WOMEN VETERANS HISTORICAL PROJECT

ORAL HISTORY COLLECTION

INTERVIEWEE: Amber Mathwig

INTERVIEWER: Therese Strohmer

DATE: July 1, 2014

INTERVIEW PART TWO of TWO [Part one took place June 24, 2014]

[Begin Interview]

TS: This is Therese Strohmer. Today is July 1 of 2014. I'm with Amber Mathwig again. It's a continuation of an interview that we started on June 24 [2014], and we are again at the [Walter Clinton] Jackson Library [at the University of North Carolina at Greensboro] in Greensboro, North Carolina. Amber, could you just state your name again the way you'd like it to be on your collection?

AM: Amber Murray Mathwig.

TS: Okay, that sounds great. Okay, Amber, well, when we last left off, you had been in Iraq and you had left Iraq and you were going to some training in Texas. You want to tell us a little bit about that experience?

AM: The training was—it's—For me, what I was going to be doing, it was mostly like a paperwork requirement. The ship that I was going to be stationed on had a brig facility [military prison on a ship] within it if needed. We never used it in the time that I was there; it was mostly a storage space.

TS: Really?

AM: Yeah. Storage space or a space for the people that worked for me to hide.

TS: Okay.

AM: They would, like, turn the cameras and then they would hide in the corners where the cameras weren't. It was really kind of funny. Nice, quiet place to take a nap, though.

TS: I was going to say, is that what they were doing, just trying to—

[Speaking Simultaneously]

AM: Yeah.

TS: —catch some shut eye.

AM: Take a nap or sometimes we told them to go down there. But anyways, it was a combined school for people who were going to these sea billets where the ship had a brig and people who were going to, like, actual physical brigs. It's an any sea and navy enlisted classification but it's not a rate [general enlisted occupation] or an MOS [military occupational specialty], per se. So for me it was just additional training on top of my rate of being a master-at-arms.

For the people that were going to, like, the shore facilities, a lot of times it's those people whose rates don't otherwise have a lot of shore billets. So in order to get off going to sea or get off being deployed all the time they need to take a job outside of their training.

TS: I see.

AM: They would be trained to basically be a correctional officer for these brigs for two or three years.

TS: To get, like, a relief from that type of work.

AM: Yeah, to get a relief from deployment. It's 100% shore duty based; you're probably going to be at the brig the whole time. I've had a couple friends that were not MAs do it and they really enjoyed that there tends to be a pull for those people who really are still going to stay in, like, law enforcement after they get out, or they know that they're going to do correctional facility work while they're pursuing their degree or whatever, so... And, I mean, it was a four week school. I was bored; it was such a simple school. [chuckles]

TS: Yeah, really?

AM: We had this class of, like, forty people and I swear I thought most of them were idiots.

TS: What was the breakdown gender wise?

AM: It was mostly male. There was myself, there was two other females that I remember, and I want to say there was maybe one or two other females on top of that, but we were looking at a class of about thirty-five people and most of them were male. All of our instructors were male. All of our training command at the schoolhouse was male. I met

my senior chief, the one that would be on the ship with me, at that school, so it was interesting, because we got along at first and then I found out that he was crazy.

TS: How did you find that out?

AM: The way that he treated us, the way that he acted, the way that he would make you sit and listen to him tell stories and then ask you why the work wasn't done.

TS: Kind of set you up for failure?

AM: Yeah, that whole—Again, going back to, like, respect for the chain of command—respecting somebody's rank over respecting everything else—he utilized that as, "I have an audience and they have to be my audience because I'm the highest ranking person here, so until I'm done with them, they're mine." And that came into play on a lot of decisions that really impacted how I felt about the military later on. But in the beginning of meeting him he was just kind of, like, quiet and standoffish but nice. The school was—like I said, for me it wasn't challenging, really. It was kind of, like—It was a nice break after having been on deployment and with the command that I was at before that.

[Speaking Simultaneously]

TS: [unclear]

AM: I hated to see other females because they really, really sucked at what they were doing and they really, really were great at playing up that whole stereotype of women are worthless and women aren't strong and women can't do anything, and, like, it was visible that I disliked them.

TS: Did you call them out?

AM: No, not—I didn't call them out, per se, but I would—We were supposed to pair up, like, males with males and females with females and I refused to. I said, "I'm not going to get any training—any physical worthwhile training with these women so I would rather work with a male." So I quite often got—We had some young Marines in our course, and nothing against their intelligence, but if they were told, "Hey, this is going to be your partner, treat her the same," they're going to treat me the same. Whereas, I think, if the navy guys, who were mostly older, were paired up with me they still would have treated me differently. So I worked with those guys and it—it was hard, they are—they are—They were big individuals, they were not small people.

TS: What kind of things would you have to do when you paired up?

AM: Just, like, physical takedown controls type of stuff, try to restrain people on the floor, stuff like that. So that's why I didn't want to work with the females, I'm like—I don't—one was claiming to be broken the entire time which really annoyed me that they allowed her to continue this course without actually doing any of the work. And then the other one, she was just—she was just small and, "I'm so delicate." But this is how I felt about a lot of training.

Like, when I was training people I never let females act like that. It's like, "You're going to—You're going to train or you're going to leave." So it really annoyed me that this schoolhouse was not making people train. Like, I would have felt the same way about the guys. We did have some guys that also claimed to be broken and I felt the same way about that, but I was just more antagonized by the women doing it.

TS: Right, because did you feel like that's a reflection on all women?

AM: Yeah, yeah.

TS: Whereas for the guy, it's the individual guy?

AM: Yeah, they didn't stick out as much because there was thirty-nine other people to make up for the fact that they were dicking around. But, yeah. So, like, that—I would just do that. I wouldn't call them out specifically but I would—I would not partner up with them; I would not be gentle with them. I think a couple of times I had to partner up with a broken one and I would be nice considering she was supposedly broken but I would, like, not—I would make her go through the movements. I already knew the movements, I had been teaching some of the stuff for a couple of years, but I was part of the class, so.

TS: When you say "broken" you mean, like, hurt, injured?

AM: Yeah.

TS: Okay.

AM: I don't remember, something with her hips I think. But—And I always got, like, kind of a reputation for playing with the guys that way; like, I wouldn't care if it was a male or a female that I was paired up with, everybody got treated the same.

TS: Right. Well, I remember at the end of the last interview you were talking about how you wanted to take on the other partner—

AM: Oh, yeah.

TS: —that had been training and you weren't able to do that.

AM: Right.

TS: Right.

AM: It still pisses me off.

TS: [chuckles] Well, when—Go ahead.

AM: Oh, no. I mean, the cla—the course, it was just a—it was a boring course. It was just that was an antagonizing part, and I hate Texas in July. It's so—Well, I guess it was actually June but I hate Texas in the summertime; it's hot. [chuckles]

TS: Yes, it's oppressively hot.

AM: Yeah.

TS: Well, did you—Now, when you got your next assignment did you put in for this assignment?

AM: Yeah. I—When I was very young in the military, right after I got in trouble, kind of, I was, like, "I have to plan what I'm going to do because I want to be an officer and I want to do this," so I looked at all the officer commissioning programs and there was really only one that I would—because there was a—there was a timeframe to apply for everything. Because I had gotten the alcohol waiver, the timeframe for most of those would have been too far. So I was eligible—I would have been eligible for this one program called Limited Duty Officer, and I just kind of, like, talked to a few people about it, and I knew what my career needed to look like in order to be eligible at the earliest point in time and get a commissioning. So that's why—part of the reason why I went on the deployment to Iraq, and that's—I purposefully chose a sea duty billet. I only had chosen ships to go to. [chuckles]

And funny story. Like, everybody that had ever applied for an LDO [limited duty officer] out—off of that ship, out of that job that I was doing, had been selected for it.

TS: Okay.

AM: It was, like, seven or eight years running where everybody that had applied, had been selected while they were still part of that command. The command sucked ass, but because it was such a rough command and they did so much stuff there, like, that's why people were getting picked up. People get picked up for E-7 very easily off of that ship and people get picked up for these commissioning programs. I didn't know that when I applied, but when I got there and they're like, "What are your career aspirations?"

I said, "I want to be an LDO when I leave this command," and they're like, "You picked the right ship for that."

TS: What—How was it that you decide upon this career trajectory that—as you describe it now?

AM: To be an LDO—When I decided I wanted to be an LDO was when there was still a lot of non-security officers in running or rates, or running security departments, so I wanted to bring in what I knew about security, what I felt about the people; like a certain amount of camaraderie and love for security personnel. That's—That was really, like, my driving point behind wanting to be a security officer. Just, I would say, the love for the people over anything else; just wanting to bring some common sense to how their lives were dictated on a daily basis.

TS: Okay. How was it when you got to the ship?

AM: It was hard. The first—

TS: This was in June of 2009.

AM: Yeah.

TS: Okay.

AM: The ship was in dry dock, which means that it was receiving repairs and a lot of our—So we have this humongous ship in dry dock, and parked next to the ship that's in dry dock is a barge where we, like, conduct our daily business, because we can't be on the ship because it's loud and there's welding and there's—it—I never knew what the ship looked like without all this construction going on until, like, eight months later when it was finally all gone. Was it eight months? Couldn't have been that long. July. No, I think we went out in November, so five months later. They were in the yards for a total of eight months [unclear].

[Speaking Simultaneously]

TS: This was in [Naval Station] Norfolk [Virginia]?

AM: Yeah. And just being on that barge and having to go up and down and to the ship and back, and again, it's the middle of summer, I was, like, coming home just exhausted every day. We—My—He wasn't the chief, he got picked up for E-7 right after I got there, but the LPO [leading petty officer] when I got there, he was very much like, "You've got a lot to do." So I had to, like, go to some other—They're schools but they're shorter schools and they were local so it was just, kind of, like training, getting officially the training that I had been teaching; I was not an official instructor.

TS: So you got certified for that.

AM: Yeah, I had to go get that certification. So I spent the first few months, like, learning a little bit about the ship and being on sea duty, but mostly being in these local schools to

get all of the certifications needed. It was rough. It was—It was the first time that I had been in a professional environment with so many people of different jobs. Prime—Before that, like, eight years—seven years, actually—seven years I had mostly spent, like, in my little MA [Master-At-Arms] world and only dealing with people either, like, as they would come across security or on a personal level; hanging out with people from these other rates.

So now I had to, like, be on a professional level with all these people whose jobs I did not understand, and everybody on a ship believes that their job is the most important job and nobody else can function without them. Which has some truth to it. You need to eat, so the cooks. You need to have steam to wash the dishes, so that's the pit[?]. Even just, like, the basic everyday functions, everybody's interdependent upon each other. So that was quite a change in learning how to do business.

TS: And interacting on so many different levels with so many different people.

AM: Yeah. Plus, I think I had mentioned that even though people thought I was young they thought I had been in the military and that I had been on a ship before because I was a first class. They thought, maybe, ten plus years, and then they find out I've only been in seven years and, no, I just got frocked [term for a commissioned or non-commissioned officer selected for promotion who is allowed to wear the insignia of the higher grade before the official date of promotion] to first class last week. [chuckles] So that—It was funny, like, people were a lot more—Once they find that out they're usually pretty generous—

TS: To help you.

[Speaking Simultaneously]

AM: —with their time and their training and everything.

TS: It seems like that's a delicate dance, too, because you want to have—

AM: Yeah.

TS: —that authority and respect but you still want to learn.

AM: Right. Plus being a female and having to find that fine line between disrespecting myself by flirting with somebody to get what I need, and getting what I need for my people by using my own sexuality to persuade them to give me their time. That was a hard one for me, and that's a hard one for me to reflect back on now because I'm, like, I had to do that, but that also, again, played into that stereotype of only women who are willing to sleep with the guys are the ones that get what they want, and stuff like that.

TS: Can you give me an example of, like, when you would have to do that?

AM: There was a—There was a male that worked in the engineering department and he was their hotshot. Everybody knew that he would advance. Actually—Yeah, he actually just picked up senior chief, too, so he's continued to advance really quickly, and he was—he was very knowledgeable. He was very much a hot shot but he was very much also, like, very male and very dominative. And he's a re—He's a nice guy and he took care of his people, but at the same time he was very much, "Anybody that messes with my people, or me, is not getting anything from us." And when you're on the ship you have to get certain qualifications and some of those qualifications come from spending time down in the engineering department learning about how they make the ship go vroom, vroom. [chuckles]

TS: Right.

AM: So by him, like, latching onto me as a woman that he appreciated and that he liked having around, everybody else that worked for him knew that. They knew that, hey, if MA1 [petty officer first class] comes around we give her whatever she needs and we do whatever is needed. I guess that was the weird—And it's really hard when you actually want to maintain a friendship with somebody, too, because they're just a cool person but you know that they have underlying motives to it, so.

TS: So you have mixed feelings about that.

AM: Yeah, yeah.

TS: Well, what was a—You talked a little bit about some of the challenges that you had. What was the most challenging part during this period that you're in the dry dock?

AM: In the dry dock?

TS: Yes.

AM: Staying awake. [chuckles]

TS: Staying awake. What kind of hours did you have to work?

AM: It was—Actually, it really wasn't—it really wasn't nearly as bad as when we got out of dry dock, but on duty days, which was every six days, I think, at that point, the—I would be awake for, like, thirty-six hours at a time, just because there were so few of us and we were always having to respond to somebody. When I say we were the CO's [commanding officer] bitches [subservient person], like, we were actually every officer's bitches. Primarily responsible to the CO, but every officer could, like, call us up and be like, "Hey, have you guys done this? Hey, this happened. Hey, this happened."

TS: They were calling for what kind of incidents?

AM: Just everything; absolutely everything. It could be security related, it could be, "I can't—My people can't find the lock—or the key for this lock. You need to come open up this lock," down in this space that I had no clue where it was, and because of all the construction stuff on the ship, like, I couldn't make any reference points.

TS: Right.

AM: For the longest time I had no idea how to get to my own spaces on the ship.

TS: You're running around just—

AM: Yeah.

TS: —at everybody's beck and call.

AM: Yeah, like a chick—Yeah, like a chicken with the head cut off most of the time.

TS: Well, where are you staying? Where are you berthing at yourself?

AM: I bought a house with my boyfriend at the time, so we were living in a house about twenty minutes away from the base.

TS: Okay.

AM: I actually still own that house.

TS: Yeah?

AM: Yeah.

TS: How was—How's everything else then? You had talked briefly about promotions, and so you had been promoted pretty quickly—

AM: Yes.

TS: —throughout that, and it gave you a level of respect quickly and—though you said how you kind of felt you didn't have all the training and experience you really nee—wanted to have—

AM: Right.

TS: —for the job.

AM: Yeah, that's why I had tried to get to a ship earlier in my career, knowing that—and I said this to some of the people that worked for me, too, that were of lower rank. I said, "You're so lucky to come to a ship and get all the knowledge without having any of the responsibility." That—Being on the ship as an MA, you do a wide variety of things so you get to learn a lot and you get to do a lot, and it stays with you for your career, as long as you want to be in the military. But going older with more rank and everything it's, like, none of the fun and all of the responsibility, so...

TS: [chuckles]

AM: Having to, like, get those qualifications that you don't have the time, whereas your younger people, they have the time, so...

TS: Where you ready to go on deployment by the time that came around?

AM: I wanted to go on deployment more than anything in the world, but my life took a severely drastic change a couple months before I left on deployment.

TS: Okay.

AM: While we were out doing workups one day my—So I had tried to impress this upon my mother and father for eight years at this point, that if anything ever happens, you need to call the Red Cross, because if I'm not able to be reached, the Red Cross will reach you quickly, like—The Red Cross will reach you faster than you could ever imagine sometimes. We prevented a suicide at my first command because the mother, instead of trying to call her son or call her son's friends, called the Red Cross and the Red Cross called the security department and the security department called the barracks watch and the barracks watch opened up the door and the security people were able to restrain the individual. That's how quickly that worked. I realize that's probably an exceptional case, but I tried to impress upon my parents, always use the Red Cross.

TS: Okay.

AM: Especially now that I'm at a ship command, always use the Red Cross if anything happens that I need to know about immediately.

So we go on this training exercise the first week of May, in 2010. And this whole, like, spring period we had been in and out of these training exercises and these certifications that have to be done to say, "Hey, you're ready to go on deployment," and it was stressful and we were losing people in our little department left and right for various reasons. The senior chief was all about himself, our chief was driving me insane, he was driving the people that worked for us just absolutely bat shit [extremely] crazy, so I couldn't control—It felt like I couldn't control them most of the time because they were so mad at him, because he—

TS: You couldn't control your people?

AM: Yeah, because he would just, like—We were getting ready to do our own certifications and he would have people sit around knowing that there was no work to be done. He would have people sit around all day and then at, like, four o'clock in the afternoon be like, "I need this list done before anybody can leave."

I was like, "You knew that we had that shit since this morning. Why—"

TS: Pretty controlling.

AM: Yeah, or, "Why can't we do it tomorrow morning when you're coming up with another list?" Just stuff like that. You mess with a sailor's liberty time, they will hate you forever, for life, and that—there is no fine balance there. It's, like, you either give your people something productive to do or you send them home. Otherwise everybody will hate the job, the life. Anyways, this was very typical—

TS: I see.

AM: —on the—on the [USS] *Kearsarge*. There was just worse for us because so many of our people were TAD [temporary additional duty] from other departments.

TS: Temporary duty?

AM: Yeah, temporary duty from other departments, so they would just whine, like, "I want to go back to my department." Or they would go to their department and be like, "I'm not being utilized for anything." Anyways, a big old headache.

So anyways, we're out on this training exercise and I was working nights and our computers weren't working—or our email wasn't working—only for one half of the alphabet, which happened to start with "m". So Friday, Saturday go by, not—no emails or anything being able to be sent around for work related stuff; just doing, like, some nighttime security and some nighttime paperwork and everything with my—the kids that I'm supervising. I always called them my kids; my stepkids.

And Sunday night—Yeah, it was Sunday night. So Sunday night goes by—or I get up for work Sunday night and I walk into the office. I want to say I hadn't had coffee, because this was something that—especially when I worked days, because I would be up so late and then I would get up at, like, 7:30 in the morning, like, nobody talked to me until I had coffee. And they used to, like—every once in a while somebody would try to be, like, really happy and they would get shut down immediately by somebody else. They were like, "Please don't do that. Just let her have her coffee and be in peace and then we'll go about the day."

So I walk into the office; it's, like, six o'clock Sunday evening. We were probably on Eastern [Standard] Time; I don't think we were that far off of the shore.

TS: Okay.

AM: But I said very casually, "Is the email up?"

And they're like, "Yeah, except that anything that was sent over the weekend you didn't get it; your email inbox is empty," basically.

I was like, "Okay." So I log on and I was getting ready to send—I think somebody brought me coffee—I'm getting ready to send some emails for work, and I'm getting ready to send, like, a quick email to my boyfriend because he hadn't heard from me in a couple days at that point. And I just get this text message from his phone that says, "Have you talked to your mother?"

I said, "No, what's going on?"

He goes, "You need to call your mom."

And I go upstairs to my officer—I think I was already crying. [chuckles]

TS: Because you knew something was up.

AM: I knew something was wrong. And he had a phone that I could call off the ship with, so I call to my mom, and my dad had been in the hospital for two days. And she tried to tell me, "Don't worry about it. They're just doing some testing." And, anyways, somehow she let "pancreas" slip out without really meaning to, so I spent the night Googling pancreas problems, which, of course, there's pancreatic cancer, which was a late diagnosis and generally terminal.

My command knew this. One of my girls brought me—went to the vending machine and just, like, brought me this entire bag of chocolate which I probably didn't need but she was so sweet about it. She's like, "I don't know how to talk to people when they're crying, so here." [chuckles]

TS: Have candy.

AM: Yeah, have some candy. So—

TS: Could you get off the ship?

AM: I was told no, originally. I was—They tr—They asked if I could get off the ship because there were helicopter flights—this is how I know we weren't that far off shore—but there was no room because the helicopters were so small and other people needed to come on and off the ship for certain things.

And so, Monday went by and Tuesday went by and I'm just a mess the entire time. I got an email from my dad. I still have some emails from my dad during this time frame that are in a box somewhere in my closet. And I go to bed, like, Wednesday morning; I don't even know why. Like, I was just really sitting at my desk every night just bawling hysterically and for once my kids weren't assholes. They mostly left me alone, actually, which is really weird. They were probably hiding in the brig. [both chuckle] But—

TS: They probably had never seen you not in control.

AM: Right, and that kind of became, like, a weird thing with all the emotions that I had to deal with on the ship during these upcoming months. But Wednesday morning I got off of work and I went to bed and, like, two hours later Danielle's, like, shaking me and she's like, "You have to get up. You have to get up. You have to be at the top of the flight ramp in fifteen minutes."

And I'm like, "What's going on?"

She's like, "I woke you up an hour ago." She's like, "You're leaving. You have to get on that—You have to be up on the ramp in fifteen minutes." So it's basically, like—

[Speaking Simultaneously]

TS: Pushing you out.[?]

AM: Pulling my uniform on, grab my backpacks, stuffed a couple of things in there. I'm, like, putting my hair up as I'm walking out to the flight deck. And, yeah, they put me on a helicopter and put me on emergency leave. And I'd been arguing with my boyfriend about driving home versus flying home when we got back—when we got back into port. His mother had bought me a plane ticket and then I texted him from the helo [helipad] and I was like, "I'm on my way now."

And he's like, "Well, okay. So has mom called and changed the plane ticket?" And I was actually able to get on a flight, like, two hours after I got back to Norfolk and go home. But while I'm at home—

TS: Where did they live?

AM: Minnesota.

TS: That's right.

AM: But while I'm at home, he and I got into an even bigger fight and he moved out while I was at home. And we had three dogs. Big story.

So this is all, like, three months before deployment's supposed to happen and I spend—I'm supposed to be getting ready for my first interview for this LDO program; I'm trying to get granted TAD to a recruiting station near my home so I can be with my family; the senior chief is denying it repeatedly, saying, "She's too valuable, she has to be here." And they're like, "We can't have you gone for deployment."

I'm like, "He's not going to be alive long enough. Do you not see these letters that are being sent to you from the doctor? This is terminal. He only has a few weeks." Dealing with being by myself for the first time in, like, three years, as well as taking care of two dogs, working fourteen hours a day; increasingly getting into fights with somebody that would become my supervisor soon after we go on deployment—or, actually, right before we go on deployment. Just all this stuff going on and having to get ready, still, for our inspection and—

TS: Are you in Minnesota?

AM: No, I was back—I was only in Minnesota for, like, five days.

TS: Okay.

AM: And then I was back on the ship.

TS: I see.

AM: We go up to New Jersey to pick up ammunition. I frigging hate Jersey, because we've gone up there twice to pick up ammunition and both times I got blackout drunk because I was such an emotional wreck. And the second time, which was after our deployment, I ended up medical, which is just awkward when you're twenty-nine years old and a supervisor, and everybody else that's getting sick and ending up in medical is, like, nineteen years old and shouldn't be drinking anyways.

So when I was in Jersey—Again, it wasn't that email wasn't working, except my family knew we were in port and they kept trying to call my phone, which didn't have a signal inside the ship. But my dad's little sister had rushed him to the emergency room one day while she was caring for him, and he ended up back in the hospital again from blood clots that had gotten into his lungs. And the—I flew home from Jersey for another five or six days and stayed there. And this whole time, again, being like, "Can I just get the TAD granted? It's only going to be for a few weeks. They—The chemo's already been stopped because the cancer's growing so aggressively."

And, still, it's like, "You're too valuable. We need you here. We have these inspections coming up. We have these deployments coming up that you have to be here for. You just need to suck it up," type of attitude. Imagine being told both by this guy who would become my supervisor and this EA [Engineering Aide], who needed his audience all the time that I'm too valuable.

And I'm get—I get back from—get back from Minnesota, and I had taken my—I had taken my dress uniform with me expecting to attend a funeral, which didn't happen, so I come back and all my stuff's at home and I, like, get to work the next day and they're like, "You have your LDO interview today."

It's like, "Okay, which uniform am I supposed to be in?"

And they tell me, and I'm like, "Half that stuff's at home. I need to go home."

And they're like, "No, we have these drills to run this morning."

So they had me, like, standing out on the pier, not doing anything, because they don't trust me to do anything at this point because I'm so emotional, but at the same time I'm too valuable to be gone.

And finally at lunchtime, which is, like, an hour before my interview, they're like, "You can go home and get your stuff now." At the same time yelling at me like, "Why isn't your stuff on board where it's supposed to be?"

I'm like, "Did you not see me leave for five days to maybe attend a funeral?"

TS: Right.

AM: "Would you not wear your dress uniform to your father's funeral?"

And the—So I—Really funny. I run home, and because I had been, like, sweating out on the pier I decided to take a shower quick and brush my teeth and I'm, like—drop my cover[hat] in the sink on top of the all the toothpaste and I'm like, "Oh, my God. You've got to be kidding me."

So I get back to the ship and I go up and I'm standing in line and everybody's got their records and I don't have my records and they're like, "No, you have to go get your records and you needed to have requested them," and I'm just, like—

TS: Right.

AM: Totally—Everything's totally gone on over my head. And I go to the personnel office, and, fortunately, they had taken care of me even if my own chain of command hadn't taken care of me and everything, and they're like, "No, we knew you had stuff going on so we requested the records for you."

So I go back and I'm standing there and the command master chief comes up to me and he goes—this is, like, right before I'm supposed to go in for the interview, and he's like, "I can't get your TAD request done." He's like, "It's just everybody's saying 'no'."

And I said, "I'm not asking to go, like, TAD for months, I just want to be home for when he dies."

And he's, like—Actually, I think that conversation was a couple days beforehand; that conversation was a couple days beforehand. The conversation that we were having outside of the room where my interview was supposed to be was, "Yes, you can go home for another week of leave after this assessment is done in, like, three days;" whatever the assessment day was. Actually, the assessment date was July—June 29, because I went home on July 1.

TS: Okay.

AM: So, yeah, four years ago today. And I just started balling and I'm, like—

TS: Right before the—

AM: Right before this interview, and I'm just, like, crying hysterically, and the other people that are standing there—I don't know how many people knew what was going on, they just knew something was going on.

TS: Right.

AM: That I was crying all the time. But, yeah, so I got myself together and wiped my face dry and I went into this interview and I'm just, like—and I told them right away, I said, "I just got some good/bad news that I can go home and everything, and I've just got all this stuff

going on," and it ended up being, like, a good interview, I think, but in the long run, because I had been so busy, and because the ship had been in dry dock and everything, and they didn't think I had enough qualifications and—

TS: Right.

AM: —that I needed more time on the ship before they recommended me. Which came into play later on when they were, like "Why aren't you working on these qualifications? You know the LDO board's looking for them for next year."

And it's like, "Because you guys have me working twenty-three hours a day."

TS: Right.

AM: "At what point do you expect me to go take my one hour of free time a day and go do something to help myself?"

TS: Right.

AM: Anyways, I went home on July 1 and my father died on July 4, so I did get to hear a few last words from him and get a hug from him before he actually, like, deteriorated.

TS: Yeah.

AM: So. Completely, yeah.

TS: So it was a very traumatic time.

AM: It was a very traumatic time worsened—The military is so complicated because it shows you just how much control they have over your life. If that had been a civilian job it never would have been a question of, "I'll just take my chances and I'm leaving. If they want to fire me they'll fire me; if they want to give me some vacation time, they'll give me some vacation time." But, like, you can't be compelled to show up to work based on the fact that you may end up in jail, you know?

TS: Right.

AM: Whereas if I had—And I never would have done this because my father would have lost his shit if he found out that I just went UA [unauthorized absence] to go home and be with him. You—The whole compelling argument there is, it's not just that you're not going to show up for work and lose your job, it's that you're going to lose money; it's that you're going to end up in jail. It's that you're going to lose everything that you've worked for—for me at that point eight years, just because you want to go home and take care of your family.

And that is—It's a really hard concept. Like, I know a—This was the rumor. I didn't hear it straight out of her mouth, I heard it via other people who she talked to, but

we had a girl who smoked pot, and then came up to us and said, "I've been doing drugs," just so she could get discharged and go home because her mother had been diagnosed with cancer while she was in boot camp, because she knew there was no other reasonable way for her to get home fast and be able to take care of her mother, so...

TS: So sometimes that compassion for the people is missing, when you're talking about—

AM: Right.

TS: —the way they're treating you in your command for—

AM: Right. And that whole thing like, "You're so valuable, we need you here for this assessment; we need you here for deployment." They didn't use me at all during the assessment. They used me as, like, a little runaround and find missing people and go get this equipment, because they didn't trust me in my emotional state.

So it's like, "You didn't trust me in my emotional state to be a part of the assessment but I had to be here for it."

And then they went out on a training exercise while I was at home for the funeral, and, again, I ended up flying out to the ship. It was kind of like a nice break in reality, this two days it took to get from our base in Norfolk to the ship because it was just the most ridiculous mode of transportation ever. We drove from Norfolk to [Marine Corps Base] Camp Lejeune. From Camp Lejeune we sat there for, like, eight hours waiting for a broken helicopter to come pick us up to go out to the ship. We have no idea where the ship is at. It's me and this guy whose house had been broken into and he had been flown off to—

TS: Deal with it.

AM: —file the police report for it and then was flying back on. Different department obviously. They actually cared about him and his stuff and how it affected him emotionally.

We leave Camp Lejeune, we fly down to Cherry Point, we pick up a bunch of people, and we fly back to Camp Lejeune and they're like, "It's too late for us to leave; we'll be landing in the dark. The captain doesn't want that with all these people onboard."

Okay, so now we're in Camp Lejeune. I've got a backpack with a toothbrush and some shirts in it; this guy has, like, nothing. So we ended up staying—one of the guys—one of the Marines got us one room at the barracks and then they're like, "Well, somebody else can sleep in the"—I don't know what they call it—their barracks watch room. Yeah, I can't remember. They had a name for it.

But I was like, "Well, I actually have extra clothes, so just let me shower and change and I'll go sleep in that room that doesn't have a shower or a bath—or a bathroom and you can stay in this room, that way you can at least shower and lay out in your underwear or whatever.

TS: Right.

AM: [chuckles] It was a really weird situation, because I didn't like this guy at all, either, but you spend thirty-six hours with somebody you become friends. And then the next morning it's, like, we sat there and waited again, then we spent all day on this helicopter. Turns out that the ship was down near Florida or something.

So we finally get on the ship and my—the guy who would become my supervisor was waiting and he's all very happy to see me and everything and he's like, "We needed you. Are you okay? But we kind of need you to get back to work," and all this stuff. And, like, three weeks later he gets promoted and he just does this complete one-eighty all of a sudden. He's like, he's part of the Chief's Mess [promotion to chief petty officer E-7 which grants the privilege to use the Chief's Mess, a room on a naval vessel that is off-limits to anyone not a chief, except by specific invitation] now so he needs to show who's boss. When he was an E-6 like me, granted we had twelve years of military experience difference between us, like, he would be on an equal level. We would make decisions together and he would defer to me a lot when it came to personnel because he mostly hated people, whereas I actually cared about people, stuff like that. And then he, like—All that—All of that, like, two, three months of stress came to a full—I don't know. Anyways, we were supposed to deploy on, like, September 13, and then we got deployed in the middle of August with a ten day notice.

TS: This was in 2010?

AM: Yeah, this was in 2010.

TS: Okay.

AM: So we got, like, a ten day notice, the ship got broken up into three section duty. Each section got seventy-two hours of special liberty to take care of their finances, store their cars, do whatever. And for me, that meant working the other six days. I was, like, I don't—I'm off these seventy-two hours; I don't really have anything to do because I already had somebody living in the house to take care of my dogs. Obviously that's where my vehicle was going to be stored; I didn't have enough time to go home. My family was supposed to come out in September before I left. I was just, like—I was getting yelled at by my officer because some stuff showed up that—When I was looking through the pictures the other day, I found these pictures that I forgot about. We had tried out these different—these new training suits, and I had been really big about—because I knew the company that was making them—I was like, "We've got to have this demo. At least let's have the demo." Right?

So we have this demo of these training suits, which basically allowed two people to fight and actually wail on each other [beat up on each other] and no one—not get hurt because of the padding and everything. And my officer is 100% against them. He's like, "We're not getting these. It was a fun presentation but these are garbage," blah blah, blah, blah, blah.

Well, somebody somewhere signed these suits to be ordered and he was blaming me for it, and I was like, "Seriously? Like, do you see my signature on anything? I don't even know how to place—"

TS: An order.

AM: "—an order—a supply order." I was like, "Obviously, somebody somewhere approved them and it wasn't me."

TS: Right.

AM: So we're trying to get all this stuff onboard at the last minute and just everything's stressful, just every—absolutely everything is stressful. And we get underway and things just kept getting worse and worse and worse. And, like I said, every day I was basically being told to do twenty-three hours' worth of work and, "Stop falling asleep during lunch," and, "What's wrong with you," and finally came down to like, "You're going to go to medical and see the doc and you're going to get put on antidepressants because—"

TS: Who was making that determination?

AM: My officer.

TS: Was he a medical—

AM: No. So he was like, "You're not going to—It's not going to be any problems with it. We just need you—We just need for you to do something." So I go to medical and I get these antidepressants and, like, three days later they're like, "Sorry, you can't arm up," which really wasn't that big of a deal, but when I got fired from my position because it was easier to fire me than it was to fire my supervisor—who sucked at life and probably still does—the rumor that they started was because I was on antidepressants and I couldn't arm up, therefore I couldn't be in the security department, even though I had been working for two months already on antidepressants and sleeping pills.

TS: At what point did you get fired?

AM: I got fired last week of December and I had been on the pills since October, so.

TS: What did—What did that mean for you?

AM: I went and worked in the legal department. For me, if I had stayed in the military it would have been a horrible thing to have spent these five months in the legal department, just because I miss so much of what I wanted to be part of, but because I was getting out it ended up being, like, a good thing for me to step back. My chief was—She was very sensitive to just everything, so she was like, "I realize you've had a rough couple of weeks, so why don't you, like, take a week and come in and just do some of this bullshit

paperwork for me and then we'll start giving you assignments once you start feeling a little bit less stressed." They tried to get me to sign a counseling chit [an official note, usually signed by someone in authority] for the final issue that happened that supposedly caused me to get fired, and I told her I wasn't going to sign it and she's like, "Okay."

And she walked with me and he's like, "Here's this counseling chit, you need to sign it. This is what you did wrong; this is what your punishment's going to be for it."

And sh—I said, "I'm not going to sign it."

And he started to, like, open his mouth and she said, "She doesn't have to sign it and that's it," and we walked away. She was—She was a really good person for me to be reporting to during that timeframe. We had completely different life perspectives but I really appreciated her, and allowed me to finally work on some of those qualifications that I was being told for a year and a half prior, "You have to do this—"

TS: Right.

AM: "—even though we don't give you any time to do this."

TS: At what point did you decide that you wanted to get out of the navy?

AM: There was this whole program going on called Perform to Serve, and you had to, like, check, want to stay in, want to stay in in a different job, or don't want to stay in. And I originally, in the fall, probably around October, November time frame, had put in "don't want to stay in".

TS: This was in 2010.

AM: Yeah. So that's final. In 2011, we got a new supervisor, a new E-8, onboard and he's like, "We have to do something about this." I don't—I don't know what he was all told about me, because he had met me for, like, five minutes and he's like, "You're coming back to the department eventually, and we're going to get this changed. I don't know how, but we're going to get this changed. You need to stay in the navy."

He—I don't know if he knew that the program was being revamped, but a few months later the program was changed where people that had originally said they didn't want to stay in, they could submit a second one if they were still within a certain time frame, saying, "I would like to stay in."

So at that point I resubmitted, with his encouragement and the encouragement of one of my best friends, and I still got denied the opportunity to stay in. So it was like—It was a decision on my part that affected the second decision, but by the time I got back in—by the time we got back into port in May of 2011, I probably would have happily stayed in for another ten or fifteen years.

TS: Yeah. What—So when you signed it to say you wanted to get out in—at that really—that period where you'd experienced the death of your father and you had terrible trauma, and also then the work environment was not—

[Speaking Simultaneously]

AM: Sucked.

TS: Yeah.

AM: Sucked.

TS: Was not good. And so, you're under all this pressure to sign something when really you were—you probably were very depressed at that time.

AM: Yes.

TS: And then—So how did you come back around to actually wanting to stay in the navy?

AM: Oh, this—

TS: Oh, they didn't let you. How did—

AM: That's the story that I was thinking on the way here that I wanted to tell you.

TS: Okay. All right.

AM: These first thirteen, fourteen months I was on the ship I was not really friends with anybody. There were people that I liked. There were people that kept asking me to hang out, either, like, to eat lunch with them or to hang out with them when we were off work. But between my boyfriend at the time and my own, like—I believed I needed to stay separate from everybody just because we are enforcing the law. You never really know who is going to be coming across your path and everything. I was al—I—Most of the time I was very good about that; like, really just picking and choosing friendships based on the fact that I needed to trust people, because I didn't want my judgement being questioned and if that person came into our legal system.

So the—This one guy—this is my best friend, my best girlfriend as I call him, which he hates and his wife thinks it's hilarious—he was in my duty section, he had seen me, like, crying and he's like, "What's going on?" So I had told him about my dad's dying and all this stuff and he's like, "Well, I don't know you but if you need anything my wife and I are here to help you. If you need a ride to the airport or whatever just let us know."

And so, he took it upon himself to always check up on me, and we ended up becoming friends and, like, I would hang out with him but I wouldn't really hang out with anybody else. And when we went on deployment we would—I would, like, hang out with him while he was on his watch, which was a watch where you, like, could have somebody visiting you for a little bit as long as you're answering the phone and doing your computer updates and everything. So we would, like, watch movies and we would talk about farming because we were both big Joel Salatin [American farmer and author] fans, and I actually remember being like, "You know, I really hate how friendships with

married guys get destroyed because their wives find out that we're friends. Do you mind if I friend your wife on Facebook?"

He's like, "No, go ahead."

So I friended his wife on Facebook and I send her a message. I'm like, "Your husband's so cool. I just want you to know that, like, I have no intentions whatsoever of messing with your man."

And she's just hysterical about it. She's like, "Trust me, I know where he's going home at the end of this deployment." She's like, "He's already told me that he's hanging out with you," and all this stuff.

She and I are friendly with each other and, like, we've hung out before and all that so it was, like, he became my friend. And because he became my friend I started hanging out with all these other people that he hung out with from his department. And that was the thing, like, I never hung out with the people that my department normally hung out with. I ended up hanging out with all these nerds from the C5I [Command, Control, Communications, Computer, Combat, and Information] department. You want—These people are made up of people who grew up reading, like, Anime [Japanese animation] and *Star Wars* and all of that.

So we—And I never really had time to—Even though I took the time to, like, hang out with him late at night while he was on watch and we watched movies and stuff, I never took the time to, like, really talk to anybody else or hang out with them; I never had time to sit down and eat. So after I got fired I all of a sudden just had all this time in the world.

TS: Right.

AM: So I would take, like, a ninety minute lunch break or we would have, like, two hour dinners where there would be this watch turn over time—people that are waking up and people that are getting off of work—so I would, like, sit there and I would eat with everybody and talk, and I mean, it's that type of family environment where you're, like, eating off of each other's trays, you're not having to ask. It's you didn't have enough silverware so you're, like, wiping a fork off and handing it to your friend. [chuckles] And it—it was just that close of an environment. We still do that when—Like, if we randomly meet up with each other, we'll still eat off of each other's plates.

TS: [chuckles]

AM: There's no questions asked about it. But we had been underway for so long at this point. Actually, I guess we started hanging out before Salalah. We had been underway for, like, a hundred and some days without a—

TS: What's Salalah?

AM: Salalah, Oman. It's a—It's a port city in the Middle East. I think I started hanging out with him right before this, and I mean, we just had a good time in Salalah. Nick, my best girlfriend, kept me from punching my supervisor in the face because he got up all in my

face. I was drunk; I had been awake for forty-eight hours and had drank a good amount of beer and had not eaten because of the—I don't know, I guess I got drunk before the food got there. And I was fine as we were walking back to the ship, but—or walking back to the post, but my supervisor came up and was, like, yelling at me and had his finger up in my face, like, shaking it at me. And Nick saw what I was about to do and he just, like, scooped me up and, like, started carrying me down the pier; he's a big guy.

And it was really funny, some chief—which I found out, like, a year and a half later who it was because he was like, "I really thought you guys were a couple"—because the chief was like, "If she can't walk on her own then she needs to go to medical."

And Nick was like, "What? Can't a guy just try to get some around here?" [laughs]

And the chief left him alone because he was new, and he was like, "What did this guy just say to me?" A year and a half later I found out who—

TS: Right.

AM: —he had said that to and I was just dying. I was like, "No, we weren't a couple." I was like, "He really kept me from hitting Chief Smith."

And he's like, "Oh, really? You should have hit him." But—

TS: What was it like to be in the—in those cultures? Because you hadn't really—I mean, you'd travelled before.

AM: Right.

TS: I remember you had been to Europe, right?

AM: Yeah.

TS: But—So what—How was this different when you were out in these cultures when you were on liberty and stuff?

AM: We were very restricted from being within the culture.

TS: Okay.

AM: Especially in Oman because it was a primarily Muslim country. They organized trips for us or we could go hang out at one of the three European resorts. We chose the lesser of the three resorts to hang out at because it was—it was, like, one where there was a lot of partying and stuff going on. That's actually where the officer was that raped the young woman. Because that's what happened in that port, was Salalah.

TS: What officer? From your ship or from—

AM: Yeah, we had an officer assault a young woman as a—as a curative rape [a corrective rape is a hate crime in which one or more people are raped because of their perceived sexual orientation or gender identity. The common intended consequence of the rape, as seen by the perpetrator, is to turn the person heterosexual or to enforce conformity with gender stereotypes.] for her our second or third day in Salalah.

TS: Was it a local woman or one on the ship?

AM: No, it was one of our—It was one of our E-1s [seaman recruit] onboard the ship.

[Lt. Dearon L. Mayberry was court-martialed on 11 charges of wrongdoing for an incident aboard the USS *Kearsarge*, and sentenced to five years in prison. He was accused but not convicted of rape]

So yeah, we just—we just hung out at these resorts. It was very [unclear] upon us that you could be arrested for being intoxicated in public, stuff like that. They had encouraged shopping but the one place that they took us to shop was basically like a giant Walmart, and then the other place was—I never made it to, I guess. Some people really enjoyed it but it was more like a souvenir type of market place. It was basically swimming and hanging out in the hotel and drinking that you could do while we were there. But, yeah.

TS: Did you stop anywhere else?

AM: We stopped in Italy for ten days, only because we had a piece of equipment break on the ship where the ship actually had to be at a complete stop to replace it and fix it.

TS: So you finally got to Italy.

AM: Yes, but it was Sicily and we were so far out from the main part of the city that we had to take transportation and they only had four sixty-person buses for about nine hundred people, so even if a quarter of those people are on duty there was about two hundred people that could be transported at a time for six hundred people, so it was like a two or three hour wait to—

TS: How many people were on the ship?

AM: At that point nine hundred.

TS: Okay.

AM: We would fluctuate depending on how many Marines [were there]. So again, our interaction was very limited by liberty rules, by transportation. We had a good time there; ten days is a little long for sailors.

TS: I would think so.

AM: Because people tend to blow their money in the first few and then after that it's, like, we need to get underway again. The—My friends and I, we had a really good time one night. We enjoyed ourselves the other day—the other days that we were on liberty, but it was just the one night that really sticks out to me, just having fun and, like, being in a happy place. And we'd go to the bus and there's all these drunk assholes there and we're like, "You guys just want to take a really expensive taxicab back instead so we don't ruin our good mood?" And that's exactly what we did, so.

But when we stopped in Spain on the way back, but it was, like, a working port so this—like, when I say this was the worst ship ever, it really was the worst ship ever. One of my friends is on a deployment right now, the exact same kind of ship, the exact same countries as far as where they're located and everything, but the—the liberty—they're actually, like, going into liberty ports; into countries to have a good time and to see stuff. They're actually, like, doing missions. They rescued two hundred people from a sinking vessel, they have—they rescued—they've done so much stuff in, like, five months that all—like, really all we did was gator squares [of a platoon of amphibious assault ships launching off the ship one by one, navigating a square path, and driving back onto the ship] all the time. We never did any miss—I can't say we never did any missions; we did bomb Libya, but.

TS: What kind of ship was it?

AM: It's an LHD.

TS: Which is what?

AM: It's a landing amphibious dock ship, which means that helicopters, harriers, and—those can take off from the flight deck at the same time that LCACs [hovercrafts] and small boats can leave the well deck [hangar-like deck located at the waterline in the stern of some amphibious warfare ships]. When you're in my job you're not really paying attention to what's going on above you and what's going on below you; you're just paying attention to what's going on in between and everybody in between, so.

TS: You're paying attention to the people.

AM: Yeah, the people.

TS: Right.

AM: Not the actual, like, mission. We had stuff that we could have participated in, such as detainees or evacuations of U.S. personnel but there were never any of those that we did.

TS: No?

AM: No.

TS: So it wasn't—

AM: There were plenty of opportunities to, we were just continually denied.

TS: Who denied you?

AM: I'm not sure. It's really weird to, like, stand up—It's really weird to listen to a radio call and know that there is a sh—a transportation ship nearby that has been taken over by pirates, and to just keep on going past them, so. Because somebody somewhere decided that that person's life was not worthy of us saving them.

TS: Were there any other ships nearby?

AM: Not that responded; out of U.S. ships anyways.

TS: How did being on the ship change your view of the navy, or did it?

AM: I loved it; I really loved being on the ship. I mean, it was a very stressful period of my life.

TS: Many of the things that you have described, someone listening might not say she loved this, they might say she hated it.

AM: [laughs]

TS: I mean, the way you've described it is not in a positive way.

AM: Because I have to finish telling about my friends.

TS: Okay.

AM: So this—After Salalah, we had had this extremely drunk-fueled conversation that just, like, solidifies your friendships with these people. It was stuff that you don't want anybody to ever know about you. Just, like, illegal activities that people have done; immoral stuff that people have done. We had just the funniest conversation about all this stuff and it's, like, you—I think there was eight or nine of us, it's like, "You are all my best friends now."

TS: So you just lay yourself bare.

AM: Yeah, pretty much. And so afterwards, this nother-hundred-some days [long time] go by where we haven't been into a port and all we have is each other and provide for ourselves type of thing.

TS: And what is your work right now? Where are you actually working?

AM: I'm working in the legal department—

TS: Okay.

AM: —in the—This is when I started having, like, the two hour meals with people.

TS: Okay.

AM: The—So we're sitting on the mess decks one day and it must have been almost all of us there so it must have been for dinner, and we start talking about how, well, if we're not going to visit any countries we'll just make up our own country. And we—that is exactly what we did. We made up this country called The People's Republic of the Underway[?] Nation, otherwise known as the Prudes or the Prudians, in reference to how you're not supposed to have sex on board a naval vessel. So nobody was supposedly getting any and everybody, like—After a few weeks of being underway, 90% of conversations become about sex. Just—It's really weird. And so, we came up with, like, titles: Minister of Fun and Recreation or Minister of Dirty Jokes. We had a slogan, which is "Semper Libidos[?]," which means "always floating." I actually have it tattooed on my leg. Three, four—Four other people have a Semper Libidos[?] tattoo; everybody did something different. The—Our—We have a flag which is, like, Neptune and I forget the—I haven't seen it in a while, but.

We just basically came up with this whole imaginary country slash support system just to, like, have something fun to talk about every day, and it something new and imaginary and that, I guess—again, going back to, like, I primarily do stuff for the people. So knowing that those are the type of people that the navy can—maybe has, that's why I wanted to stay in, because I wanted to be with those type of fun, wild, imaginative people who are willing to support each other, and willing to just, like, go out on a limb for each other and be your friend no matter what. And, like, some of these people that I was—I became friends with, they're like, "God, you were such a bitch when I first met you," or "you seemed like such a bitch because you were always rushing by or off in space."

And I'm like, "Well, I had, like, all these things going on and I had these things to do and I didn't have time to make friendships with anybody," but.

TS: Right.

AM: Yeah. So when—I think when people talk about that band of brothers or that band of sisters that the military creates, like, it has nothing to do with mission in the end. I really truly believe that it just has to do with the people.

TS: You form bonds with certain people.

AM: Yeah, you form bonds, and I hate to negate—I don't want to negate, like, anybody's sacrifices or stuff, but people don't jump on grenades to protect a nation of six million people that they've never met. I don't even know how many people live in the U.S. these days, probably more than that. But they jump on grenades to protect those ten brothers that they have that inside joke with. It has nothing to do with patriotism. That's a—Like, I really, truly believe that patriotism is a bunch of bullshit most of the time. I think that I would have done anything for these people, and I probably would still do anything within physical limits because we're all over the country now, for these people.

And one of these guys, the next ship that he went on got rammed by a much larger transport ship and they had a legitimate state of an emergency. And when he was telling us about it post deployment he was like, "That's the first time that ever happened in my career, where we have this huge state of emergency and people's lives are at stake and people just automatically went and did what they had to do."

And part of it comes down to training but part of it comes down to, "Oh, shit. We're out in the middle of the ocean and all we have is each other." So there—Yeah, there's a lot—there's a lot of complaints, but there's so much that I learned from the ship, which is these friendships and is these—this whole floating city, per se, of survival and, like, not that I was ever suicidal, but I was definitely depressed to the point where if I jump off this ship that's—there's nothing else around me, and it kind of makes you feel small in this big old universe and everything. Like, you'll never see a sunset like you see it at sea when there's nothing to block the rays and the colors and everything that's going on.

I have this really cool picture—I should find that one for you too—of, like, pretending to touch the edge of the Suez Canal, because the canal is so small and the ship is so big that just playing with the camera angle a little bit it looks like I'm touching the edge of the Suez Canal, so. And the Suez Canal is, like, a big deal in the navy to—" Have you been through the canal yet?"

"Yes, I have. A couple of times actually."

TS: Right.

AM: And I really truly believe that if I had stayed in I would have advanced to my goals, so. It was—That was a big disappointment, because when my father died I was still—I was still intending on staying in and meeting these goals.

TS: Right. Did you feel—Because you had been promoted rather rapidly on your own.

AM: Yes.

TS: The work that you did to do that. Did you feel that you were treated fairly overall?

AM: No.

TS: How did—How do you feel about that particular—the fairness factor?

AM: Even though there was a lot of, like, sexist behavior, I think for the first several years that I was in I was ranked and promoted based upon my ability, even if people didn't like me because I was a female, or they thought I was outspoken or too die hard or whatever, like, I was still ranked and promoted based upon my ability. When I got to this command, I don't know if it's because I was now of a senior leadership position or if it just happened to specifically be these people that I was working for, but being me was the liability, and the liability was primarily that I was female making these decisions and trying to follow the rules and be fair and consider that people have lives outside of what we do here in this command and we need to respect that. Yes, mission first, people second, but not—

[Speaking Simultaneously]

TS: You can't do the mission if the person's not there[?].

AM: Yeah, you can't do the mission if the people are refusing to do it, or weird stuff, that people would all of a sudden be like, "Fuck it," and storm off, whatever, but.

TS: You think your gender as you gained rank became—

AM: Became a problem.

TS: —became a problem.

AM: Right. It's great for somebody that's going to be a worker bee, but for somebody that wants to start making the decisions and being in charge, that was the issue.

TS: How did you recognize—I mean, was it at the time or was it upon reflection that your being female was an obstacle to what you wanted to do?

AM: I think a lot of it is reflection. I recognized stuff at the time but I didn't know how to deal with it necessarily. A lot of times I just—I felt like I had to try harder. And I don't know—I think I told you this when we first met, that I really want to change that vocabulary that women in the military use, like, "I had to try harder." No, I was better. And that's all it was, is I was better. There was no trying about it; that was my natural work ethic and characteristics and everything.

I think that if I had had that mindset that, like, "I am better," not just, "Oh, I need to try harder," or, "I just need to accept the system as is," because I did have a certain

amount of advancement off of that system. I had a good amount of security in my life off of that system and that was really important to me to have that security. I hate not having that security now, it really sucks, but—

TS: How—In what way did you feel more secure?

AM: The monetary, the always having somebody available to help you even if it's somebody that doesn't care about you and they're only obligated to help you out of being—

[Speaking Simultaneously]

TS: Right, you talked about that several times, right.

AM: Yeah, being part of the command.

TS: Right.

AM: Like when I moved here it was—I thought it was going to be easy, and then I'm, like—two months into it I'm crying and I'm like, "What is going on? Why do I hate it here so much? I've moved so many times in my life." And then I'm like, "Because I don't have the navy to take care of me." I didn't have a built in friend somewhere. I didn't—

TS: The support system was gone.

AM: Yeah, I didn't have somebody who knew somebody who knew somebody that would call me and take me out to dinner just to take me out to dinner.

TS: Right.

AM: So, yeah, I'm, like, on the phone with my friend, Chad, and he's been in the navy for, like, twenty-five years now. He's an old fart. But he's like, "I understand what you feel, because even though I'm still in the military, I hated Virginia when we moved there, and I was getting really irritable with Shelly[?]." And his—their son would had been ten at the time—eleven—now he's fourteen, yeah. And he's just, like—because everybody that I had been with for so many years is back on the west coast or they were stationed too far away here on the east coast. And just having that same feeling of—you tend to count—rely on this, like, small subset of people. And because he's such a high-ranking officer now, his subset of people is much smaller.

TS: Smaller? Right, right.

AM: Like, I ended up—It's really weird. Like, I ended up becoming one of his first newest friends here on the east coast because we were lifting at the same gym together. And the

first thing I ever said to him, because he came in in his uniform, was like, "You're an LDO, right?

And he's like, "Yes."

And I was like, "Okay, we can be friends." Because he had the officer bars on, and I could tell that he was older, and I think he had his ESWS [Enlisted Surface Warfare Specialist badge] on, too, so that's something only an enlisted person would have.

TS: What is that?

AM: It's an enlisted person pin but LDOs are still allowed to wear them once they become officers.

TS: I see.

AM: He was like, "Yeah, I'm an LDO."

And I'm like, "Good. I don't—I don't like straight officers," referring to people who—

TS: Right.

AM: —graduated from college and became officers.

TS: And were commissioned right away.

AM: Yeah, so.

TS: Well, what about the culture of—I—we talked about this a little bit, and more off-tape, I think, than on, but the culture of sexual assault, and rape, and that—beyond the harassment issue.

AM: Mo—I would say that every assault that I ever heard reported or heard rumored, up until the one in Salalah, so seven and a half years, it was always victim blame. It was always, "They're lying." It was, "Why would he sleep with her?" It was very sexual-based type of argument. The—There's a lot more that I know now, just about victim grooming and stuff like that, or victim blaming, that I see reflected a lot in these assaults that went on, even prior to that assault. And the only—I think the only reason that that assault was never talked about as a victim blame or, she was asking for it, because of—

TS: This one in Salalah?

AM: —Yeah—because of the dynamics that went on. Most of the people knew that she was a lesbian; most of the people kn—found out that there was a significant amount of blood in the space in which he raped her; and most people came to understand that he claimed to have been blacked out; he had a really hazy memory the next morning. He was—He was so drunk that he was not woken up to be told, "Hey, this is what reported." They had to

wait for him to wake up. An off—Another officer was put in his stateroom with him and basically, "Call us when he wakes up." That's how drunk he was.

And her—She was never questioned for any of that. I had heard so many other people, females and males, be questioned about how they had participated in their own assault. In two thousand—

TS: So was he prosecuted then?

AM: Yeah, he was prosecuted. He was awarded five years in the brig [U.S. military prison]. He appealed, saying that it was consensual sex, despite the fact that there was blood in the room and—

TS: What happened to the woman?

AM: She—Let's see, that was two thousand—December of 2010, she was flown off to receive treatment, and plus because it's just not a good idea to keep a rape victim in a small command like that at sea and everything. They were flown on two separate flights back to the United States within forty-eight hours of the assault happening. And up until last August she was still in the military and she was still fighting to get back on a ship. She had joined—this is coming secondhand from my friend who ended up being her supervisor at the hospital—but she was assigned to the hospital so that she could receive treatment and basically doing administrative type of jobs. So this was almost three years that she's been doing this, and she had been fighting to get back on a ship and do the job that she had been originally trained to do, and actually be in the navy doing something that she wanted to do.

And I just talked to my friend a couple of weeks ago and she said, "Yeah, it took a long time and it took a lot of people repeatedly saying, "No, that's not acceptable for her to be processed out." But, finally, she was allowed to re-enlist and got sent back to a sea duty command, but that took almost four years for that to happen. And she had been in the military six, seven months at the time that she was assaulted.

TS: Oh, she was really new then?

AM: Yeah, yeah. She was actually working on the mess decks at the time, which is something that people new to the navy, new to the ship, will do. She had reported the—Like, she's a strong girl; she's a very strong girl. She—The assault was over and he left and she went and found her supervisor on the mess decks and immediately reported it.

TS: Immediately.

AM: Yeah.

TS: Well then, that brings another question to mind about the whole—So that would have been, like, right after "Don't Ask, Don't Tell" was repealed, then; right around that time.

AM: Right. Yeah, it was October of 2010 I think that was repealed. There was a small celebration on board the ship. [chuckles]

["Don't Ask, Don't Tell" was the official United States policy prohibiting military personnel from discriminating against or harassing closeted homosexual or bisexual service members, while barring openly gay, lesbian, or bisexual persons from the military. On 22 December 2010, President Barrack Hussein Obama signed the repeal of "Don't Ask, Don't Tell" into law]

TS: There was? What kind of celebration?

AM: Unofficial. One of the guys that worked for me, who was never in the closet to begin with but got into a lot of tiffs with the Marines once they came on board, liked to walk around and be like, "Guess what? I'm gay." [chuckles]

TS: And so, how would that go over?

AM: He was so confrontational about it but most of the time [unclear] like, "What are you—What are you going to do about it?" Like—

TS: Well, finally he could say—

AM: Yeah.

TS: —without—

AM: Yeah, like, "What are you going to do about it" type of thing, but like I said, he was never in the closet to begin with. There were the—The guy's name is Elliott. I first met Elliot in 2009 about a week or two after I'd checked on board of the ship, and Elliott was being stalked by a guy from his "A" school that he had dated a couple of times and he had to ask for a restraining order against him.

And the way that the—he ca—he came in with Mekam[?]—and Mekam's a female—He came in with Mekam, and she just very—like, danced around the whole issue but basically saying like, "We need to know what the wording is going to be before we put it on paper because there's no way that we can say—"

TS: Right, because—

AM: "—he's being stalked by somebody—"

[Speaking Simultaneously]

TS: "Don't Ask—

AM: "—he dated."

TS: "Don't Ask, Don't Tell" is—

AM: Yeah.

TS: —still implemented—

AM: Yeah.

TS: —at that time.

AM: Yeah. So Elliott—We got the wording down on the paper, like, something about a friendship and blah, blah, blah, blah, blah, and it was just so annoying. So that was in 2009. Two thousand ten we get underway and Elliott is being—Elliott and one of the other guys that he worked with who was also gay were being harassed by another guy in their department, and I was told we couldn't do anything about it because to do anything about it would be to—would basically require them to say, "I'm being harassed because I'm gay," and that was still post—no, pre "Don't Ask, Don't Tell" repeal.

So then post "Don't Ask, Don't Tell" repeal, Elliott is now hanging out with Kyle, and I forget the third guy's name but he was a Marine and he was also gay. And there was just so much change in him over these two years, and he and Kyle ended up getting married last year. And just that change from that first day that I met him and he had to, like, cover up who he was to get help that any heterosexual person would have immediately been given, to the end of deployment when he and Kyle are, like, talking about moving in together and making plans together and all that, it was like watching him grow up. Yeah, he did grow up because he was such a young kid at the time and there was a three year difference, but that was really cool.

Anyways, with that—with that girl, the testimony was that she had been nuzzling another girl's neck on the pier, because it was a—like a beer garden type of atmosphere and there was music and vendors and stuff on the pier that had been brought in, and the officer that assaulted her was like, "You need to do that shit on your own time because it's not—" It's liberty time, so it's technically your own time, but it's still a military environment and he just had it in his head that what she was doing was wrong.

TS: You had said something about—earlier, about that he wanted to convert her or—

AM: Curative rapist.

TS: Curative [Corrective] rape.

AM: Yeah, that's the name for it.

TS: I see.

AM: But yeah. So that assault, like, plays out biggest into my head as everything that's wrong with the military, but for once there was no victim blame.

I was assaulted in 2007 on New Year's Eve. So yeah, January 1, 2007. I was not assaulted by anybody that I knew but this goes back to the whole trusting people thing.

TS: Right.

AM: They were guys from my friend's command that had shown up—and this makes me—After this happened it kind of like started making me rethink that whole joke about men who show up at the bar thirty minutes before closing and swoop in and snatch the girl away that another guy's been working on all night. I no longer trust those people at all because that's what they did. They, like—They showed up after everybody had been drinking for a while, and they showed up towards closing time.

TS: It was like a predatory thing.

AM: Yeah, it's a predatorial behavior. And I never—They drove me home after—

TS: Who's—How many is "they"?

AM: Two.

TS: Okay.

AM: They drove me home after the assault and I went to bed and I woke up a few hours later and I went into my roommate's room, and she had been with me the night before but I guess we got into an argument, is what she tells me. And I started to say like, "I think something got slipped into my drink last night," and she goes, "No, you just drank too much."

Yeah, I spent, like, the next two days just extremely sick. I knew that something had been put in my drink on top of whatever I had drank before they had shown up. And I never considered it to be, like, an assault because I had been taught all this victim blaming over the years; like, I shouldn't have been out drinking; I shouldn't have been doing this; I shouldn't have separated myself from my friend or allowed her to separate her from me; I shouldn't have trusted these guys who were friends of my friend and who were also in the military, sort of thing.

TS: It's your fault because you didn't have the boundaries proper.

AM: Right. It was New Year's, what was I supposed to expect, sort of thing. So the only thing that I was concerned about—Well, two things. One was being pregnant. Even though I was on birth control I didn't know—I couldn't recall whether they had used condoms or

not. And I kept telling myself they had a kitten so they must be nice guys. They did have a kitten; I played with the cat as we were putting on our shoes to leave. And the other thing that I was concerned about was, if I do report this how much trouble will I get in for having been drinking while I'm on this alcohol waiver and still within this time period of not supposed to get into trouble. So I never reported it and I never even said out loud that I had been raped up until 2012.

TS: Right about the time you were getting out or you had—

[Speaking Simultaneously]

AM: This was after I had gotten out and I had started school and I was in this class, and we talked about the military women a lot in the class, and we talked about assault victims a lot in the class. It was women's modern day issues or something like that.

TS: Was it here at UNCG?

AM: No, it was at Virginia Wesleyan College in Norfolk.

TS: Okay.

AM: But we had some—Most of the girls in my class were pretty young. Some of them were very wise for their age but some of them were not, and one was very much like, "My father taught me how to box and every girl needs to know how to fight in order to protect herself."

Then another girl was like, "Well, I really think some girls just regret sex afterwards."

And everybody knew that I had been in the military and that I had been a military police officer, and I was just, like—I was sitting there and I was like, "Am I really going to say this? Am I really going to say after five years of keeping quiet to myself like, 'I was assaulted'?" And that is exactly what I said. I said, "Look, I taught people self-defense and I used—I taught it on a regular enough basis that it was, like, drilled into my head, and I was still assaulted. Knowing self-defense did not help me at all."

Knowing that I had never met these guys before, there was no history that could have even supported, like, a whole victim blame thing and I still blame myself afterwards. Primarily concerned with losing my career, not so much with being assaulted. And, like, what if I had become pregnant? What would I have done?

So, it was—Yeah, I don't really—When I do advocacy work or I speak out about sexual assault and sexual harassment issues in the military I don't really refer to myself, even though it's a—it's a good representation of self-blame. The—Yeah, I don't really refer to myself, I just refer—I like the big picture; I like to use other people's stories, which may or may not be a good thing.

TS: Why do you think you do that?

AM: I think that for what people are looking for, people want those dramatic stories and those dramatic stories are what force people to, like, change their minds and make choice—make a different choice; yeah.

TS: When you put people in an uncomfortable space that they're not used to—

AM: Right.

TS: —you challenge their thinking a lot.

AM: Right. It's a lot—I think it's a lot easier for people to—I don't know, it becomes a big issue sometimes when I discuss this with some of the other people that I work with, but.

TS: It just changes the dynamics of the—

AM: Conversation.

TS: The relationship, too, probably, sometimes.

AM: Right. Yeah, when people talk about—I think the general public right now is under the belief that military sexual assault will always happen to—amongst two co-workers in which one has been significantly harassed and set up to, like—and, yeah, quite often they have been, but quite often it is just an assault of convenience on a co-worker as well. So those—People don't want to hear those stories; they want to hear, like, these dramatic stories of assault and harassment and everything.

TS: Like the one you told me about in Salalah.

AM: Yeah, yeah.

TS: Well, do you think, too, maybe you don't want to be seen as a victim?

AM: No, I don't want to be seen as a victim. I don’t want to be seen as a victim speaking out because the victim community right now is just—they're fucking nut jobs.

TS: They have a different per—

AM: [laughs]

TS: —perspective. But they're coming along[?].

AM: Yeah—

TS: But you don't necessarily agree with, right?

AM: I don't want to, like, add a divisor[?] in there of education versus not educated because I think a lot of them are educated, but that feminist education that I have tells me that you can't be a voice—you can't be a voice based off of one experience. You have to be a voice based off of many experiences and be open to all these different feelings and interpretations.

So is calling them nut jobs probably a little bit severe? Yes. But the reac—The personal reactions that I see a lot of people take to other people speaking out, or laws that are being passed or considered, they have to leave that alone, and that is one thing that I try to detach myself from, is getting these strong personal reactions. I need to feel that reaction for the whole—not the community of victims—I need to feel that whole reaction for that com—that entire community.

I'm trying to recall this message that I sent to somebody the other day. It's not about advocating for justice and advocating for response services for victims. Even though that's the job that I want to pursue, is that response job, in the end it has to be about advocating for that entire cultural shift that includes potential victims and potential perpetrators and actual victims and actual perpetrators and those people who support one or the other. You can't—You can't just only talk about victim services. You have to talk about prevention methods. And you can't talk about prevention methods in, "Well, if you do this, this will happen." You have to talk about prevention methods in how we are actually going to stipulate change; how we're going to support those people who are working to make that change.

TS: It's really—You're trying to complicate the whole process and not say it's all linear, right?

AM: Right. There is—Yeah. I love this story I heard a few years ago and I guess it's an old fable. It's—These three men are walking by the river and they see all these babies floating down the stream, and two men stop and they're like, "Oh my God, we have to save the babies." So they start plucking babies out and they're throwing the babies over their shoulders, just trying to pluck them out because the babies just keep coming. And they're like, "Where did the—Where did the third guy go? Where did the third guy go?" And they're, like, all stressed out but they're saving the babies, right?

And all of a sudden, like, the flow of babies slows down and they're able to get more of them out because there's not as many coming by. And all of a sudden the third guy shows up and they're like, "Where the hell have you been? We've been rescuing all these babies and you just took off."

And he's like, "I went upstream to see where they were coming from." That is—That is what I think every time I think of what I want to be doing to help military women and men; primarily military women because I think that the problem goes beyond sexual assault and sexual harassment. The problem goes into how are women treated across the board? Is it about getting women into combat positions? Yes, but there's so much more to it than that. So where is the problem stemming from? How can we slow down the amount of assaults that are happening in order to provide better services for

them? If there's fewer people seeking services, those services can be concentrated upon those people.

TS: It's interesting that you say that about the culture, too, because I think we're finding just in the last year, in the news, the culture of colleges.

AM: Yes.

TS: And the issue of rape in colleges is problematic, too, and there's some of the similar cover ups.

AM: Dynamics, yeah.

TS: Yeah. So it's not—I mean, it's a culture that's wider—

AM: Right.

TS: —than just the military. Although it has its own idiosyncrasies, as far as chain of command goes.

AM: Right.

TS: But, yeah, that's interesting. Do you think you would recommend the military service to any young woman or young man today?

AM: Yes. I will not deny to anybody the opportunities that I had. Which, one would be this wonderful free education that I'm getting. Two, the experiences, even if they're limited in scope sometimes; even if they are not what I imagined when I joined. I didn't see the world. I only saw liberty buses or resorts. I loved Salalah, by the way. I did go on a great trip with my best girlfriend. We had to ask the guy to pull off so I could puke on the side of the road, but the trip was great. Just the sights and what—interacting with these tour guides who were locals and everything. The stability I never would have—I don't think I ever would have left Arlington without that stability.

TS: Well, I was going to say, how do you think—I was going to ask you, how do you think your life has been different because you joined the navy?

AM: I was allowed to find myself. I don't think that I would have ever thought of pursuing feminist studies without having been subjected to such an extreme amount of anti-woman behavior, anti-gay behavior. As my mother pointed out, she's like, "You have so many gay friends."

I'm like, "I know. I love them." And that is not something that was open—an open topic or anything back in my home town. I had Wiccan—Like, my first command I had all these Wiccan [practitioners of pagan witchcraft] friends, which was just weird because when I was fifteen I was told I was going to hell because I thought it was okay to be

friends with people that weren't Christians, even though at that point I had never met anybody who wa—who wasn't raised or proclaimed to be a Christian.

TS: But you had read, probably.

AM: Yeah, I had read about it, I knew that there were other religions and, like, I always wanted to step outside of myself but I had never been given those opportunities to. So, like, again, the whole white culture. I had only been in this white, anti-Hispanic culture because nobody liked the migrants. They were set up as dirty and unclean and criminal and everything, and it's, like, meeting all these people and just having this variance of friends that I—just, like, really opened up my mind to stuff.

TS: Did it give you a broader world view?

AM: Yeah. I don't—I don't know if "world view" is the right word, but definitely gave me a broader view on people and just different things that go on.

TS: A bigger culture than the one you came from, like you say, though.

AM: Right.

TS: Than white bread Minnesota.

AM: [laughs]

[Speaking Simultaneously]

TS: Because I'm from—

AM: Lutheran.

TS: —white bread—

AM: Yeah.

TS: —Michigan.

AM: Yeah, so that was definitely—It makes me feel free. I look—I'm Facebook friends with a lot of people that I graduated with. Some of them purposefully not, but—

TS: High—From high school.

AM: Yeah.

TS: Yeah, we had that conversation—

AM: Yeah.

TS: —about how that—there was a difference.

AM: There's a difference in how they've moved on with their lives and how I've moved on with my life, and I will like what I'm doing. I never—I never could have done what they're doing.

TS: Do you think you had more opportunities open to you? Even though you had a lot of doors closed to you too.

AM: Yeah, I think that I had more opportunities.

TS: Yeah, and so—Go ahead, I'm sorry.

AM: Yeah, just general opportunities.

TS: For education?

AM: Education, just broadening my horizon. Being, like—I don't think I really care that I'm not actual friends with any of them anymore, because I think—because I know I felt everybody was so small-minded when we were in high school that I can't imagine still being friends with some of those small-minded people after all these years, so.

TS: So you see them as they're still in the same place.

AM: Most of them, yeah.

TS: Not geographically, even, but just the whole—

AM: Yeah, yeah.

TS: Okay. What about the idea of being a woman in the navy, and do you feel like you were ever, like, a trailblazer in anything that you did?

AM: No. I realized about—and I still feel this way about my life—I'm not a person that's going to do, like, amazing, spectacular things; I'm a person that's there to tell other people that they can do amazing, spectacular things. Be supportive, give them that idea that they can achieve. And even if they don't, like, do amazing, spectacular things, but just giving them that moment of support to keep doing what they're doing, that they think is right with their life.

TS: Did—

[Speaking Simultaneously]

AM: I've always been kind of like a—not even a mentor, because that's, like, a long term relationship; more like a—just like a motivator.

TS: Positive motivator—

AM: Yeah.

TS: —for trying to bring out the best in—

AM: Yeah.

TS: —people.

AM: Or trying to force somebody to try something new, or take a different perspective.

TS: Challenge them.

AM: Yes.

TS: What about the wars? Did your perspective on war change?

AM: Yeah. I guess I was caught up in that post-9/11 patriotism that I hate so much; that we have to go fight these countries that are har—it's hard to even recall what my actual thoughts were because I don't support any of these wars anymore. I don't really support U.S. intervention in any country. I think that—I think that we intrude too much. I think that we are trying to pinpoint our values on other countries without accepting that they have their own values. And, yes, some of those values are wrong, but they need to change their own systems, not receive an entirely new system.

Like I said in the last interview, with doing the paperwork in Iraq, you realize that they were operating under a completely different—almost non-existent judicial system of punishment, and here we were trying to bring in these, like, strict legal rules of evidence and admissibility of testi—people's testimony and stuff, and there was really no in between route. How do you go from a system of "He said, she said," to "Well, he said on paper, and it's supported by this document, this document, and this document"

I'm truly convinced that most of our wars are instigated through financial gain, whether it's oil or—I think that our big interest in Uganda and Sudan is more to do with their resources, which, to my understanding, a lot of their resources are used in technology. So if we start wheedling our way in now eventually we'll have access to

those resources and we'll be able to control how those resources are disseminated throughout the world.

TS: You've gotten a much more cynical view of—

AM: I'm very cynical, yes.

TS: What about the idea of women in combat?

AM: I think that if somebody wants to do it then they should be able to it. They shouldn't be denied until—The people should only be denied if they've proven that they can't do it. With the—With the officer infantry course at [Marine Corps Base] Quantico [Virginia], something that I noticed right away—and I didn't know—you only hear about stuff until—when somebody says it, right? But I noticed in these articles that were being written by this asshole at the *Marine [Corps] Times*, he went and observed one of the very first rounds of women going through the course and he took some pictures and he labeled one of them as, "this young male lieutenant climbs the rope," and then the other one as, "this young female lieutenant hangs on to the rope." It's, like, those type of words are so important in this integration process. He—This officer can—This male can do it, no questions asked. Or this female is struggling, no questions asked. But you don't know what happened in the five seconds before or after that picture was taken. Maybe the male fell off, maybe the female fell off. Maybe she was almost to the top of the ropes, type of thing.

So then come to find out that men are given two opportunities to go through this course and women are only given one, because, well, it's a waste of time, because if they don't make it the first time then they need to move on. Well, what are the guys doing in the meantime? Like, why—What are they doing while they're waiting for that second chance at that course, so.

TS: It's a double standard thing.

AM: It is a double standard, and I don't think they've changed it yet but they realize that they do need to change it, and so they're still—they're still waiting on these females to be given the second chance to go through. Because the pass rate is much higher for males that are on their second chance than their first chance, so you would assume then that females' pass rate—

TS: Would be higher.

AM: —would be higher. Or start to pass because now they know what the course looks like and now they know what their weaknesses are. So it's not a—It's not an issue of women can't do it, it's that they're not—they're actually not being given the same opportunities to do it.

TS: To succeed.

AM: Yeah. I was never given the opportunity to go out to one of these FOBS [forward operating bases] —

TS: Right.

AM: —in Iraq and show—

TS: As the investigator.

AM: Yeah, as an investigator and as an instructor and show—hey, I can sh—I can teach these guys.

TS: Right.

AM: I can collect this evidence and help in these prosecutions sort of thing, so.

TS: I wanted to ask you a question about the navy and women, because some of the strongest pushback had to—and maybe still has a little bit to do with women on submarines.

AM: So a fe—

TS: Because of space issues, it's like the privacy issues is pretty much the major, I think, resistance.

AM: Can I go to the bathroom and then answer this?

TS: Oh.

[Interview Paused]

TS: Okay, I'm going to start it again.

AM: Okay.

TS: Okay, go ahead.

AM: All right, so one of the issues that I have with these gender integration arguments is that the same people who are arguing that sex will happen—sex will happen if you put men and women together, or assault will happen if you put men and women together, are the same people that will argue that military personnel are above all else and they take care of each other and they're—

TS: Disciplined.

AM: They're disciplined, and—Like, on one hand they're saying assault won't happen because military people don't assault each other, and on the other hand they're saying assault will happen because you've put men and women together.

TS: So they contradict, you mean?

AM: Yes. The—When I was in training to go to Iraq we went to Kuwait and we had to go out to this training range where everybody sleeps in these tents and they're—I mean, they're not like tents, they're tin buildings; it's just one big open classroom. And I slept between two guys and it didn't bother me at all—other than one guy snored—because at the end of the day we were tired, and it was training, and we were just supposed to crawl into our sleeping bags and go to sleep and that's all that it was. [I] think we did that one night. We might have been out there two nights. It was, like, this big deal of, "Oh, all the girls are going into the outhouses in the mornings to change," and it's like, "Why don't you just change in your sleeping bag while the lights are still off," sort of thing. Just these setups of, well, if they see breast they'll get enhanced, or if they see a penis they'll—that something has to happen just because you see each other.

When I was on the ship we had a lot of plumbing problems down on female berthing. Surprising. Not. Tampons and stuff being flushed, or running out of toilet paper and people using paper towels and all sorts of things. So, like, our hall technicians, a.k.a. plumbers, that were on the ship, we only had one girl—No, we had two girls, but one was removed from her division because of problems with her supervisor, so she, fortunately, was moved to another supervisory-like position in another department but she wasn't doing any plumbing work on the ship. So before the other girl got there it was always the guys that had to come into berthing and girls would just freak out about it. And I would be like, "What the hell? They are not—Like, trust me, they don't care about you. They are coming in here to unclog our toilets of tampons and hair and paper towels. They don't care what you look like naked right now."

So it became, like, this big issue of, I would have to go down there because, well, for one, I was loud so it was guaranteed that everybody was going to hear me announcing that these guys were coming in and that they would be there for a couple of hours to unclog our toilets. We had to put up sheets so that the guys could work on the toilets without—so then the girls could still use the toilets and I 'm just like, "I don't care."

TS: You just thought that was a bunch of nonsense.

AM: It was a bunch of nonsense because it was so wrapped up in just, like, body parts, and that all comes back to our cultural ideas of, like, body parts are shameful, or they're only for sex. Not that they're, like, for reproduction purposes or the mammary glands for feeding children and stuff like that.

TS: So if we all just saw each other more often it would be immuted[?].

AM: Right.

TS: In some way.

AM: Right. Like, I guess—I guess you would think a married couple or a couple that's been together forever, when they get up in the morning and one of them gets undressed to go shower, the other one's not like, "Oh, I'm going to jump you," every single day. Some days, yes, they might say that but most of the time they're going to be like, "Seriously? Get yourself in the shower and get out so I can get in the shower and get out." That sort of thing, like—

TS: Well, I've heard that said about—like, they say the idea of gay men in the military being open and being predatory towards heterosexual men.

AM: Right.

TS: Gay men, their response has been, "I've been around men all my life in showers and stuff like that and—"

AM: Right.

TS: —I'm—it's—" [chuckles]

AM: All of a sudden I'm gay—

TS: Right.

AM: —and it's going to change?

TS: Yeah. It's, like, "It's how I've been used to growing up."

AM: Right.

TS: They always shower openly, and less so with women. Women cover up more, I think.

AM: Women do cover up more. When you would have the lines for the shower, like, women would—some of the—We had one woman who wore a tee shirt, shorts, a full robe, socks, and slippers to the shower and she would take her robe off outside the shower and remove the rest of her clothes inside the shower. And then you have people like me who are like, "Okay, I'm going to put on a towel and my shower shoes and go to the shower."

TS: Right.

AM: And it's everybody in between.

TS: Right.

AM: I came out of the shower one day—This was during my not sleeping period, so when I was asleep I slept through everything, and I guess they had called for a drill, and obviously I hadn't shown up, and one of my guys got sent down and he was, like—and I'm walking out of the shower in a towel and it's dark in the barr—in the room, and he's just like, "Whoa!" And he's, like, looking down.

And I'm like, "What do you want? You came in here, obviously, to talk me. What do you want?"

TS: Right.

AM: He's like, "We're in the middle of a drill."

And I'm like, "Okay, I'll be upstairs in five minutes." It wasn't a big deal to me but it was a big deal to him.

TS: Right.

AM: Just that constant everything is a sex organ or every—It's not even that everything is a sex organ, it's that everything is sexualized. And that—And it doesn't help that women are continually set up to be a primary entertainment source for men, or useless for men, so the more useless they are the more they're only good for sex.

The whole submarine thing came up in a discussion with a submariner, who's a local recruiter here, a few months ago and I really think he's delusional. I say that a lot about a lot of people, I think.

TS: What did he have to say about it?

AM: Just—He just—That—His excuse was that women—"The sub that I was on, it would never have worked to have women on there because of the way the racks are set up; there's just no privacy. And you just have to have privacy, for some reason, to change."

And it's, like, "Well, if it really is privacy, can't you change in the shower or can't you change in a stall? In an emergency is it really going to matter if she jumps out of bed in her shorts and tee shirt and puts her coveralls on?" Because most people are sleeping in, like, shorts and tee shirt anyways; it's actually required by instruction to sleep in shorts and a tee shirt.

TS: To be ready to go.

AM: To be ready to go at all times. If you have to do, like, a man overboard drill you have, I think it's, ninety seconds to be in your muster position, which is basically enough time to put on some sort of footwear and grab a sweatshirt if it's cold outside and run to your mustering position. There—In an emergency there's no time to be worried about—

TS: Nakedness.

[Speaking Simultaneously]

AM: —whether somebody is naked or not.

TS: Right.

AM: That's just a really annoying, frustrating thing. You remember that picture that went viral a few years ago about the Marine in Afghanistan, like, fighting in his "I Love New York" boxers?

TS: I don't remember—I don't think—

AM: Like, and—

TS: I don't think I ever saw that.

AM: Okay. Nobody cared that he was out there in his "I Love New York" boxers. He had been taking a nap and their FOB got attacked and he put on his protective gear and grabbed his gun.

It's a really idiotic argument that just because somebody exposes a breast or a penis that they're going to be attacked, or it's going to cause issues in the workplace. What causes issues is exposing yourself outside of what's expected, I think, if that makes sense. We had a—We had some people—We had a—We had a division where, I don't know, I guess the guys were, like, going back and forth about whose dick was biggest and one of the girls made a joke and one of the guys was like, "Check it out." And that went too far, you know? That was too far. And he got sent to mast for that. And the whole time people were like, "Well, but she made a joke."

Yeah, she made a joke. She didn't say, "Hey, I would like to see your penis to compare it to these other guys." It's a really stupid environment. [chuckles] And I—Sometimes I just don't think that that sort of stuff happens in other jobs.

TS: You mean like in a business setting?

AM: Yeah.

[Speaking Simultaneously]

TS: Well, they might [unclear]—

AM: They might, they might.

TS: I don't know, I don't know. It's a—

AM: I was reading an article this morning about the Silicon Valley again, about how it's just a bunch of partying bros [males] and that's why women can't advance or get into their—that culture, because—and partying bros is what the military used to be.

TS: Right. Well, maybe they're still comparing[?] there, I don't know.

AM: Yeah.

TS: Well, what about—You've done—You've come to school here at UNCG and you're in Women and Gender Studies. What are you studying to—What's your goal?

AM: My goal is primarily to study military and gender issues with a strong focus on assault and harassment and how that plays into the overall picture, but primarily on pointing out how these little nuances, how they've been created, how they're supported, how they continue to contribute to the issues that we experience. Bringing that feminist perspective to the argument as opposed to just trying to regulate everything.

TS: Some veterans have had trouble transitioning into a college atmosphere from—for different reasons.

AM: Right.

TS: How's that transition gone for you?

AM: Undergrad was really hard. Half my classes were daytime classes, so mostly, like, nineteen to twenty-two year olds. The other half were evening classes, which in Norfolk included a lot of veterans but still also included young people. It was more—It was just—It was mostly just, like, lack of respect for time or lack of respect for the person talking, sort of thing. But on the other hand, one of the people that I had the biggest issues with was also a veteran. He would just show up whenever he wanted and he would just tell stories in the middle of class, and he was always going back to "when I was a Marine," or "when I was in Afghanistan." And I can't stand people who start every sentence with "when I was."

TS: But he was obviously connected—that was his identity that—

[Speaking Simultaneously]

AM: That was—

TS: —made him feel comfortable in the class.

AM: That was very—I think he was uncomfortable in the class.

TS: But I mean—

AM: Yeah.

TS: What I'm saying is, talking about that might have made him feel more comfortable.

AM: Right.

TS: Trying to connect to his own identity of—

AM: Yeah. And it—

TS: —how did he fit.

AM: It bothered me that he was like this because he was so anti what people expect from the military; that disciplined behavior. I know—I want to say it would happen at least once every class with my undergrad, but basically, like, reminding people that they were being disrespectful. In that course it was the professor wanted to start a quiz and they were all just, like, gabbing away and talking and she's like, "Is everybody ready?"

And I said, "Our table is."

And so, she started handing out the test and they're all, like—as soon as the test is down in front of them they're like "Oh, my God. We weren't ready."

And I was like, "Well, maybe you should shut the fuck up once and listen to what Dr. Gonzales had to say because she asked if you had any questions." And they all just looked at me and she was, like, smirking and looking down at the same time and started taking their test. And I did that in every single one of my classes.

TS: Like, "Let's go."

AM: Yeah, like, maybe you need to shut up and listen to the professor. I was very onboard with addressing everybody as professor or doctor. I still do that even though we're told we can be on a first name basis.

TS: In graduate school? Has it been easier in graduate school?

AM: Yeah, it has. I feel—I don't think that my feelings are not normal. I think that they're affected by my history in the military, but I feel that infantilization, I feel that I'm not as advanced as some of my peers because my background is different. A lot of my undergraduate degree was completed online, so having not been around academics I feel like I don't know how to navigate—

[Speaking Simultaneously]

TS: The verbiage—

AM: —the college system.

TS: —too? Like the terminology that people are using sometimes.

AM: Terminology, but more just, like, the system. I haven't had the same opportunities as an undergraduate internship or an undergraduate teaching assistant that helps you get those things in grad school. I have no idea what I'm doing most of the time.

TS: Do you have any mentors; people mentoring you here?

AM: Not really.

TS: No?

AM: No.

TS: Do you belong to the Student Veterans Association?

AM: They suck, in my opinion.

TS: Okay. What would make it better?

AM: [laughs] I went to—I'm so judgmental all the time.

TS: Pardon?

AM: I went to one meeting and I just—I didn't feel bonded with them. I think that there may have been a couple of people that one on one I probably would have bonded well with, but overall it seemed very "Hoorah, I'm doing this for my resume." And, again, I hate—

TS: So it wasn't a support system.

AM: It wasn't a support system.

TS: I see.

AM: The emails of what's going on, it's, like, is that—and stuff constantly getting cancelled. And I realize non-participation doesn't help, either. But I met a couple of other veterans one day by accident. They were actually dr—it was at one of the snowstorms where

everything was shut down and I didn't have electricity so I went to Old Town [Draught House, a pub near The University of North Carolina at Greensboro campus] to eat and do some homework, and they were there drinking and they were being very loud with their conversation and I kind of, like, invited myself into the conversation, and then they were, like, looking at my homework and they were like, "Oh." It was—I had VA [Veterans Affairs] stuff sitting out—VA studies—and they're like, "Oh, what are you doing?"

And I'm like, "Oh, I do military studies."

So they're like, "Oh, we're all veterans." Even they were like, "We don't like—We don't like the group for some reason just because it's so—it's so—" It's too military, I think.

TS: Too military?

AM: Yeah. Ever since I—Before I joined the military I did a lot of volunteer work; just a lot of community work, and very giving of my time and myself. And my first command, like, beat it into our heads so much that we had to do volunteer work, that we had to participate somehow because it looked on your eval, and, like, the littlest thing would be just lauded and praised upon. So I did a lot of this volunteer work, and I enjoyed doing the volunteer work, but then people that were signing up and then not showing up at the last second, they started, like, telling them that you're going to be penalized for not showing up to do volunteer work. And by the time I got done with that command I was like "I don't want to do volunteer work to be recognized by the military; I want to do volunteer work because I want to do volunteer work."

So my second command, they knew that I was very actively involved with the local Lion's [Lions Club International] group and I came to eval time and I didn't put it on my eval. And they were like, "You just got an award."

And I was like, "Yeah."

They're like, "You have to put it on your eval."

I said, "I don't want to." But they found out enough information about my award and they wrote it into my eval and I was not happy about it. I was, like, "I don't—I want to be recognized as being effective at my job and knowing my job, not being out in the community." I really feel like there's this huge disconnect between people who have so much time that they can constantly be doing volunteer work and people who are actually in their jobs and doing their jobs.

TS: Right.

AM: When something comes down to where I think people are doing it just to be recognized, and not doing it to provide support or to provide something for somebody else, then I have a problem with it.

TS: It's like a status.

AM: Yeah.

TS: When it becomes a status.

AM: Yeah. This is the same reason I tried to avoid award ceremonies all the time and just get given my award. So, like, "Oh, here. This has been sitting here for three weeks. Take it."

TS: Well, I'm going to ask you this question that you had a comment about earlier.

AM: Okay.

TS: What is patriotism to you?

AM: [chuckles] Oh, gosh. I feel like patriotism should be—This is what I wish it was. I wish that patriotism was a loyalty to your country based upon the ideals that you uphold in order to provide everybody with a good life.

What I see patriotism as, is ideals based upon the heterosexualized white normativity American Dream that people believe we can achieve by bombing other countries, by interfering in other countries. I believe that patriotism is lauded to be this sacrifice of yourself for all—like I said earlier—all these millions of people that you've never even met. Most of whom you probably wouldn't even like if you did meet them. Whereas, it's really—Those sacrifices are really just about that small group of people that you're with.

I think that over time patriotism has just become kind of a dirty word for me. That it excuses bad behavior, whether it is these killings of civilians in other countries or assaulting—being given a pass to sexually assault somebody because you're in the armed services; that undying—that every service member is worthy of praise and adoration; that they don't have to prove—

TS: Just being in the service, you mean?

AM: Yeah, that just being in the service allows somebody to be better than others; that being in the service comes with restrictions on what type of person you can be.

TS: And you think that's a false narrative.

AM: Well, lately I see from other veterans a lot of, like, anti-immigrant stuff because of the immigration laws being altered. Immigrants have been allowed to become full citizens for years by serving in the armed services, and some of them are the absolute best people. And it comes back to that "American Dream." If you—If you go to college and get a degree, or you become part of the military, that's supposed to be, like, a really awesome American thing. But you want to deny it to somebody because they're not a citizen? Or you want to say that because they're not a citizen that it doesn't mean as much, that they didn't work as hard, that they didn't have to try as hard? They probably had to try harder due to language barriers and stuff, or stereotyping, so. It—I really feel like it's just become this catch-all for—

TS: It's like a slogan?

AM: —discrimination.

TS: And it's like a slogan, maybe? The word "patriotism"?

AM: Yeah. Yeah.

TS: Like, you're patriotic and you have the bumper stickers: "Support Your Troops".

AM: Yeah. And, like, I brought up my uncle and his sons the last time. I feel like—Sometimes I feel like him, and people like him, believe that their status as parents of a soldier makes them better than other people, so.

TS: You think that each person has to individually prove their worth then?

AM: Right, and I think—

TS: Not just because they are wearing a uniform; they haven't earned it necessarily.

AM: Right. And I think that patriotism allows people to say—I think patriotism and racism go hand in hand. And I think patriotism and sexism go hand in hand, because people believe in that "American Dream" so much that they believe everybody has been given the same opportunities to achieve it, without recognizing all these other barriers.

TS: That people start with disadvantages.

AM: Yeah.

TS: Some people.

AM: And that sometimes, just because you were given two options doesn't mean that either option was a good option, and that either option was the same option that another person had.

TS: So if some people have privilege.

AM: Yes.

TS: And some people have disadvantage.

AM: Yes.

TS: And we're not on the same playing field always to get to—

AM: Absolutely not, which is why I don't discourage anybody from joining the military, because you do have a level playing field at some point. Yes, it may be a little bit harder for you to get advanced, but when you do get advanced you're getting the same pay; you're getting the same benefits. You make it past your three years of honorable service, you're getting your full Montgomery GI Bill. Which is probably the easiest veteran's benefit to receive. But it seems like the rest of them suck. [chuckles]

TS: Like which ones?

AM: Getting disability, getting VA [U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs] health care, getting death benefit, or just being—getting, like, these other things that you're supposed to get as a veteran. Oh, which brings up the other thing that annoys me. It really annoys me when people throw "veteran" into a sentence to make it seem like that person was discriminated against or that person was—

TS: Like what? Give me an example.

AM: The Cracker Barrel [Old Country Store restaurant chain] incident from last week. A seventy-some Cracker Barrel server gave a homeless man some free food and was fired because he went against Cracker Barrel policy. Well, Cracker Barrel policy is a policy for a reason, and I understand that you have to have policies against giving away food, even if they were a little harsh in firing the guy for a couple dollars' worth. But every single news outlet has to report that they fired a seventy year old veteran. Him being a veteran has nothing to do with whether he was worthy of that job or whether he should have kept that job, because he violated company policy. But that—Because he's a veteran, his life and his access to that job meant more to people.

TS: So it's, kind of, become a buzzword for—

AM: Yes.

TS: I see. Interesting. I hadn’t heard about that incident.

AM: I also don't talk about being a veteran unless it comes up in conversation.

TS: You don't, yourself?

AM: No.

TS: Why?

AM: If it's not pertinent to the conversation, I don't need—I don't need to be recognized as such. It was actually really awkward a couple weeks ago serving a table of four people where it came up that—I had my grandparents and they were like, "Oh, we know that you had grandparents because you've been so patient with us this entire evening and so calm."

And I'm like, "Oh, yeah, I love my grandparents. I don't get to see them very often."

They're like, "Oh, why not?" It becomes this whole circle story of—

TS: Right.

AM: —"I'm in North Carolina because I used to be in the military."

TS: Right.

AM: And they're, like—I don't—People are always like, "Oh, thank you for your service." And for once it wasn't uncomfortable. I really think that they were very genuine in their expression, but like, "Thanks for your service," is also a buzzword.

TS: Right.

AM: So.

TS: Well, do you also think that maybe there's things that civilians don't understand or maybe have a misconception about people who are in the military or the military service?

AM: The whole that if you're not on deployment you're not doing anything; that you're only in the military when you're on deployment; that you're not all equal in the service. I think that—I think the chain of command thing people get, like, that you have to report to somebody with absolutely no deviation or you get punished for it.

I think that the military's really just a smaller subset of the larger population, so you have your good people, you have your bad people. I think people primarily think that military people are good and that those who advance are only good, because it's the military. That everything is *Band of Brothers* [2001 war drama miniseries] or *Saving Private Ryan* [1998 film starring Tom Hanks] all the time, so.

TS: Much more heroic—

AM: Yeah.

TS: —you think, than the—

AM: Or that all men have been in combat. When, really, I think combat jobs are, like 15%, every—85% is support. Not saying that support people haven't seen some really bad shit because they have, but that because they are trained differently they're not necessarily prepared for that really bad shit the way that combat people are prepared, and that's why it's so much worse. And that is possibly why women are experiencing combat-related trauma worse than men, because they were never trained the way that men have been trained in the past. I need to write that down for later.

TS: What is the—like, the most—the best part about having served in the navy?

AM: The people. [chuckles]

TS: But what about the people is so good for you? What is—Why does that enrich you?

AM: It's a mo—They're motivating. I don't know what else to say without repeating myself from earlier. Just that having that wide variety of people that I've met and that I've experienced life with, it's pretty amazing.

TS: Well, I don't actually have any other formal questions. Is there anything that we haven't talked about that you wanted to add?

AM: No—

TS: We've covered a lot.

AM: —not at this time.

TS: Yeah. [both chuckle] Well, Amber, thanks so much.

AM: You're welcome.

TS: I really appreciate you talking with me. I'll go ahead and shut it off.

AM: Okay.

[End of Interview]