had to—and that's in regular life, I had to tell you because that's just something that's a part of me.

TS: Right.

TM: And so, I would always, always, always be nervous. Now, with—with Dee—how I came out to her—she was just showing me pictures of her in civilian life or whatever, and she—she's, like, a punk rocker so she has pink hair. So I was like, "Okay, she's a alternative person so I can tell her."

And so, when I told her she was like, "Oh my God, I am too." So it—it was just wonderful and—

TS: You didn't recognize that about each other?

TM: No, we didn't.

TS: Interesting.

TM: I thought she was a square when I first—[chuckles]

[Speaking Simultaneously]

TS: A square? What's a square?

TM: Yeah, like a—like a—like a nerd. Well, we were all nerds because we thought we were the smart ones.

TS: Yeah.

TM: But I thought she'd just be a boring person, because, like, she's—she—when she has glasses on and all that she looks real nerdy. So I was like, "Oh my God, I'm not going to be able to hang out with this person."

TS: [chuckles]

TM: But when she was showing me pictures, she has pink hair and all this stuff, and—and piercings, and, like, her ears are gauged and all this stuff, so I was like, "Okay, she's alternative so she must be accepting," and so that's when I went ahead and told her.

Now, I'm not the kind of person that really—I don't—I don't really care who knows, so when we were—when we went to Kuwait it was—it was a bonding experience for some of—for my—the girls that I hung out with. It was ver—We became very close, but they did not know that me and Dee were gay, and so when we finally got to Iraq, I told Dee—I said, "We need to tell them eventually. We need to tell them," and I said, "I'll come out and say something first." And so, we were in a group setting and I came out, and I sa—I said, "I want to tell you all I'm gay," or whatever.

And they were like, "Oh, okay." One girl was very shocked and surprised but she eventually got over it. But Dee, she was more hesitant; she was much more hesitant; she had to wait and tell.

TS: Was she more worried about the risk of getting kicked out?

TM: Not necessarily getting kicked out, but just by what our friends—

TS: Oh.

TM: —that we had just got close with, what they would be thinking. And so—And especially—Because she was cool with another one of our friends—the other girl that she did the patrols with, they were very close at the time—and so the fact that they had been close for so many months and she had not said anything to her about it, I think she was very a—apprehensive because of that.

TS: I see.

TM: Yeah, but that was her deal, but I—I mean, I don't—I don't really care, so I came out and I told people. And I'm sure it got around and—and, plus, with everybody seeing that me and Dee were so—

TS: Yes.

TM: —close and—We—We kind of egged it on as well. Like, we would say things like, "Oh, we've got to go take a shower together." [both laugh] But just—you have to go and take a shower together.

TS: Right.

TM: I mean, you're in a trailer, everybody has to take—

TS: Well, you did whatever wordplay you could [unclear].

TM: Right, right. So—

TS: I see.

TM: —we—we would egg—

TS: And have fun with it.

TM: Yeah, we egged it on, we did; we had fun with it. And—Because we knew that people thought that about us anyway so we just egged it on. But when we got back to the States, I would say we were very much supported just because—I mean, when you came into our

apartment, you knew you were going into a gay situation, because we would have rainbow flags up and we would have this and we would have—

TS: All on the inside?

TM: Yeah, all on the inside, and—

TS: What other gay symbols are there for [unclear]—

TM: Yeah.

TS: —a military base.

TM: Posters? Yeah, yeah, right, right, right. So we—we pretty much—You knew what you were getting into when you came to our apartment.

TS: Would you be careful about who you invited over?

TM: Yeah, we would but that's what—That's exactly the story I was about to tell. One time we—We always used to go out to the lake. We used to go out to the lake on the weekends, and we were going to have, like, a little get-together after the lake so everybody—We were very influential in our unit. We had everybody move into this one apartment complex so we could all be close. So after the lake, everybody went to their apartments to change before we were all going to hang out, and we used—just used to leave our door open because people would just walk in, and so we left our door open and in walks in [*sic*] our old commander, because we had a change in command while we were in Iraq. So our old commander comes walking in our door and [chuckles] it was like, "Oh my God." But he never said anything to us about it. I'm telling you it's rainbow everything in the house. I mean—And then he sees it's a two-bedroom apartment but it's three people living there so—

TS: Right.

[Speaking Simultaneously]

TM: —[chuckles] somebody's in the same bed.

TS: Somebody's bunking.

TM: Yeah, so—but he didn't ever say anything; he didn't ever say anything to us; never said anything. We were just, like, "Captain Winn[?], thanks for coming over to our house unexpectedly." Like, "What are you doing here?" But he was just, like, hanging out with

a former so—he—a soldier he had got out from our unit and he knew that—where we stayed at and that we were going to have that get-together.

TS: [unclear] come by.

TM: Yeah, so that was—that was something else. But other than that we pretty much did not care. We kind of wanted—like, we wanted somebody to say something. We kind of almost wanted some—

TS: You were, like, ready to be—have them—

TM: Yeah.

TS: To chal—To have them challenge you?

TM: Yeah. Yeah.

TS: Really?

TM: Yeah.

TS: Why?

TM: I just—I don't—I don't back down from anything, so why should I have to change who I am? You sign that little—the—"sign the gay away," as I like to say. But I mean, what are you—what are you—what are you really—what are you going to do? You're going to kick me out because of it? Like, I just couldn't—

TS: But they did.

TM: Yeah, they did. But I just—

[Speaking Simultaneously]

TS: Lots of people.

TM: I just—I don't know. I had more faith—

TS: Yeah?

TM: —in the army. Like, I had more faith in the people that I was around. I trusted them so much that—I just trusted them so much that I felt like they're not going to do anything to

kick me out. And then also at that point in time, I think they were so—trying to keep people in because of Iraq and Afghanistan—

TS: Right.

TM: —that that's why they were overlooking a lot of people. Because there was a—there was a guy, I mean, he was out. You—I mean, you could tell.

TS: Like a flaming [flamboyant]—

TM: Yeah, he was flaming, yes, and—but he was our mortuary guy. Who else is going to do that? Right.

TS: I don't know.

TM: Right. [chuckles]

TS: I never really thought about that.

TM: Yes, yes, so—and he knew that. And so, he felt like he could act however he wanted to because he knew, who else is going to—who else are they going to get to do the mortuary work here, and that's his MOS that he wanted to do so it's not like he got put in into that. So who else is going to be doing this? I'm influential here so I might as well—I'm just going to act how I want to act. So I think a lot of us, we got away with it. I—I was actually very surprised that he got away with it, but I think it was easier for us females.

TS: Did you go to any clubs or anything?

TM: Yeah, we went out to clubs.

TS: Did they have the—this—like, "Do not go to these clubs"?

TM: No, they didn't.

TS: No?

TM: They didn't. There was—There was a gay club. Man, I can't remember the name of it but—and then there was a country western club that a lot of people went to across the street from it. [chuckles] So if you looked across the street you might see some folk, and I'm telling you pretty much everybody that I met in those clubs, they were military.

TS: Either one?

TM: Yeah, yeah, so—I mean, because Fort Hood is military all the way, so you're not going to get too many other people than military. All—All—When I was in, at Fort Hood, Texas, the on—pretty much all the gay people I knew were in the military.

TS: Okay.

TM: Yeah, that I knew that lived—

[Speaking Simultaneously]

TS: Did you know—Were you—Were you lesbian before you went in?

TM: Yeah, yes. Yeah, so everybody that I met that was gay, they were in the military. Like if I met them at a club or just meeting other people, they were in the military, so it was a lot. There was a guy, we did—Oh my God, I feel so bad. There was a guy, he was—my friend Dee—he was in the unit with—with her, together in the cav [cavalry] scout.

TS: Okay.

TM: He was a medic. His name is Daniel [correction: Darren] Manzella, and he was gay and we had no idea. I mean, we—Looking back, yeah, we kind of knew, but he eventually got out and that's when he finally talked to us. That's when he fin—And see, he knew about us so we—we were always like, "Why didn't you say anything to us?" And he fin—he finally told us when—when he got out.

He was actually on *60 Minutes* [CBS television program] a few years ago. Yeah, look that up. A few years ago he was on *60 Minutes*, they were talking about gays in the military and he was on there. Unfortunately, he just passed away not too long ago from a car accident. Yeah, so when I think about being gay in the military—I mean, he was an awesome soldier. He was a medic and, I mean, he couldn't be who he wanted to be. He couldn't even come out to us who he knew was gay, and I even wrote a paper about this. Yeah, a few—

TS: Yeah? What did you say?

TM: —a few years ago. The title of the paper was "You Don't Have to Shoot Straight to be in the Military"—"You Don't Have to Think Straight to Shoot Straight," or it was something like that.

TS: Right.

TM: Yeah, so it's all about—Because they think that being gay is going to break down the cohesion, but—camaraderie and all that, but it—it really doesn't. It kind of—The fact that you have to hide yourself from somebody, you don't really get to know them, and then,

like, how can you—You have to be close to that person next to you to expect that they're going to save your life.

TS: Right.

TM: And so, I know we have to be in tight situations, and showers and all this kind of stuff, but you know what? When I'm in a shower I'm more concerned about trying to cover up my own body than try to look at somebody else's. I mean, come on. No, no. And I think that's, like, the biggest misconception because they think, like, you're looking at them. I'm not looking at you. Trust me, I'm trying to cover up myself. [both chuckle] I'm trying to cover up and that's what—

TS: Right.

TM: Most people are—are like that, too, but I—I'm really glad that they—

TS: Well, they see it only about—I'm sorry, I didn't mean to interrupt you.

TM: Oh no, I was—I was just going to say I'm glad they repealed "Don't Ask, Don't Tell" because it's just—it—it keeps you from knowing that person that—that's supposed to be there to help save you, and I mean, what should it matter; your—your sexual orientation. The fact that you want to serve your country—I mean, you want to serve your country. If you're willing to die for your country, everybody should be able to do that. If you have the mental capabilities and the physical capabilities you should be able to do that. And I know another reason why they repealed "Don't Ask, Don't Tell" is because they need more people to go into certain MOSs, like linguistics and stuff like that. So you are, like, turning away groups of people that could be very beneficial to the military.

TS: And they did; they kicked them out.

TM: Yeah, yeah. You either turned them away or kicked them out. And so, it's—I mean, I'm just so glad that they repealed it, just because of that, and now you don't have to feel like you have to hide who you are to serve.

TS: Right. Well, it's always interesting to me that—when you—when you were saying that about the shower—is that the people who, I guess, make that judgment about what you're going to do, is—is based on as though all a homosexual is, is about their sexuality.

TM: Yes. Yes, yeah, yeah, the—that is the big thing and I'm like, well, that means that you must automatically assume that when a guy is looking at a girl that he's automatically assuming that certain things—I mean, you're—you're, like, making me feel like I don't think about people in other ways unless it's sexual.

TS: Right.

TM: And I—I don't look at—No. [chuckles]

TS: Right, right. So that's—

[Speaking Simultaneously]

TM: No, no way.

TS: It's interesting that you—you mentioned that. So, yeah.

TM: So I—I just—I love my friends that I was in the military with because they were so understanding—so, so understanding—and I know there were some guys that were going through some things that we had to keep secret for them; like, they were thinking about maybe having sex with a guy or having a relationship with a guy and they couldn't, of course, talk to their other battle buddies about it but they could talk to us because they knew that we were gay. And so, they were ask us insights on it and stuff.

One of our other friends, she was going, like, a little gay phase, I guess—I don't know—but we helped her out with that. Just little things here and there, and we would have to be quiet about it. But we were open.

TS: You're like the lesbian counselors.

TM: Right, right, right, we were. We were the lesbian counselors. [both chuckle] Yeah, yeah. But it was just so amazing—

TS: Lucy with your little sign.

[Lucy van Pelt is a fictional character from the comic strip *Peanuts*. She occasionally pretended to be a psychiatrist with a booth and a sign that read "The Doctor is" in or out, depending on which side of the "In/Out" placard was displayed.]

TM: Yes. So it was just amazing that we had to try to hold it together for other people because we could be—it was okay for us because we were out and we didn't care. And so, it never—I was never, ever worried about being kicked out. I never was.

TS: No? Not once?

TM: No, no. [chuckles] I wish other people would have had the same experience, and a—

TS: Well, you're talking 2003—or what, 2—

TM: Two thousand four is when I went to Iraq, yes.

TS: And when did they do the repeal?

TM: Oh, it wasn't until—

TS: Two thousand and—

TM: It's just recent. Within the last four—

TS: [Two thousand and] nine—ten? Something like that? [Don't Ask, Don't Tell Repeal Act of 2010]

TM: Yeah, something like that, yes.

TS: But the trajectory was moving away from—

TM: Yes, "Don't Ask, Don't Tell", anyway.

TS: Right. Because of the war, I think.

TM: Yes.

TS: You made some good points about that.

TM: Yeah, I mean, you have to—you can't be all restrictive as to how—who you're going to bring into the military, just because you're alienating groups of people that could be very beneficial to the war efforts.

TS: Especially in a voluntary force.

TM: Yeah, in a voluntary force you need to be trying to take people. [chuckles]

TS: Right. Well, what—Was there anything—Because we started—You started on this when we were talking about issues of sexual harassment, and so you're basically saying, "Everybody knew I was this lesbian, so—"

TM: Yes, so I didn't get me—messed with.

TS: So they didn't—they—you didn't have the kind of—you didn't—They weren't approaching you in that way.

TM: Right, yes.

TS: Men or women or—in things like that. So how—How did you communicate with—Although you said you had some trouble, your dad didn't communicate with you at all—

TM: Yes.

TS: —while you were there, but your brothers and sisters, did you guys—did you make—get to make phone calls, did you do email? What kind of—

TM: Yeah, I pretty much called. I'm not—Well, especially back then I wasn't too, too close, and like I said, every time I called, it was something.

TS: Yes, right.

TM: My—My brother, he had lost his job either right before or while I was there and so he was going through the whole un—unemployment thing, and so it was just hard hearing stuff like that. And back then my brother and my sister and—my sister had just had my—my niece so they were all staying together. So I would hear from—If I called my sister, I would hear about what my brother was doing and she's like, "I know he doesn't get it—his unemployment is not as much as what he used to make, but I'm just going—" I would just hear something from her.

TS: Right.

TM: And then I would hear the other side from him. And see, before I—We all lived together; I lived with them.

TS: Be—When you—Before you went in?

TM: Yeah. So I mean, I totally understand what was going on and everything. And then it was—It wasn't too long after my mom passed, so it was just a lot going on with them having to deal with that, having no money. And so, I just didn't want—I just had my own thing going on. I—I would make up excuses not to call. Like, I would be like—I mean, they would shut down communications if somebody in the unit died, in the—pretty much the brigade—if somebody in the brigade died—so they would have a opportunity to contact their family back in the states before it got out. Well, I would just make excuses, like, "Oh, somebody passed away so we didn't—"

TS: So you couldn't call?

TM: Yeah. I—I know sometimes I would go for months without calling.

TS: Did you ever get any care packages?

TM: Yeah, I got a few, but just with money situations of, like, my family and everything—I mean, they did what I [correction: they] could. Actually what I did was—I went on this website that's pretty much "Adopt a Soldier".

[Adopt A US Soldier [AAUSS] is a non-profit organization that connects supportive civilians with deployed troops and offers a channel by which to communicate encouragement and express gratitude to the men and women serving in the United States Armed Forces]

TS: Oh, yeah?

TM: Yeah, and it was two families that adopted me, so they pretty much took care of me. [laughs]

TS: What kind of stuff did they send you?

TM: Oh, good stuff.

TS: Like what? Tell me.

TM: This one family, they sent me two pairs of boots; two pairs. Any—Pretty much anything I would ask for; like, you ha—I—I love Rice Krispy Treats. Oh my God. They sent me a box of Rice Krispy Treats. They sent me—I—I love popcorn; I love this; I love that. They would send it. Clothes, like—like little sweaters and stuff I could wear, because I'm—I know one family I was communicating with, it was during the winter. Boy, the winters, I cou—Whew-wee, I don't want to go through a winter again over there. But, yeah, it was getting cold so they were sending me stuff for cold weather. One—It was one family, it was a whole family; I think they had, like, three kids. And then another—the other—it was a couple, they were older, so all their kids were out of the house; it was like a empty nest kind of thing for them, so they just loved that they could adopt a soldier. So, yeah, I was like, "Yeah, I'll get them to adopt me so I don't have to worry about my family. I don't even need to talk to them."

TS: [chuckles]

TM: So I was actually communicating more—I communicated more with people that I did not—with them, and also with people that I hadn't communicated with in years. I actually communicated with them more than the people that I had talked to on a regular basis when I was at home.

TS: Right.

TM: I—I used that time to just reach out to different people.

TS: Do you still keep in touch with the ones that were helping you out?

[Speaking Simultaneously]

TM: No, and I hate—I hate that I didn't; I would have really loved to keep in touch with that. It was—And it was at, like—at a certain point that you're like, "I don't know if I should contact them anymore."

TS: Right, like when you're getting ready to go back?

TM: Yeah.

TS: Right.

TM: And so, it was just—I—I'm so upset that I didn't keep in touch with them but it was a good thing, and I was—I was apprehensive with being black and then having these white families adopt me.

TS: Really?

TM: Yes, yes, yes.

TS: Why?

TM: I mean, you always wonder about that. When they—

TS: But did they have—did they know? I mean, did they——

[Speaking Simultaneously]

TM: Yeah, I mean, I have sent—I've sent them pictures—

TS: Okay.

TM: —and they were still sending me stuff, so I was like, "Okay." [laughs] But, yeah, I was just—I was very apprehensive about that.

TS: Really?

TM: I really was, yeah. Yes, but none of the families, they ever said anything after I sent pictures. They're like, "Oh my God, you have a weapon." Or they'd say something like that but it wouldn't be—

TS: Oh. Something about it, yeah—

[Speaking Simultaneously]

TM: Yeah, but they wouldn't say anything—

TS: —being a soldier.

TM: Yeah, it would be more about being a soldier, and they will say stuff about being—me being female, but they're like, "How—How is it with you being a female?" But other than that, I—I got mad support from them.

TS: That's neat.

TM: I'm so glad I did that because they probably—they gave me more support than my family was, and my friends.

TS: So they were kind of—You can lean on them, like—

TM: Yes.

TS: Yeah.

TM: Because—

TS: And you had two families.

TM: Yes, yes, that was—that was awesome; that was awesome, so. I remember when I was at—when I was at GTCC [Guilford Technical Community College] before I came here to UNCG, I did a—a little campaign where we collected items for some soldiers overseas and I was just like—because I know what it feels like to get a random care package that's—One of the girls that I served with, her church—Well, she had told me about it but I had totally forgot. She said she had gave them some names of some people that didn't really get a lot of packages.

TS: Right.

TM: And she just went on ahead and gave them my name, too, and I just got this random care package, and then some other people got random care packages, too, and it really

brightens—it—I'm about to tear up, because it really brightens your day over there just to know that somebody over here cares, and that you're not over there just for no reason. And, I mean, I have family but I'm just not close to them. Some people don't have family at all, and so I can just imagine—I'm sitting here, like, "Oh, I don't want to call my family," but some people don't have a choice, so to get something like that; it just really means a lot to them to get those care packages and stuff. It—It just—It really means a lot. It meant a—It meant a lot to me, just knowing that somebody over here cared. And I know there was a lot of people just wondering whether the war should be on or not, and then you don't know what's go—You don't know what's going on back in the States.

TS: Yes.

TM: I remember they had the election. The last time George Bush ran was when we were over there and—and that—

TS: Right, 2004.

TM: Yeah, so that was crazy, and then you hear the results and you're like—first of all, you don't know if you got to vote; you don't know if your vote counted.

TS: Right.

TM: And then you're like, "Well, what's going on back in the States that this person won, that this—" You don't really know what's going on back in the States and you don't know what other people are thinking. You only know what these soldiers—what we're thinking.

TS: Do you get, like, newspapers or magazines, or—

TM: Yeah, I mean, you have access to that stuff but it's just—it's not the same—

TS: Yes.

TM: —as just being here. We can go outside right now and get people's opinions about stuff that's going on but it's not the same as look—looking in the newspaper from all the way overseas.

TS: You're kind of in a bubble?

TM: Yes. Yeah, so—that I hated, too, was being in that bubble but I sometimes kept myself in that bubble just so—like I said with my family, so I wouldn't have to hear—hear it or deal with it.

TS: Well, how did—Is there anything more about your experience in I—in Iraq that you wanted to talk about that—that I haven't asked you about?

TM: I don't think so. I—Although, I myself—I would go back not as a soldier, I'd go as a civilian.

TS: Yeah?

TM: I would just—I just want to experience the culture and what it's like out there. I think a lot of pressures get put onto soldiers that go over there and they get—they get a little bit crazy, and people wonder why you have PTSD [Post-traumatic Stress Disorder], but it's really just the repetitiveness of the days. Because more—more days than not, unless you're, like, a scout or—or infantry or something like that, yeah, you may be seeing stuff on a daily basis, but the average soldier—the soldier over there, it's pretty boring.

TS: Right, they say it's like 10% are actually in—

TM: Yes.

TS: —actual combat.

TM: Yeah.

TS: Actively.

TM: Yeah.

TS: Offensively fighting.

TM: So it's pretty boring; it's pretty tedious. It's—It's—It's strenuous on the—on the mind, because when you're having to do—like I said, I didn't get—my first day off was when I went on leave.

TS: That's a long time not to—

TM: Six months.

TS: —have a break.

TM: Yes, yes. And I don't think my next one came until—They gave us the day off for Christmas, yes. Now, I think it was, like, closer—Okay, our camp—I think it ha—it had, like, Australians there and, like, the Ir—We wanted—The goal was for the Iraqi forces to eventually take it back over. So they started taking back over so it alleviated some of the things that we had to do, so closer to the end of the deployment it wasn't as difficult being tasked out on these duties, but that's really what taxes on the mind, is the repetitiveness. It's the doing the same job every day, not getting a day off; being away from family. I mean, it's—it's so—it's easy over there, it really is, but it's hard in another—it's—it's—I don't know; it's hard to describe. It's easy because you don't have to deal with the same

pressures that you have to do have to do in the States, like paying bills, taking the kids to school. I mean, little things like that you don't have to worry about. I don't have to worry about having to go and order food because I know what the cafeteria's going to have.

TS: And everything is structured for your—

TM: Yes.

TS: From the time you get up—

TM: I don't think—

TS: —to the time you go to bed, right?

TM: Yes, I don't have to think. [chuckles] So it was pretty easy.

TS: Yeah.

TM: It was pretty easy. But then when you start to think about what's going on at home and what you're missing, and then when you come back home and everybody is just living their life and you come back and it's like you have to try to fit in somewhere, and that was—that was kind of difficult.

TS: That was what I was going to ask you about—

TM: Yes.

TS: —next was coming home and—and how was that?

TM: It was—It was difficult. I don't—I'm not really sure—I guess—And they tell it—they tell you this. They say you're just coming back, but they have been liv—everybody has been living their lives for a year—their day to day lives—and they're—they're continuing to live their day to day lives as how they have been living it. You want them to cut that out and include you in this—in their lives. When they haven't had you in their lives for a whole year they have to readjust to that just like we have to readjust to coming back.

So I—I remember coming home and I was—it was like, "Oh my God, the whole world is going around and I'm just sitting here." That—That was another shock; like, not doing anything was a shock.

TS: Yes.

TM: I finally get time off but I'm not doing anything; like, what am I supposed to do with myself? Then when I came back home—When I came to North Carolina to visit, I was—I stayed with my best friend, and he—he actually went to school; he was going to

school here at the time. And he would go off to school and I would be there by myself. I haven't been by myself in a year. [laughs] I haven't been by myself in a year, so—

TS: Because you always have to have a buddy?

TM: Yeah, well, it's not even having to, but it's just always somebody around.

TS: Okay.

TM: There's never no by yourself, no. Even if I'm in the room—I mean, I'm in a room with, like, six other girls so there's never any alone time, really. Maybe in that Porta-Potty but—[both chuckle]

TS: That's it, huh?

TM: Yeah, yeah. So when he would go off to school I would just be sitting there with myself and I had to think about things and so that was kind of difficult, and it was like I want to come back and I want to party and I want to celebrate the fact that I'm back and—but everybody else is saying, "Oh, I'm tired," or "Oh, I don't want to go out to eat," or—

I got so upset, I almost threatened not to ever come back home because I—I was just like, "How are you all not doing it up for me now that I'm coming back?" But it's just because they have to live—I mean, me coming back was that one day. Now you're back and let's go back.

TS: That's it.

TM: Yeah, yeah. To me I felt like it needed to be [chuckles] like a ongoing party.

TS: Like a birthday month.

TM: Yes.

TS: A celebration.

TM: Yes.

TS: Yeah.

TM: Yes, so having to deal with that was pretty hard, so—

TS: What did you do?

TM: Retreated in myself, really. I threatened—Because we had a month off, like, right after we got back from Iraq, so I threatened to go and leave and be with my friends. Yes, for the rest of the time that I was on that leave I threatened to leave so, I mean, they pepped it

up a little bit for me but, yeah, it was just very difficult having to deal with that. Like, you think you're going to come home to a hero's welcome, but—Now, I will say it was very bittersweet the day—the day we got back to Fort Hood, because we get off the airplane and we're—we're riding on the buses back to our unit area.

TS: Yes.

TM: And they have all these signs up for our unit specifically because I guess every unit that comes back they do this. So I was in 115 for support battalion, First Cavalry Division, so they had all these signs up, "Welcome Back, 115;" it's just wonderful. And then what they did was, they—they have the ceremony field, and so they dropped us off on the buses and the buses are in front of us so that the crowd can't see us. And so, we're all lined up and everything and then the buses move and so it's such a big thing; we're revealed and everything. And so, we have to maintain, because they have to go through the little spiel first. We had to march up and they have to go through their spiel. Then they—But it was so exciting. But then again, I didn't have anybody there because it was in Texas, and so it's great to see, like, family—families who could be there, it was great for them, but I didn't have that welcome. And so, I felt some kind of way about that, but I try to get over that because I know—I mean, nobody could come down [unclear]. I was going to see them in two weeks, but I didn't—I just didn't feel like I got the hero's welcome that I should have; I felt kind of ripped off of that.

TS: Right.

TM: And I really just think it's just because of my family and my friends; they're just very liberal and don't—they don't support wars and stuff like that.

TS: But you wanted some kind of validation—

TM: Yeah.

TS: —that what you did was important—

TM: Yes.

TS: —and worthy and that they respected you for it, I'm sure.

TM: Yeah.

TS: Right?

TM: Yeah, yeah, but I—I just don't—Like, my—A few months ago my sister asked me a few things about what happened in Iraq and I—I thought that was quite interesting, and she asked. And so, I'm going to tell them anytime, but really I don't share anything with them because it's private. It—Well, it's not private but it's—it's mine, and if they really want to

know about it they'll ask. I mean, I guess they think that I'm going to break down if I start talking about Iraq or something but I'm really not. I loved—I mean, I—The shitty stuff that I talked about, no. [both chuckle]

TS: Right.

TM: But I actually—Like, we had some fun times, though, over there.

TS: Yeah?

TM: We really did.

TS: What were some of the fun times?

TM: The fact that—Okay, none of the people I'm going to talk—are talking about are still in. But we used to—[both laugh] I had to think about it this way. We used to drink; I'm not going to lie. We would drink—

[Speaking Simultaneously]

TS: You weren't supposed to drink over there?

TM: Nope.

TS: Oh, that's right, because it's—

TM: Yeah, it's war zone.

TS: Okay.

TM: Now, only day—

TS: —Oh, that's why, it's a war zone?

TM: Yeah, yeah.

TS: Okay.

TM: When you're in theater you can't drink, but we could actually—we actually could drink. The only day we could drink was on [National Football League] Super Bowl [Championship].

TS: You're kidding.

TM: Yes, that is the only day; like, they brought in cases—case after case after case.

TS: Okay.

TM: I think you could get two beers—and it was so funny because I had to sit near my first sergeant—because it—it was only at dinner and you had to drink it there in the cafeteria. And so, I'm sit—I'm sitting there and my first sergeant's, like, pretty much at the same table that I'm at. He's like, "Don't be getting drunk—" They called me Moe. He's like, "Don't get drunk down there, Moe." [chuckles] So that's the only day when we could drink, but there were times when we drank.

TS: How did you acquire the alcohol? Not that you did it personally.

TM: Not that I did it personally, because most of these ways I wa—I wa—I wasn't even able to do these things, but, like, if they went out on patrols—

TS: Yes.

TM: —or whatever, searching vehicles they would ask, "Can I have this?" Yes, and they would get alcohol, and they—they would find ways; [chuckles] they would find ways. They—We—I never did that. I didn't like taking anything from the children but I—we wasn't supposed to give anything to the children, either, but we felt bad. Our camp, it used to be kids that would come up to our walls, and it would be the same kids every day, and I re—I know we really weren't supposed to do that but these kids always come up and they were so used to us and they would beg; they would beg; "You got anything for—You got food? You got this? You got that?" And so, we would give them CDs [compact discs].

TS: Yeah?

TM: [chuckles] We would give them CDs. And then they—I mean, they would be like, "If you give us some, we'll you some. We'll give you alcohol; we'll give you alcohol."
And I'm like, "What?"

TS: [chuckles]

TM: But that's how some of them were getting alcohol; like, a CD for a bottle—a CD for a bottle of alcohol.

TS: Really.

TM: Yeah, yes, so it would be things like that, how they would get it, but, yeah, they—Now, that stuff is nasty, though. I don—I don't know what kind of proof it is—

TS: [chuckles]

TM: —but, oh, man, it was so nasty. But, yeah, we'd have some fun times with that. It would just be a way to—if you had a little bit of time—

TS: Yeah.

TM: —just to spend there, be with your battle buddies, we would drink sometimes.

TS: Did you guys do any kind of games or—

TM: They had—Our camp had MWR. I forget what those stood for but it was pretty much—

[Speaking Simultaneously]

TS: Morale, Welfare, and Recreation.

TM: Yeah, yeah, yeah. So we had that. And so, we had a MWR building so they had some kind of recreation for us, but it was pretty much just hanging out when you could with certain people, because everybody was just tasked down with so many duties and had so many different schedules—

TS: Right.

TM: —that if there was a day where you could hang out you just would try to do that, but mostly your days—Now, I would—the only time in my life where I ever enjoyed working out was Iraq because that—I would do that every day. If something happens—happened where I couldn't work out I would be upset.

TS: What kind of workout did you do?

TM: We would—I would work out in a gym and that was pretty special because we never used to be able to work out in a gym. Excuse me. Every time we did PT in the unit it would be just regular calisthenics.

TS: Yes.

TM: Regular PT. But because I was on tower guard—especially when I was on tower guard—they didn't mess with us. They was just like, "You better pass the PT test because if you don't then we're going to be on your back." So that was pretty much—I mean, I never had a problem passing a PT test but I will say I went to the gym more because it—it was another thing that I could put onto my routine.

TS: Right.

TM: So I would be upset if I couldn't do that.

TS: I meant to ask you—

TM: Yes.

TS: —about when you were at—When you were in the tower you said you had somebody else with you.

TM: Yes.

TS: Was it mostly men or women or—

TM: I had a—There was a female that I was with at first. She was all right, but one of my—this one guy I was on there with most of the time, we became very close, like—

TS: [unclear] that's a lot of time to spend together.

TM: Yes, yes, we spent a lot of time together. [chuckles] Yes. He wa—He was married and had—he—I think two or three boys and he really wanted a girl. And so, there was this house that sat, like, the—it was our tower, then the big—then our wall and then there was a road, so on the other side of that road was a little house and he would—like, when they would be outside they would be walking the goats and all that other stuff. I mean, this was amazing to me, that's why I wanted to see the country because I'm like—I'm—I'm not a city girl but I don't walk around with goats every day so this was just amazing to me.

So he would be like, "Can you give me one of your daughters?" He would yell that out to them, and, like, one day the father was, like, holding up the little girl.

I was like, "Oh my God." It was so crazy.

But we had fun up in there. We, like—Because his name was Gotay[?], the guy that I was in the tower with the most. He—He was Puerto Rican, and he learned—he learned English. I guess they had to go through the English school before they even go to basic training if you don't speak English.

TS: English as a second language?

TM: Yes, so he had to go through that school before he even came through. So we used to get—We got close because of music, and so we just realized that we knew a lot of the same artists and liked a lot of the same music so we would listen to mus—we weren't supposed to, but we would listen to music up in the tower. We watched mov—We did thing—I mean, yes, we do things that we're not supposed to do.

TS: [chuckles]

TM: Don't let them tell you any different. We're not perfect—nobody's perfect—but—

TS: Well, you had a lot of time to pass.

TM: Yeah, you had a lot of time and I don't feel like it takes away—There—There's passing time and then there's really not paying attention to what you're supposed to be doing, and so if we're listening to music, to me that's the same thing as me just singing outright, so—

TS: It's in the background.

TM: Yeah, yeah, it's in the background. We're going to be talking anyway and—

TS: Watching the movies might be a little—

TM: Yeah, watching movies.

TS: [chuckles]

TM: Now, no, you shouldn't be doing that but I know people that did—

TS: Yeah.

TM: —watch movies. We tried to steer away from that. We watched a TV show or two but we did—we mostly did the music thing. But—And if we watched movies it would be in the daytime when it's easier to see anyway.

TS: Oh, right.

TM: Yeah, so—But he—That was my buddy right there, Gotay, because we—we were up in that tower; we experienced a lot together. But like I said earlier, rockets were the scariest thing for me and the first rocket I ever experienced went over our tower. Yeah, it hit right behind us so they were aiming for us.

TS: Aiming for the tower?

TM: Yeah.

TS: What did you do?

TM: We heard the whistle and it's like—I'm like, "What is that? What is that," and you just get so scared, and then you hear boom and it's right behind you and then you realize, like, they were probably aiming for this tower right here. And so, that was pretty much—that was the scariest—that was probably the scariest—one of the scariest days over there, but

I'm glad I got to experience that with him because the girl that I was in the tower with the first time, I don't think she would have been able to take that.

TS: No?

TM: No, I don't think she would have been able to take that because she was very—she was very young. I think she was, like, a fresh eighteen, so nothing against her being a female, I think it's—would have—just her age.

TS: Her age.

TM: He's—He's a father, I—What?—I was twenty-four when I was in Iraq so I had been through things already. So I think we dealt with it pretty well but, yeah, that was—that was my buddy. And we did—We used to do a whole bunch of things together because we had the same shift. So we would go to dinner together, if we needed to go to the shoppette we would go together, or, like, if he went somewhere and he knew I liked something he would get it. It's just like that—There's nothing like a battle buddy; there's nothing at all like a battle buddy; nothing ever can replace that. And I know I've had falling outs with some of my battle buddies, but I'll tell you, if I have a falling out with you today, ten years later I can—we can get back and be friends again like it wa—it was nothing, because there's nothing like a battle buddy. It's just that camaraderie. You're forced to be close but you—I mean, you have to trust your life with this person, so.

TS: And you go through it—like, a common experience together and—

TM: Yes.

TS: —uncertainty—

TM: Yeah.

TS: —of what's going to happen.

TM: Yeah, so there's nothing like it; nothing like it. So—I know, like, on Facebook, some people that I haven't seen since I was in Texas, if they say anything like, "Oh, I miss my battle buddies," I know they're talking to me. It—It's just—There's nothing like it; there's nothing like it. And I—I miss them so much; we had a big old crew.

TS: Yeah.

TM: I miss them, yes.

TS: Well, what—Did you feel like, in the time that you were in, that you were treated fairly? Like, for promotions and—

TM: Yes, yes. Well, I didn't really—Well, up to E-4 is pretty automatic.

TS: Yes.

TM: I did not do—I didn't tr—I didn't—I already knew I wasn't going to stay in so I never, like, tried to do—going up for sergeant. I could have; my points were low enough that I could have but I just—I wanted to get out.

TS: Why did you want to get out?

TM: Because they were having too many deployments. They went back a—a year and a half later after we got back so that was just—

TS: So you knew that you would deploy again?

TM: Yes. Yes, if I stayed in. And so, I just—My military experience was—my first year was training, my second year was Iraq, third year was getting out. That's pretty much how I looked at my whole military experience, and I rea—I didn't get a lot of things out of the military that I would have really wanted to because of the deployment, and I just really felt if I would have—Now—Well, maybe not because I would have been—I would have been a—a more senior soldier whether I would have went on to be a NCO [non-commissioned officer] or not. I would have had more responsibilities and they would have put me in my job, and I would not have went through the same things, but I just felt like if I was going to get everything I was going to get it should have been within those three years.

TS: Yes.

TM: I—I didn't want to go through another—I just didn't want to go through another deployment and then have to deal with the possibilities of being put on some random assignment that—where I don't know my job or I'm not doing a soldier-type thing that—I don't know.

TS: And so, that's really because of that experience you had those first six months, right?

TM: Yes, yes, that first six months of Iraq really—Yeah, because I think I would—right at the end of the deployment, that's when I could have re-enlisted and I—No, no. If I have to go through this again? Because I don't know if I'm going to be put into a unit where they're going to feel a certain way about their females.

TS: Yes.

TM: And I—I had these certain experiences but I'm glad that I got to experience them with the group that I did. If I would have experienced these same experiences with so—another group, I don't know if I would have been able to take it, and I don't know how they would

have tre—treated their females. I would have had to come out to a whole other group of people. So although my time sucked a little bit, I really enj—it was the people that kept me there, and I don't think I would have had that same cam—camaraderie with another group of people. It's just—

TS: So the fact that everything was probably going to change—

TM: Yeah, everything was—

TS: —was—

TM: It was changing. I already knew it was going to change because—

TS: Yeah.

TM: —people—my whole shop left within, like, two months' time, two—three months' time of us getting back; there was three of us left.

TS: And then everybody was either just going someplace else—

TM: Yeah.

TS: —or getting out.

TM: Or getting out. Yeah, because there was stop-loss. Everybody was stop-loss, except for those new folk.

[Stop-loss, in the United States military, is the involuntary extension of a service member's active duty service under the enlistment contract in order to retain them beyond their initial end of term of service (ETS) date]

TS: Do you think that during your deployments your relationships with your peers and your supervisors were different than they were when you were—Well, they had different experiences because you were so new.

TM: Yes.

TS: But do you think that experience being deployed is different than it is when you're back at the regular base, like in Fort Hood?

TM: Not with my section, just because whatever happened in our section stayed in our section.

TS: [chuckles]

TM: They tried—They really—And we were pretty much all on the same page because, like I said, when—we drank as lower enlisted but the upper enlisted drank too. There was pretty much a understanding of, "You better not get in trouble," and there were some folks that did get in trouble but it stayed within our group. And—

TS: Kind of like that "take care of your own" mentality?

TM: Yeah, yeah, and I don't know if those same—same things would have been able to happen in—when we got back to the States; if we would have been able to keep that like that. But my section was very supportive. My sergeants—my main sergeants—oh, they would cuss you out in a minute; they were hard on us. We always had to be the best, so they put a lot of pressure on us, but I will say that they—the fact that they kept things within just our section, that helped out, and also they would fight for us when—when we needed to be fought for, because even though they would put me on different things, they really actually hated to, but it's, like, the—the unlucky draw of you are the lowest person on the totem pole so it's going to be you. But they—they get upset by that, they get upset by it, and my section was one—we had eighteen people, whereas most sections maybe had ten, if that, so they were always pulling from us because we had the most people.

TS: Had a bigger pool of people?

TM: Yeah, so—

TS: Right.

TM: They—I mean, they always try to look out for us and stuff, so—and that was in and out of the deployment. One of our—Our main sergeant, he had been through a deployment before so he knew how to—how things would go, so I don't think it would have been any difference in between being back in the States and being over there. We were pretty much—We knew what—their expectations and they pretty much stuck to it.

TS: Do you feel like you had any mentors at all?

TM: Yeah, like I said, our—our main section sergeant, Sergeant Collins. We don't know where he is. I—We don't know what happened to him. He got out and we never heard from him again so we don't know. He always talked about going and getting lost in Mexico somewhere so we hope he's doing okay. But he retired. And so, he was a big mentor because he's so smart and he had been in the military for so long and he was one of those ones that would cuss you out but you knew that he—he just wanted you to do the best, be your best, and he was the main one that was like, "Keep it within us." He didn't—He was very—He was fatherly-like, and so he was a big influence on me.

My first sergeant, he was a big influence; the ser—first sergeant I had before we got out; Harvey[?]; First Sergeant Harvey. He disappeared somewhere, too, but I think

he's in, like, Wyoming or somewhere. [both chuckle] I think those two were probably the biggest ones.

And then I had—I had some drill sergeants in my AIT, in my school, that I really looked up to. There was—I—My school, I loved it. Drilling ceremony; man, it was awesome. Marching to school every morning. Woo-hoo, I mean, I get—It gives me chills. They really looked out for us. It was a lot of camaraderie. It was—It was just—It was like being at a pep rally. Every day was like being at a pep rally.

TS: Really?

TM: Yes. Oh man, they used to get us riled up every day, and then when the flag come down, I mean, it was just like—we used to—"boom, boom, boom," and the flag—flag came down and it was, like—the drill sergeants used to really egg us on, and it was just really the camaraderie, and we learned how to properly do drilling ceremony. It was just so many different things that we learned while we're in the school that I really looked up to the drill sergeants, and it was—when you're in basic training, the drill sergeant—you don't have that—you start to have more of a camaraderie with NCOs once you get into school. You've still got to call him drill sergeant but it's a little bit more open. So I like that. Basic training you can't be close to a NCO, you can't talk to him on a personal level, but you've got to do that more at AIT, and I think that's why—because they could let their guard down, we could joke with them. I actually saw a drill sergeant laugh. [both chuckle] Yeah.

TS: Did you ever have any female—

TM: Yeah.

TS: —like, role models or even n—anti-role models? I don't know.

TM: It was more anti—

TS: Yeah, with your face that's why I said it that way. [both laugh] So—

TM: They were pretty hard on us. I think—

[Speaking Simultaneously]

TS: Was this at the training?

TM: Yeah, all of them.

TS: Yeah.

TM: All the females that I've known.

TS: Do you think they might have been harder on the women for a reason?

TM: Yeah. I had one female drill sergeant in basic training; I—I had—I pretty much hated her. I really did. There was an incident in our basic training where—at the—everybody—They talk about toeing the line at the end of the night, and so this one—at—at the front of the room was the drill sergeant's desk where they sit at. And so, I was in second platoon in basic training, and so there was a sign on the desk that said, "This seat is only for second platoon drill sergeants."

So a drill sergeant from another platoon was doing toe the line that night and he looked at it and he's like, "Second platoon drill sergeant?" He was like, "Oh—" like, talking junk.

And so, like a day or two later, I guess one of the drill sergeants looks at this—our second platoon, they look and they're like, "It says 'fuck second platoon drill sergeants' on here."

And so—Yeah. And so, they see this, they go off on us; I mean, we get smoked. I don't even know how long we was getting smoked. They were like, "You all need to fess up,"—and it's just us girls—and they was like, "You all need to fess up. Who did this?" And it was just—I mean, it was girls crying, girls accusing each other. They—They would smoke us for a little bit, then walk out and they'd be like, "You all better tell us or we're going to smoke you again."

So it would be girls arguing back and forth and nobody's confessing to this, and so they were, like—I think we had, like, a week or two left of basic, and they were like, "You all are going to get smoked seriously every day until we figure out how to do—who did this."

And so, I'm talking about we're bickering—they're bickering back and forth, nobody's confessing to this. I mean, they're smoking us so bad. And then the female drill sergeant—she really upset me when she said this—she said, "For all of you all out here that are mothers, y'all—," she said—I mean, she said something—"I do not respect you all as mothers;" that, "Y'all are bringing up y'all's children like this and y'all can't even confess to so—" [unclear].

TS: She made it personal?

TM: Yeah, she made it personal. And then this one girl, she—she had went to the doctor that day and had came back, and when she came back it was like, "Do you know who wrote this on this sheet of paper?" We're still in the midst of getting smoked and she was like, "Y'all don't remember that day that that drill sergeant was in here and he said something about that?" And come to find out it was him. He came and apologized to us but our drill sergeants did not. Yes, and especially her; like, that really hurt; it really hurt. I mean, that—I would say that was the only time I felt hazed in the military. That was the only time, and even though I'm not a mother, for her to say that? I can imagine a mother

hearing that; "What kind of mother are you when you can't even confess to something like this?"

TS: Yes.

TM: And none of us in there had anything to do with it.

TS: Right.

TM: And so, yeah, that's prob—probably one of the worst days I ever had in the military and one of the worst times I had dealing with a female drill sergeant.

TS: Yes.

TM: Most of them were pretty hard and—but she was the only one I hated. [chuckles] Yeah.

TS: Well, you had talked to me earlier, and I—I actually think we might have done this off-tape, when you were saying you wished that—Well, the question here is, is there a school or a special training that you would have liked to have attended?

TM: I would have liked to know more about the different fields I could have went into in computers because that's what I was interested in at the time, but I would have rather did something more like dealing with people in some kind of way. I would have rather done something like that because when I got out I—I had thought about doing the reserves, and there was a civil affairs unit in Greensboro and they said they deal with—deal with people, and I was like, "I would have rather—do something like that," and that's why I want to do things with people now, because I think that's better for me rather than working on some random equipment.

TS: Is that how you picked your major?

TM: Yeah. Yeah, I knew I was—I needed—I—I wanted to work with people, and I'm ve—I'm, like, a good mentor, a motivator, and I like to encourage people to do well.

TS: Yes.

TM: And so—Now, criminology was my second choice because I actually wanted to do social work, but transferring in it wasn't—I would have had to do another year of school and I didn't want to.

TS: So it worked out better with the sociology and crim—

TM: Criminology.

TS: Criminology?

TM: Yes, because—I mean, that's—I'm interested in that, too, so.

TS: Well, how's it been being a student here at UNCG?

TM: It's—It's all right. I thought when I—I started at a community college because I had heard that the—it's just easier, and then, of course, a lot of older students go to community colleges first, so that would—that was a good transition into coming here. I really thought that I would just be another number here but I'm—I'm not, and I—it's probably just because I'm a veteran and I'm involved in this stuff, but I really felt like there's been open arms, and I—I think I've been the oldest person in a class which is kind of amazing me. I'm thirty-four and I'm the oldest person in a class. It's like, "Wow," but I try not to think about that. I try to just focus on the class and—It comes out sometimes, the fact that you're a veteran, and there have only been a few situations—there have been a few situations where it's been kind of sketchy and I'm like, "Okay, I don't know if I'm going to be able to finish this cla—or finish this day in this class."

One—We were talking about suicide in one of my classes, and there are different forms of suicide, and I guess one is, like, where you sacrifice yourself. And so, the teacher said, for the example, like, a soldier going on a bomb, and that just bothered me so much because I know somebody that died pretty much doing something like that. And so, the whole suicide thing, I don't think that was their intention to commit suicide, it just—

TS: That's a different—

TM: Yeah, I feel like that's different, because you may be able to live, you never know. It's not like you're—But you—It just bothered me that that was the example that was brought up.

TS: Right, I see.

TM: Yeah, it really, really bothered me.

TS: Did you say anything about it?

TM: I actually didn't.

TS: Probably hard.

TM: Yeah, it was, it was, and it was a teacher I like, too.

TS: Did you say anything to that teacher later?

TM: No, I didn't.

TS: Maybe you should.

TM: I should because—I really should.

TS: Because it would—maybe there'll be another veteran in that class—

TM: Yes.

TS: —in the future.

TM: Yeah, that really bothered me. And then, I know we—a class this year, I was totally not expecting that to be the topic even though that's what we were reading, but I thought we were going to end up talking about something else, but the question was, "Is war a good thing?"

Now, some people in this class—It was probably one of our first discussions this semester, and so—It's a 490 class so I know some of the people in the class already and some of them—some of them know I'm a veteran. And so, when that question got asked—and it was just—you know most people are going to say that it's not necessary, and so that was a pretty hard class to sit through, and knowing that I was probably—if I said something, I mean, I'm going to be for war. I mean, that's—I'm going to have a lot to say that's going to be like, "Yeah, war is a good thing." And I only said a few things, and I—I did end up talking to that teacher later on. I told him that it was a hard class for me that day and I told him that I was a veteran. I don't—We didn't discuss that topic ever again after that. [chuckles]

TS: Really?

TM: We never did. We never did, and I don't know if he—it was because of that or not, because we discussed different parts of that passage but, like, the—Actually, the whole passage was about good and bad parts of war, and so I was actually amazed that we never talked about that subject again; we talked about other things in the passage. So I don't know if it was because we had that conversation but that—

[Intercom in background]

TS: Alright. Well, so being—Is there anything—As a veteran being—going back to school and being around a lot of the young people who really aren't even aware that we're at war still right now, does that ever bother you, I guess?

TM: Yeah, it does, because it's like you live life and you have been through so many experiences and you know what other parts of the world are going through, and so when students say certain things and you're just like, "Oh my God. [chuckles] You—You have no idea. You have no idea what these people are going through over here." I mean, they don't really want us to be over there.

I mean, they know that we're trying to help in our own way but it's just like if you own a house and somebody invades your house trying to tell you how to cook dinner; that's pretty much how they look at it. It's like you're invading their home trying to tell them how to govern themselves. And we're—When we're the main ones talking about, "You need to be able to do it on your own without government intervention," but that's what we're doing, there's good parts about it and there's bad parts about it.

But a lot of these students, they don't know—they don't have any kind of world view. They have went straight from high school to college. They probably still have their parents paying for them. It's just—It's a lot of things that I feel disconnected as far as with the average student, straight out of high school, having to deal with that. It's a lot to have to go through.

And then, people assume certain things about the military. I'm on a—a committee for a dance marathon that's going to be going on later on in the year and I said, "Oh, I can get the ROTC to come out and help pull security and all that stuff."

And this one girl was like, "What do we need them for? We don't need it." She—
And I said, "Well, they can pull security, they can do this, they can do that."

"Well, they ain't going to have no guns, are they?" Like—

I said, "Well, you know what? You may not, but most people respect that uniform," and so they're not—but, like, I said that to her and she pretty much shut up.

And it was kind of amazing because other people in the room know I'm a veteran and so they were looking at me, like, "Oh my God, she's going to go off." I tried not to.

But when certain people say certain things like that I'm like, "You don't know what we do and it doesn't matter. We don't need weapons. We are trained to be able to fight in any kind of way that we can, so I don't feel like I should have to explain that to you." If—"Do you want to go up against that person in uniform?" is what I really wanted to say, but just—and I think that—and I can just imagine how the students feel when they see every Tuesday and Thursday students in uniform, because that's when they have ROTC days, and so I wonder what it's like to be a student to see these other students in these uniforms, like, "What are they taking over?"

TS: Yes.

TM: I think they have a certain—They look at us differently; like, we're just here to take over and we're so rigid and we—

TS: Like, more of a militaristic kind of—

[Speaking Simultaneously]

TM: Yes. Yeah, but really it's—some people—It's a career for me, it was a job; a stepping stone to get somewhere else. I wanted to be able to go to school, I wanted to be able to travel and meet new people and have new experiences. Some people do want to make it a career. I'm just not—I like my freedom. You had to give up your freedom to be in the

military. So I like my freedom but I think—I don't know—I—People think that military, we're just there to control others or just do it our way; I do—I don't know. I just don't know why people look down on us, but we're average people. We're just obeying orders, is all we're doing. We—We raised our right hands saying that we would serve our country, and in serving our country we have to do a lot of things that you are not going to do.

TS: Well, do you think your life is different because you enlisted?

TM: Yes.

TS: How?

TM: I think it's better, because it has opened me up to more opportunities. I know if I tell somebody that I was in the military it automatically puts me before other people. That's why I don't—Like—Like, a girl in Career Services, she just wanted—people that work in there, they're trying to do a career for—for veterans, because she said every time she goes out to employers to ask what they want, first thing they say is, "Veteran." And so, I do a lot of leadership things and a lot of stuff here and there, and I know that my advantage is that I have military service, and so I don't have to worry about a lot. [both chuckle]

TS: Would—What would you say if a young person came to you and said, "I'm thinking about joining the military"? What would you say to them?

TM: I would tell them to do it. We're trying to—

[Speaking Simultaneously]

TS: Male or female?

TM: Yeah, it don't matter.

TS: Would you say—talk to them the same?

TM: Right, yeah. Yeah, I think I would. Now, a female, you do have to tell them, "Watch out. You are going to be around a whole bunch of guys, but just do what you're supposed to do. You—The same. You're going to be wearing green or whatever colors they're going to have by the time you get in." [laughs]

But—Yeah, like my nephew, we're trying to encourage him to go in. He's a little knucklehead so I—I want—I like to tell them everything that could go on in the military that—from basic training and the showers, to just whatever; whatever could happen.

TS: Kind of things that are thrown at you.

TM: Yeah. Now, that—what—in this one class, we had—she showed us a video and it was about women in the military and going through sexual harassment and all that, and I think it was, like, three women and then they—I guess they had tried to tell their superiors that they had went through this and they didn't get any kind of help, or they were chastised, or sent to other units or whatever; discriminated against.

So in this movie—Now, I was with the girls; I understand that it happens. It didn't really happen to me but I can understand their frustration, and so in this movie the girls—it's a documentary—so the girls, they went to a restaurant, and the waitress was—she said that she was wanting to go into the military, and they completely tried to talk her out of it, and I think that by talking a female out of going into the military you're pretty much feeding into the stereotypes because you're telling her that she can't do the same thing as a man, that she wouldn't be able to handle it, that we should just cower away, and instead of fighting and putting more females into the military where it can be equalized and there—it would lessen some of these things that happen, I mean, you're making it worse, in—in my opinion, by telling her not to go in.

TS: [unclear]

TM: You're already telling her that she's lesser than that man. To me, that's what she's telling her; that she can't take it. You may not have been able to take it, but I know one thing, you can't really do—I'm going to be fighting and fighting and fighting, so if anything would have happened to me in the military, some kind of sexual harassment, something where I really felt that there was something going on, I would have told somebody until somebody listen to me. You're going to listen to me. I'm going to go to the highest person that I can. I told you what I did when my sergeant wouldn't let me go out.

TS: Yes.

TM: I went above him.

TS: Yes.

TM: So that's just the kind of person that I am and I just feel like your feeding into those stereotypes when you tell women not to go into the military.

TS: And not everybody's experience is the same.

TM: Yes.

TS: In fact—

TM: Right.

TS: —no one's experience is the same.

TM: Right, and I had to—After that video and the teacher showed it, she asked for our opinion and I think that was the first time I came out in the classroom. I said that I had been in the military and I was, like, this—I was with this video up until she started telling her not to go in, because how are you going to tell a female not to do that. When you go in the military, that's a very strong thing to do, I feel like. It's very empowering and all that, and I feel like by taking that away from somebody by telling them, "Oh, don't do it because you're going to get hara—" that's so untrue; that's so untrue. And then, you don't know what event can happen to a person to make them stronger. I'm not saying that it needs to happen, but that could be—if it happens to her she could have been that one person to bring it to the attention to the whole world. How do you know that's not going to happen? So there's so many possibilities that I would never—I would actually—I actually encourage people to go in. Go ahead. I—I wish they'd bring back the draft.

TS: Really, why?

TM: Yeah, because it'll grow people the hell up. I feel like people should have two years of service to some—I mean, it doesn't even have to be military, but some kind of governmental service so that you know—

TS: National service?

TM: Yeah, so that you know what's it like to serve your country and you'll be more willing to work and—[chuckles] So I just feel like they should bring some kind of service like that in and that way you're—you have more loyalty to your—Because I will say that's another thing; I have—I'm more loyal to my country. You can't—I can talk shit all I want to about it but we can't do any wrong; [laughs] we can't do any wrong.

I have a friend that went up to Washington, D.C. and—for Veteran's Day and their partner, like—they got into a big fight and everything while they were up there and I was, like, "They ruined our nation's capital on Veteran's Day?" Like, that's how I feel about it. I'm very patriotic now.

TS: Well, that—

TM: Yes.

TS: —that's a question I have, actually.

TM: Yes.

TS: What does patriotism mean to you?

TM: It means loyalty. It means coming together for your country, for your community, for your family, for each other. Putting aside all differences that we may have, whether it be differences between North Carolina and California, we're all a part of the same collective

unit and that's really what patriot—patriotism means. It means letting go of your int—individuality and just becoming one as a unit and, I mean, that's exactly what they teach us, is letting go of yourself and becoming one at—or being able to work as a unit, and that's what we really need to do, is compromise and do that and that's what patriotism means to me.

TS: Do you think there's anything that women can't do in the military? Because last year U.S. Secretary of Defense [Leon Edward] Panetta opened up combat arms—

TM: Yes.

TS: —to—to—to women and they don't have a—they're, kind of, slowly going into that.

TM: Yeah.

TS: And women serving in the intry—infantry, Special Forces, submarines; those kind of things are in the future. What do you think about that?

TM: I think that's awesome. I don't know why it took so long. Like I said before, the only thing that I feel like—I mean, if a woman is—has decided that that's what they want to go into, I think they're pretty tough as is. If you want to go in the Spec—I wouldn't do it. [chuckles] I—Anybody that goes in the Special Forces I think—I mean, you've got to have that mentality. You have to go through that training. They shouldn't—Yeah, they shouldn't do anything special as far as the training for them; they should go through the same training. But I really feel like this has been a long time coming and I—I support it, really. Like I said, the only problems that I feel like would probably happen is that me—men automatically feel like they need to protect women so they're just going to be looking to protect that woman as—They're going to be like, "Are you okay?"

TS: If they train together.

TM: Yes. Well, it's still—

TS: Yeah.

TM: Yeah, that's why I'm—I—

TS: It's hard to say?

TM: Yeah, it's hard to say.

TS: Yes.

TM: I really do feel like—that—that's the only issue that I feel like could come up.

TS: Is the protectiveness?

TM: Yeah, protectiveness. I mean, you just automatically want to save women, and then—Let's say if some situation happens to where there's a hostage situation, or that they're taken prisoners of war, it's just—it's hard to take in when it's a female. I know, like, when that Jessica Lynch thing happened, and that was just so hard for them to take because it was a female, but there were other people that were prisoners of war.

[Private First Class Jessica Dawn Lynch is a former United States Army soldier who was seriously injured and captured on March 23, 2003, when her convoy was ambushed by Iraqi forces. Her recovery on April 1, 2003, was the first successful rescue of an American prisoner of war since Vietnam and the first ever of a woman.]

TS: And killed.

TM: Yes, and killed in action, so I just—That's my only thing, is that if certain things like that would happen, females are going to be diff—treated differently because of that.

TS: Yes.

TM: Because of that whole protective thing. You don't want—You don't—If something happens to a female—that first female that dies in combat—that—that's actually in a combat MOS—

TS: Yes.

TM: —and the first one that dies, they're going to be looking at it like, "Is this something we should have done," but they—it's a casualty of war; that's just what's going to happen. There's going to be people that are going to die. It's just—

TS: Right.

TM: It's war.

TS: But they're going to scrutinize the woman more—

TM: Right.

TS: —than the man because they—if you're already a man in that field—

TM: Yes.

TS: —they feel like you're qualified—

TM: Yeah.

TS: —because you—

TM: Yeah.

TS: Interesting.

TM: Yeah. I mean, that's my only thing about it, but we could do whatever you want us to do; whatever you need us to do, we'll do it. [both chuckle]

TS: Yeah. Well, that seems like a good one to end on. I don't have any other questions, but is there something we haven't talked about that you might want to mention?

TM: No, I think we were pretty thorough. I enjoyed it.

TS: Yeah.

TM: Yes.

TS: Me, too. Thank you so much, Tina.

TM: No problem, no problem.

TS: All right, well, I'll go ahead and turn it off.

TM: Okay.

TS: Okay.

[End of Interview]