

WOMEN VETERANS HISTORICAL PROJECT
ORAL HISTORY COLLECTION

INTERVIEWEE: Rhonda Sloan

INTERVIEWER: Therese Strohmer

DATE: 29 January 2016

[Begin Interview]

TS: Well, today is January 29th 2016. I'm at the home of Rhonda Sloan in Spring Lake, North Carolina, which is close to Fort Bragg, to conduct an oral history interview for the Women Veterans Historical Collection at the University of North Carolina at Greensboro. Rhonda, could you state your name the way you'd like it to be on your collection?

RS: Rhonda Lynn Crawford Sloan.

TS: Okay. Okay, Rhonda. Well, thanks for letting me come here and talk with you today. Why don't we start out by having you tell me a little bit about where you're from, where you grew up, when you were born?

RS: Oh.

TS: Start at the beginning.

RS: Oh, gosh [chuckles]. I was—I was born [4 April 1965] in Kingwood, West Virginia, and it's funny because I'm African American, and everyone—when I tell them that they're like, "West Virginia? Are you really from West Virginia?"

I'm like, "Yeah."

I grew up in Uniontown, Pennsylvania. It's right outside of Pittsburgh.

TS: When did you move there?

RS: Oh, gosh.

TS: About how old were you?

RS: I had to have been in elementary school.

TS: Okay.

RS: Because my step-father was in the military. My mother got married to him—and his name is Bobby Joe Crawford—and when she married him we went to Germany—no, we went to New Jersey, and then—yeah.

TS: Okay.

RS: Yeah, we went to Germany.

TS: He's in the army?

RS: He was in the army, yes.

TS: So you were an army brat, too.

RS: Yes, I was.

TS: Well, I didn't know that.

RS: Yeah. We left West Virginia and we went to Fort Monmouth, New Jersey, and I was in kindergarten there. Then we went to Germany to Schwäbisch Hall. Then we came back to the States to my grandmother's, and then—at that time I didn't even know what divorce was, but my parents were divorcing. And—

TS: That was your step-father?

RS: My step-father.

TS: Okay.

RS: Right. And I considered—I mean, that's my dad; the only dad that I've known.

TS: Okay.

RS: Because I don't know my—well, I know my biological father, but I really don't have a personal relationship with him.

TS: Right.

RS: I've talked to him, I've seen him while I was growing up because he was there, but I don't have a personal relationship with him. But my step-father, Bobby Joe, yes, I do, I have a relationship with him, and he's in Indianapolis.

TS: Is he?

RS: Yes. But we moved to Uniontown, Pennsylvania because my mother had an aunt named Laura—who she's named after—and she lived in Uniontown, so we moved to Uniontown, Pennsylvania. And that's where I grew up.

TS: Okay.

RS: Me—

TS: That was after the divorce, then?

RS: After the divorce, yes.

TS: So then you stopped being an army brat because—

RS: Yes.

TS: Okay.

RS: And he—he went on and finished out his military career, and we stayed in Pennsylvania.

TS: Okay. What was it like growing up there?

RS: Oh, God, I loved it!

TS: Now, you've got some siblings too.

RS: I have four siblings.

TS: Okay.

RS: My older sister, Stephanie, she did twenty years and one day in the military. She retired an E-7 [sergeant first class], here on Fort Bragg.

TS: She's army, then?

RS: Army.

TS: Okay.

RS: Yes, she was a paratrooper. She did sixteen of her twenty years here on Fort Bragg.

TS: Did she?

RS: Yes.

TS: Now, where is she living?

RS: She lives on the other side of Fort Bragg.

TS: Okay.

RS: Off of Strickland Bridge [Road] in Cumberland County. Then the next to oldest is Theresa. She did twenty-four years, I believe; I think. She—She was an MI [military intelligence].

TS: Okay.

RS: She retired first sergeant out of Fort Belvoir [Virginia]. Then me. I retired a CW-4 [W-4; chief warrant officer, four]. I did twenty-nine and five months. And like I told you, it was because I was a two time no-select for W-5 [chief warrant officer, five].

TS: Right.

RS: And yeah, it took me awhile to say that because—yeah—there was a lot of bitterness. I can still taste it on the back of my tongue.

TS: Sure.

RS: Then my next sister, Sonya, she got a medical retirement.

TS: Okay.

RS: She made it to E-5 [sergeant].

TS: She was also in the army?

RS: She was also in the army. We're all army.

TS: Yeah.

RS: All army, nothing else.

TS: All army, all day, right?

RS: Nothing else. All army.

TS: Just looking around here you got—we're all army.

RS: All army.

TS: Steelers and the army.

RS: And army, yeah. And then my youngest sister, Annette, we helped pay for her to go to college.

TS: Okay.

RS: And she was a nurse. But she passed away in 2011.

TS: Aww, I'm sorry.

RS: Yeah. But other than that, life was great. I mean—well, my intent—

TS: It's all girls, no boys.

RS: All girls.

TS: Okay.

RS: All girls.

TS: Girls ruled, then.

RS: All girls.

TS: Okay.

RS: It was a house full of women.

TS: Yeah.

RS: Yeah. But at first, my intentions weren't to go in the military. That wasn't it. I mean, when I was in high school I was taking the courses to go to college; that was my plan.

TS: Is that how you felt always; you kind of always wanted to go to college?

RS: Yes.

TS: Were you a good student?

RS: Yes. Oh, God, I was a great student.

TS: [chuckles]

RS: I mean—Because my mother—my mother, she told us we only had two options.

TS: Okay.

RS: It was books or boots.

TS: Okay.

RS: And my older sister, Stephanie, she graduated high school and she went to college. She went to Virginia Union [University] in Richmond, Virginia. And I was like, "Oh, God, I'm going to college. I want to be just like Stephanie," because when Stephanie went to Virginia Union, she was a cheerleader. Well, throughout junior high and high school I was a cheerleader. Believe it or not. I'm going to have to show you the pictures.

TS: I can believe it.

RS: And I was like, "I'm going to—" and I pictured myself as a University of Pittsburgh cheerleader.

TS: Okay.

RS: Believe it or not.

TS: I believe it.

RS: But then I saw my mother struggling to send Stephanie money, and take care of us, as a single parent. Then when Theresa graduated high school in '82—well, Stephanie went for one year, she came home, she got pregnant, and she had my nephew, but my mother was struggling. Our mother was working two jobs and—

TS: Where was she working at?

RS: She worked at a nursing home, and then she worked at a department store, so—but then—

TS: Long hours.

RS: Long, long. And it came to the point where I had a job after school, Theresa had a job, but then we still were—we had days when, like, I had to cook dinner, Theresa had to cook dinner, so—and we all had responsibilities. I mean, it wasn't like—I mean, I got to be a child, but then I didn't. I mean, I had a wonderful time growing up, because me and my friends on Facebook [social networking website], we always talk about—oh, gosh—like, they got snowed in and we talked about snow—

TS: What you would do on snow days?

RS: Sledding on snow days and—

TS: Yeah.

RS: Because I recalled one time when my—my youngest sister, she was using a plastic bag, sledding off one of the hills, and she had cut herself on the butt, and didn't realize that she was cut until she came in house and started to un-thaw. And then Mom had to take her to get some stitches. But—I mean, growing up, it wasn't like today. I mean, we were close knit. We were walking to school, walking home. And, I mean, it was wonderful. But a single mother trying to put one person through college.

So when Theresa joined the army right out of high school in '82, I was like, "Okay." I took the SAT's [Scholastic Aptitude Test]. I was ready. I was ready.

But when she joined and she was like, "Rhonda, it's not that bad. You can do it—" So then Theresa left. Then February of '83, Stephanie decided she's going to join the army. So Stephanie goes.

So I was like, "I can do this."

TS: [chuckles]

RS: But I wanted to wait until after my summer was over.

TS: Okay.

RS: So then I waited until after I turned eighteen, and then I went and I signed up.

TS: Well, before you did that, in the years that you wanted to go to college, what did you see yourself doing? Besides being a cheerleader—

RS: Yes.

TS: —which I'm sure you were fabulous—did you see a career, or what did you—

RS: I saw myself being a lawyer.

TS: Yeah?

RS: I really did. Because I—I really thought about equality and fairness. I did. And believe it or not, I still think about that. I mean, all throughout my military career, it was all about fairness. And I have tons of stories where, like, sometimes a soldier would come and tell me something. I can recall when they did the—you reenlist and go to college—two soldiers were—

TS: Like the Bootstrap?

[Bootstrap was a military program that provided financial support tuition expenses for off-duty college education]

RS: No. No. No.

TS: Not that?

RS: You'd reenlist and you'd go to college for so many months. It was a reenlistment option.

TS: Okay.

RS: Okay. So there were two soldiers—one was an E-5, one was an E-4 [corporal]—so they were making the soldiers come to PT [physical training] formation and then go to college. Okay? But we had an E-7 and he wasn't showing up. Is that fair? No. So I told the first sergeant. The first sergeant didn't know anything about it because the E-7 wasn't talking to the company commander. I said, "We have an EO complaint wait—about to happen."

TS: Equal opportunity?

RS: Equal opp—[extraneous comment redacted]—yeah, equal opportunity getting ready to happen here. But it was a color thing. Believe it or not.

TS: Yeah.

RS: We had a white company commander, black first sergeant, and these were two black soldiers. He said, "Well, he made that decision."

First sergeant said, "Well, I'm making this decision. He is my soldier. He will make formation."

And then the E-7 shows up in civilian clothes. We had the two soldiers showing up in PT clothes. "No! You're coming to PT." Oh, he was mad, but it was fair. It was fair.

TS: How did it finally get resolved?

RS: The E-7 was in PT formation. Well, class starts at 6:30 in the morning.

TS: Right.

RS: Classes on campus don't start until 8:00.

TS: Right. And who takes that class?

RS: Yeah.

TS: [chuckles] Right.

RS: Yeah, so—I mean—and that was—that was what I wanted to do.

TS: Yeah.

RS: Yeah, but—

TS: I can see that.

RS: It didn't pan out that way.

TS: Yeah. Well, there's still time.

RS: There is.

TS: There's still time.

RS: And—But I don't have the money for it, so.

TS: Yeah.

RS: No, I gave away my 9/11.

[The Post-9/11 GI Bill is an educational benefit program specifically for military members who served on active duty on or after September 11, 2001. Depending on an individual's situation, a provision of the program may include transferability to eligible immediate family members (spouses and children)]

TS: Yeah.

RS: Yeah, I'd want Uncle Sam to pay for it.

TS: [chuckles] Yeah. I don't blame you for that.

RS: But I'm bitter about that too. But that's another story.

TS: Yeah. Yeah.

RS: But—

TS: So you saw your sisters go in.

RS: Yes.

TS: Did you ever consider any other service at all?

RS: No.

TS: Never even looked?

RS: Never.

TS: No?

RS: Nope.

TS: Now, what did your mom think about your sisters joining the army, and then you?

RS: I don't know. You'd have to ask her.

TS: [chuckles]

RS: I mean, it was like—I know that she didn't want us to be that statistic—they're having kids, and penny jobs, or being on welfare, or anything like that. She didn't want that. She wanted us—and she would tell you, she wanted us to have more than her. I mean, just as my daughter—she will tell you, "Oh, I have to get a Ph.D. [Doctor of Philosophy] because my mom has a master's."

And I mean—And I'm like "No, I don't expect for you to do that. I just expect for you to be happy in life."

TS: Right.

RS: But, I mean—Well, I've already told you, I thought that I was doing the right thing for my career with that, but—

TS: Right.

RS: —but it has—it has paid off for me.

TS: Yeah.

RS: Yeah.

TS: Well, you had a fun summer, apparently, before you joined the army.

RS: Yes.

TS: And you signed up in Pittsburgh, right? Is that what you were telling me?

RS: Well, I went—signed up in Uniontown.

TS: Uniontown.

RS: At the recruiter's station in Uniontown, and then I went to the MEPS [Military Entrance Processing Station] in Pittsburgh. But the funny thing is, I wanted to change my MOS,

[military occupational specialty code] because recruiter—my recruiter then, I mean, he had me thinking that the job I was going to be doing was in a warehouse, because I signed up as a 55 Bravo ammo [ammunition] specialist .

TS: Okay.

RS: Right? And the video that I saw [laughing]—

TS: It was around the time of *Private Benjamin* [1980 American comedy film starring Goldie Hawn], too, I think, wasn't it? Right?

RS: Yeah. So I'm thinking that I'm going to be in a big warehouse, right? And so, I had went to San Antonio [Texas] to take Stephanie's son down there to her, and found out that, oh, no, I'm going to be outside in the elements getting cold, and wet. No, no. So I didn't want to go. I wanted to go back to the recruiter and change my MOS. So the day that I was supposed to go, I told them, "Oh, no, I'm not going." I got on the bus, went all the way up to Pittsburgh, and I told them I wasn't going. So two MP's [military police] come in, and he told me that I had to go. And I'm like, "So they're going to take me to jail?" I mean, the bully tactics. [chuckles]

TS: Had you signed anything; delayed entry?

RS: I had signed one time. Yeah, I did the delayed entry.

TS: Okay.

RS: And so, I signed once, but I didn't know that I had to sign the second time.

TS: Right.

RS: So I have nothing but my little purse.

TS: Right.

RS: I'm in Pittsburgh. Nothing. No suitcase, no pajamas, no nothing.

TS: They said, "Well, we're going to give you enough stuff to get you there."

RS: So I went on, signed paperwork. I mean, tears and snot, everything. And so—I mean, I find this out years later that I didn't have to go.

TS: Right.

RS: But—

TS: But you went.

RS: I'm on my way to Fort Dix [New Jersey].

TS: You had a purse? [both chuckle]

RS: That was it. So then I called my mom and she got me some stuff together, and then she sent it. But then I went on to Fort Dix.

TS: Yeah.

RS: And the rest is history.

TS: Well, that's what we're going to talk about then, history.

RS: [chuckles] Yeah. Yeah.

TS: So two of your sisters had already been in.

RS: Yes.

TS: Had they prepared you for what was going to happen in basic training or—

RS: No.

TS: No?

RS: No.

TS: Didn't even ask them?

RS: Well, Theresa did tell me that I was going to have to run, but I thought, "I can do this," because I was a cheerleader, and I was running anyway.

TS: Had you played any sports or anything?

RS: No.

TS: Nothing like that?

RS: No.

TS: Okay.

RS: I was just a skinny little girl.

TS: How was basic training for you, then?

RS: Oh, my God—

TS: I have to go look in that book again, huh?

RS: [chuckles] When I got there—

TS: How old were you when you went in?

RS: Eighteen.

TS: Eighteen, okay.

RS: Eighteen. I got there, and they take you through the line, and they give you the rucksack, and your packing all this stuff in, and I know how they do—they—they're trying to make you cry, and all that—

TS: You already cried on the way there.

RS: Right, and—oh gosh. And so, I have the rucksack, and then I have the little suitcase that Mom—and they want you to carry everything, and it's—I swear, it's like we were going over three football fields or whatever, but it was probably just one, but it seemed like it was so far. I mean, it was—I mean, and they're yelling at you—but you know they can't do that now because—so much stress. It was scary at first. It was really scary. But then after—after a while you just got—you just got used to it. I'm like "Oh, it's going to be like this all the time." So yeah.

TS: Get yourself in a frame of mind to deal with it.

RS: Yeah. Yeah. And then my drill sergeant, Sergeant Hardy—I mean, this is the funniest thing—I saw her ten years later at Hunter [Army Airfield, Savannah, Georgia], and I was a W-1 [warrant officer, one]. I was in the gym, and in the locker room showering, and I heard her voice.

TS: [chuckles]

RS: And I'm there, and I'm, like, locking up, like, "Oh, God." And I turned around, and I was like, "Oh, my God—she was an E-8 [master sergeant first class], right? Because when she was my drill sergeant she was an E-5. And I had put my pants on, I didn't have my shirt on, and I was like, "Excuse me, master sergeant?"
And she was like, "What?"
I said, "I think you were my drill sergeant at Fort Dix."
And she said, "When?" And I told her, and she said, "What are you doing now?"
I said, "Well, I'm stationed over here at 24 [unclear]."
"Well, what rank are you?"

I said, "Well, I'm a—I'm a warrant officer." [both chuckling] I'm like, "I'm a warrant officer! I outrank you now." It took me a minute to realize that. I'm like, "You scared me for how long?" And then she started laughing at me. I said, "Whew. It took me—You know how much courage it took me to come and talk to you?" After that, everybody in the locker room started laughing.

TS: Sure.

RS: I said, "Don't y'all know, she terrorized me."

She said, "No, I didn't. No, I didn't."

And then I said, "Alright, when I come back—" I told them, I said, "When I come in here tomorrow—" I said, "—I'm going to show y'all."

TS: So you brought your book?

RS: Oh, I brought the book, and I said, "Oh, she had a Jheri Curl [permed hairstyle popular among African Americans during the 1980s]—" everything.

She said, "Don't you dare bring that book in here."

TS: Let's see [looking at Sloan's book]

RS: Right there.

TS: Oh, yeah. Okay.

RS: Oh, yeah.

TS: Sergeant B. Hardy

RS: Yes.

TS: [unclear] Sergeant. There we go.

RS: Yes.

TS: Oh, my goodness.

RS: She said, "See, you didn't have to do that. You didn't have to do that."

TS: [chuckles] Oh, my gosh.

RS: Yeah. And she came to my promotion to W-2 [chief warrant officer, two] and everything. Yeah.

TS: Would you say that when you're starting out, and you're going through the army, did you have—not necessarily second thoughts, but were you like, "What am I getting myself

into?" sort of thing? Do you remember how you felt, like, as an eighteen-year-old? Because now, you did all this time; almost thirty years. How were you back then?

RS: I thought of it as an adventure. Because when we moved to Uniontown and we told people that we had been to Germany, they thought we had been to Germantown. That's a couple towns over from Uniontown. And I'm like, "No, I've been to Germany. I've been to Holland. I've been to—"

And they were like, "No, you haven't."

Okay. We had pictures of this stuff.

TS: Right. Right.

RS: And then they'd come to our house, and they will see— "Where did you get this?" "I told you that I've been," and that I wanted to go back and see things. And then every time that I went—well, when I went to Germany, I wanted to go back to Schwäbisch Hall to see where I grew up, and then—

TS: Did you do that?

RS: Yeah.

TS: Yeah.

RS: Not the first time or the second time, yeah. And then when I told my mother I was going to Germany— "Oh, you have to send me this. You have to send me that."

TS: Oh, yeah.

RS: And she wanted a cuckoo clock. "Mom, you have cuckoo clocks. You have a grandfather clock. Why do you need another one?" Yeah, so—yeah, it was—it was an adventure.

TS: So part of that experience as a child having been there, kind of opened up your worldview a little bit, then.

RS: Yes.

TS: Even as a young girl.

RS: Yes.

TS: To what the possibilities were.

RS: Yes.

TS: And that stuck with you.

RS: Yes, because I was around people that—when I was growing up—that hadn't been outside of the state, and I've been out of the country. I mean, still, there's people that I went to high school with—"Oh, yeah, you went on a little cruise. " The army has taken me places that—I know that if I went to college I would have had to get a really good degree to get a really good job. How do you spell Afghanistan?

TS: Right.

RS: When I went to Korea this last time, I went to China. I've been to the Great Wall. I have pictures of me on the Great Wall. And so, the army has been an adventure.

TS: Yeah.

RS: I've seen things and I've done things that I know a lot of my classmates from high school haven't done in their lifetime.

TS: Yeah. So you made it through basic training.

RS: Yes.

TS: Was there anything—after you braced yourself, like, "Okay, this is going to be this way—" that was particularly physically hard or even emotionally hard, even after that moment? Besides the drill sergeant.

RS: Physically—Physically, no.

TS: Okay.

RS: No, because I was in good shape. I think when my cycle came every month [menstruation], because I really had bad cramps. Other than that, no.

TS: No? Emotionally?

RS: No.

TS: Once you, kind of, braced yourself you were good.

RS: Yes. Yeah, I missed home, but then I'm like, "This is new."

TS: Yeah.

RS: I'd lived in New Jersey before so—yeah, it was new. I mean, I—

TS: Were you in a platoon?

RS: Yes.

TS: That platoon that you were in, was it men and women?

RS: All women.

TS: All women.

RS: I was used to that.

TS: Yeah.

RS: With my mom and my sisters, I mean—

TS: Right. But what was that like? You had a mix of people, right, from all over?

RS: That was a little different, because where we lived in Pennsylvania was the projects [subsidized apartment buildings], but I was used to a mixture, because when we moved to New Jersey, the little girl that lived next door to us was a little white girl. So that's who I caught the bus with. I was holding her hand going to school. And then when we lived in Schwäbisch Hall, there was a mixture of everybody. So being exposed to other people than my race, I've seen that. And I mean—But then where I was in Uniontown, where I lived was predominately black, but where I went to high school was a mixture.

TS: Yeah. But how were they too? Like, you're in this group, but how were people—not necessarily race—but, like, young women who hadn't really been away from home or experienced anything?

RS: Oh, yeah. You had some of them that they were just crying every night, and you're like, "Okay, please just get over this. Why did you do this if you're going to be crying every night?" But yeah, you did have some crybabies. You did. And then you had some that wanted to do this to better themselves for their children, so that they could have a better life.

TS: Right.

RS: And—yeah. It was—You met a different—Everyone had their own reason for being there.

TS: Right. And they weren't all the same.

RS: No. No. There was one girl in my class, she was eighteen like me, and she had a baby when she was thirteen. And I know—I won't forget that.

TS: Yeah.

RS: And I was like, "Thirteen? I think I was still playing with Barbie dolls."

TS: Yeah. Was she pretty motivated?

RS: Yeah, because she knew that she had to—

TS: Support her child?

RS: —support her child.

TS: Yeah.

RS: And I was like, "Thirteen?"

TS: Yeah.

RS: "Did I even have my cycle at thirteen? And here you are, you had a child that's five [years old] in kindergarten?"

TS: Yeah, oh my goodness. Yeah.

RS: Yeah, so. Yeah.

TS: Well, so you got through basic, and now you're going to go into—You need to take a break?

RS: No.

TS: Oh, you're turning that off, okay. So you're going to go to your AIT [Advanced Individual Training], and you went to Redstone Arsenal, Alabama.

RS: Yes.

TS: Tell me about that.

RS: Oh.

TS: You're being introduced to ammo.

RS: Yeah.

TS: How was that?

RS: Oh, that was—Well, it was—Well, the first time I had to fire a weapon in basic training—

TS: That was the first time you ever did it?

RS: Ever. Ever.

TS: Did you do the M16 [rifle], then?

RS: Yeah, it was a M16.

TS: M1? M16?

RS: I think.

TS: Yeah.

RS: And then—And AIT, we didn't—I mean, we had to identify ammunition, and then we learned all about storing it and issuing it. And then still I'm thinking, "I'm going to be in this warehouse." And then we go out to the bunkers that are outside. And I was like, "Okay, yeah, I think I can do this." Until—Then they tell us that there's outside storage, and I'm like, "Oh, what did I get myself into?" [chuckles] Yeah, then—I mean, it was—it wasn't bad then, but then when I get to my first duty station, then that's when I realized, "Rhonda, you may have messed up." Yeah.

TS: Where was that at? Where was your first duty station?

RS: In—

TS: Ansbach [Bavaria]?

RS: Ansbach on Katterbach Kaserne.

TS: So you went right to Germany?

RS: Right to Germany, yeah. I was in a aviation unit, yeah. And again, I'm the odd girl out.

TS: Are you one of the few women, or are there any—

RS: Yes.

TS: —any other women with you?

RS: No. No.

TS: Just you?

RS: Yeah, just me. I was in a aviation unit, and when we would go to support the attack unit—the Bravo Company—B attack—the first time I went to the field, but then after that they said I couldn't go because they had to make special quarters just for me. Yeah,

because the Bravo Company was all male, and if I went for an ammo section and I'm the only girl, I couldn't stay where all the guys were. Then they'd have to make a special—put up a special tent just for me to stay there, so—

TS: What did you think about that?

RS: I wasn't mad.

TS: You're like, "That's fine. I don't need to be out in the field." Is that how you felt then?

RS: Yeah. Then I didn't—I was like, "I don't mind." But then one of the guys that I did AIT with—I mean, I was like, "Yeah, Norton[?], I'll see you when you come back." But it wasn't fair. It wasn't. I should have been there like everybody else. But then after that—then when the fuelers went—there were more females.

TS: Then there was more that you could group together.

RS: Yeah.

TS: And they could house them together.

RS: Yes.

TS: Because I know a lot in those early years when they're transitioning—the all-volunteer army and they're getting a lot more women in—housing was a big thing.

RS: Right. Right. Right. Well, because one time—The one time that I did go—that first time—Norton would stand outside of the bathroom and where we went to take a shower, and I would shower, and then go back and then—

TS: Like guarding.

RS: Yes.

TS: Did you feel safe?

RS: Yeah.

TS: You felt safe with the guys that you were working with?

RS: Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. Oh, Norton wasn't going to let anything happen to me.

TS: Yeah.

RS: That was my dog [slang for "good friend"], Norton.

TS: [chuckles] He's watching out?

RS: Yeah.

TS: When I'm looking at this sheet here, and I'm looking at all these places you've been. So you went from Germany to Fort Bragg [North Carolina], back to Germany, and Colorado, Korea, Kentucky, Alaska, Alabama. Where is this at? Fort Hunter, Fort Stewart. Where's that at? Fort Stewart.

RS: Georgia.

TS: Oh, Georgia, okay. Georgia, Texas, back to Fort Bragg, Korea. So you went a lot of places in the almost thirty years you were in.

RS: Yeah.

TS: I don't know if we should go through them one by one, but what I kind of want to ask you is—You were in Germany twice?

RS: Yes.

TS: Twice. Fairly close together, I guess. A couple years apart?

RS: Yeah, a couple years apart.

TS: Yeah. What would you say about how your experiences were at the different places you were at; overseas compared to, like, in the States? And you can throw Alaska in there too. Was the experience different because of the geography that you were at, or did it have more to do with, maybe, leadership, or the time period you were there? Do you see a difference based on those kinds of things? How would you characterize your tours that you had? How would you differentiate them and how would you say they were a little bit similar? Do you understand what I'm trying to ask you?

RS: Yeah. I think that overseas assignments, you're kind of detached from the States and your family. So you make a family, and that bonds you. Because just last weekend—weekend before last—I went to Kentucky for one of my friend's fiftieth [birthday], and this is a friend that I met in Germany in '86, I think, '87, when I was in Aschaffenburg, and that's—we bonded as family, and that's just like—

TS: Almost thirty years ago.

RS: Yes, almost thirty years. And I mean, her and I have been friends just that long, and I think when you're away from family, you make a family, just like a deployment. When I was in Afghanistan I—Sabrina—her and I—she's a fellow warrant officer—we were a family, and we're still family to this day. When I was in Iraq, there's a group of us, we were family, and we're still family now. It's like you make a family. Because in the States

you have so many different places you could go. When you're away, where can you go? Especially when you're deployed and you're on that FOB [forward operating base], you can't go anywhere.

TS: Right, the two deployments that you were on.

RS: Right. And then when you're in Germany, yeah, you can go different places, but you're on that Kaserne [German, meaning "barracks"], or if you're in Korea you're on that camp or whatever.

TS: You're kind of dependent on each other for just getting through the day.

RS: Right. Different things.

TS: And getting through the weekend.

RS: Right. Yeah. I mean, it's there. And even in Alaska you make a family.

TS: Yeah. Because you can't just run out like you can run out here and head down to Fort Bragg, right?

RS: I mean, my husband and I were talking about that, because one Christmas we went to go have Christmas over someone else's house, and in Alaska you have to put a battery blanket, an engine heater, oil pan, or something like that, and we had to leave our car running the whole time. Because we went to housing. We stayed off post and there wasn't any place for us to plug our car in.

TS: To keep the engine warm?

RS: Yes.

TS: You have to plan a little differently.

RS: Yes, you do. Yeah. So you make a family.

TS: Yeah. Where you were, did it depend at all, then, on who's in charge? Like, who's a commander, things like that? Do those things make a difference in your tour too?

RS: Yes.

TS: In what way?

RS: Either—Like when I was telling you about Korea.

TS: We did a lot of that off tape I think.

RS: Yeah, we did. When I was in Korea the—Did I leave a Korea out? No, I didn't. No, I didn't. I went to Korea enlisted, and then I went back as a warrant officer.

TS: Right.

RS: I did Korea three times. When I went back as a warrant officer, and with Colonel Patrick—he's my family now. That leadership, it was—I've had different types of company commanders at—when I was a warrant officer. Either they trust your ability or they don't. When I was at Fort Hood [Texas] I had a company commander who—she really didn't trust my ability, but everyone else did, and I think it was because my battalion commander didn't trust her ability. So she thought that we were against her, but if she would have sat down and had a conversation with myself, the OIC [officer in charge], and the NCOIC [noncommissioned officer in charge], she would have seen that we were all on the same page. But she was the odd person out, because she wanted to be. If—I mean, different places where I've been, if they trusted you—trusted me, then the leadership's good.

I was here at Fort Bragg and I worked for a lieutenant colonel, and I had deployment experience in Afghanistan and Iraq, and he had deployment experience in Qatar. Qatar is where they sent the people in Afghanistan and Iraq for R&R [rest and relaxation or recuperation]. Okay, and you can go have a beer. How much ammo are you moving in Qatar? And then I'm a [W-]4 and you have this other guy who's a [W-]3, who has never deployed, and you're going to look to him for guidance? So I sat back. I'm the W-4, and you're always going to look to him.

So when we were doing reports every day, you take your sweet time. And then there's this other colonel that has to compile the reports, asking him, "Hey, where's your report?"

"Oh, I'm going to get it to you. I'm going to get it to you."

After a month or so, he would start blind copying me.

TS: Who's "he"? Which "he" are you talking about?

RS: The other lieutenant colonel. The [unclear]. He would start blind copying me, and by the time he would think of something to give to him, I would have already done it and gave it to him. And so, then our full bird colonel [military slang for the rank of colonel, O-6] when—one day—I mean, me and my col—my [unclear] colonel just got into it. And I'm like, "You know what? I'm done with this bull [bullshit]. We're going to go see [unclear]."

"Okay, let's go."

So then he says, "Well, I've given her soldiers to do this."

And I had to look at her, I'm like, "What soldiers have you given me?"

And the full bird says, "What soldiers have you given her?" He couldn't name them.

I said, "See?"

And then I'm so glad that the other guy came in and said, "The only reason this section is still floating is because of Rhonda."

And he's like, "Well, she hasn't done nothing."

And then he said, "She has done everything. Do you know how I get the reports?" And funny enough, the one that I got into it with was a Hispanic guy. This guy who had my back was a white [Caucasian] guy. And he said, "This is the only reason that they're floating, is because of her. She gives me the reports, not him. He gives me garbage. She is in touch with everybody downrange." So he didn't have faith in me, but he did.

TS: Yeah. How did that end up, then?

RS: Our full bird colonel fired the colonel that was head of my section, but at that time I was getting ready to PCS [permanent change of station] to go to Korea.

TS: Somewhere else?

RS: Yeah.

TS: Now, how was it when people think about you in the military, you're always moving. That must be a hassle. But there's tradeoffs, right, for things like that.

RS: Yeah.

TS: You get to leave a bunch of stuff behind.

RS: Yeah.

TS: You're like, "I only got X more days and then I'm out of here."

RS: Yeah. But—In my field, your name is [unclear]. Sometimes—Just like when I left Fort Bragg the last time and I—Well, no, no, no. I went to Korea. I had worked with a major—Major Strong[?]-here at Fort Bragg. We were in the same battalion. He was the SPO [support operations], and if he ever listened to this—he was the SPO for our battalion—he would be like, "Why are you still telling that story?"

Because I had to run a range, and I didn't do something right, and when I went to go do the brief—and he just started yelling at me, and he said—he told me to get out and when I get it fixed, then come back, but it wasn't so subtle. I mean, there was some bleep, bleep, bleep, bleep, bleeps in there that time.

So I came back, and then he was like, "Okay, good."

But then years passed, and then when I was going to Korea my sponsor had contacted me and he said, "Yeah, the SPO can't wait for you to get here. [unclear] SPO brigade level now." And so—

TS: Same guy?

RS: Colonel—He made [unclear] colonel, right? And I said, "Who is this SPO that can't wait till I get there?"

He said, "Colonel Strong."

I was like, "Oh, my God."

TS: What does SPO stand for?

RS: Support Operations Officer.

TS: Okay.

RS: And so, then when I got there it was Colonel Strong, but he had changed. He was saved [referring to Christian salvation] and he didn't curse as much, but he was still the same ornery [bad-tempered] guy. I mean, he was still strict, by the book, I love him. And he believed in me. And there was a W-1 that worked for me, and he told her, he said, "Two things can happen. Either you can learn something from her or you can walk away with nothing." Sadly enough, she walked away with nothing.

TS: Yeah.

RS: Yeah, but.

TS: Well, let's talk a little bit about some of the stuff that you got to do; like, you talked about traveling. What kind of things did you get to do when you were overseas that you enjoyed the most? Where was your favorite place to go?

RS: Any place that had good food.

TS: [chuckles] Okay. Where was that at?

RS: Let me see. I liked Germany because the Jägerschnitzel [meat with mushroom sauce] was good, but—

TS: You get any of that Currywurst [steamed, then fried pork sausage seasoned with curry ketchup]?

RS: No, I didn't really like that.

TS: No?

RS: No.

TS: Okay.

RS: But I liked Korea, too, because I loved going to a kalbi [grilled ribs; sometimes spelled "galbi"] house. That's where they put the fire in the middle of the table, and they bring all the little bowls, and they bring the pork or whatever and you have to cook it yourself. And you put it in the leaf with all the stuff, and then you just shove it all in your mouth.

TS: [chuckles] That sounds perfect.

RS: Oh, it is so good. You wrap it up and you just shove it in your mouth. Oh, it's so good. And I have—Oh, gosh, I have pictures of me and Mr. Won. When I was in 84th with Colonel Patrick, that was the best time, when I was in Korea.

TS: You enjoyed good food?

RS: Oh, yeah. Yeah. And meeting people. I've met so many wonderful people throughout my career. Yeah.

TS: Yeah. Did you have any particular mentors?

RS: Oh, yeah. Colonel Patrick has to be one. There was a E-6 [staff sergeant] when I first came in the army, and I know she's retired. Because, I mean, my first duty station—

TS: This is the one in Germany, first time?

RS: One in Germany, when I was in Ansbach. And my squad leader, he was E-5—Sanders—and one day I had to ask him, "Do you not like me because I'm a private or because I'm a girl?"

Because if there was a detail, he would say, "Private Crawford." We'd be standing in formation. "Private Crawford."

So when a platoon sergeant would turn around and say, "Hey, I need two people," I would just step back and fall out.

TS: [chuckles]

RS: I'm serious, because I knew that it was going to be, "Private Crawford." [chuckles] So then one time I just had to ask him. I knew it was going to be me or Norton; me or Norton.

TS: Norton's the one that had your back all the time?

RS: Yes.

TS: Okay. Were you both privates?

RS: We were both privates; both privates. And I remember one time we were painting the toad[?] room where we kept all of our equipment. This was down in the basement of our barracks. And Sanders told us to make sure we kept the windows open, because we were painting the floor grey or something.

TS: For ventilation?

RS: For ventilation. And I told Norton, I said, "Norton, if we don't have the windows open we'll get sick and he'll have to do it. But we won't be sick long." He used to dog me and Norton out. Oh, my God.

TS: Did you not open those windows?

RS: On purpose.

TS: Did you get sick? [chuckles] Oh, my goodness.

RS: We threw up, and then they took us over to the TMC [Troop Medical Clinic], but he had to finish it. And then about two hours later we were better, but he had to finish it. And then one day—oh gosh—it was raining so hard. He had us in the motor park just sitting in in our vehicles. "Why are we sitting in the vehicle? Can we go back to our room and do our correspondence courses?"

He said, "No. You're just going to stay right here."

I said, "Come on, Norton. We're going to go to the dayroom and do our correspondence courses."

He said, "No. Didn't I tell you to stay in the vehicle?"

"You did, but it's stupid." [chuckles]

TS: Did anything happen to you?

RS: No.

TS: No?

RS: No.

TS: When you asked him, "Is it because I'm a private or a girl," what was his answer?

RS: He didn't say anything. He didn't say anything. But I knew that I was going to be on the next detail.

But then the ironic part is, when I got to Fort Campbell [Kentucky], coming from Korea, I had made the cutoff score to E-6, right? And there was a guy that was in Germany with us, and he was there, and he saw me, he said, "Crawford?" And I wasn't paying attention, my name was Sloan. And he walked up on me, he said, "Crawford!" And then I looked, and he said, "You ain't hearing me?"

And I was like, "Well, I got a different name."

And he said, "You know Sanders is here?"

I said, "What?!"

TS: [chuckles]

RS: "What?! What?! What?!" And I said, "What rank is he?"

He said, "E-6."

I said, "Let's go find him," [chuckles] because I had—my E-6 was dripping wet [slang for brand new]. I think I had had it on, like, two days or something. "Let's go find him," because I wanted him to see Private Crawford was now a staff sergeant. Okay? I wanted him to see me.

TS: And did you?

RS: No. We couldn't find him.

TS: You couldn't find him?

RS: Oh, I wanted—I wanted him to see me so bad.

TS: That would have been a joyful day.

RS: Yes. Oh, I wanted him to see me. Yes, I did. I mean, I know it might have been wrong, but I wanted him to see me. I did.

TS: Well, tell me about the process of how you went from being enlisted to warrant officer.

RS: [chuckles]

TS: How did that all come about?

RS: Oh, that was pressure.

TS: Pressure?

RS: Yes, from my husband.

TS: Okay.

RS: [chuckles] I say that jokingly.

TS: Alright.

RS: When we were in Alaska, I worked for a W-2—Chief Strumps[?]; Chris Strumps[?]
and he was the accountable officer at the ASP [Ammunition Supply Point]. He would
leave, and I was the NCIOC so I would have to take over. And they were up there
recruiting—the recruiting team—and my husband said, "Well, you're doing this stuff.
You could become a warrant officer."

But my GT [General Technical] score was a 102, and you needed a 110. So I went
to BSEP [Basic Skills Education Program]. That's the course you go to to raise your GT.
The first time I tested I got a 109. Yeah. So then I—I was pregnant with Alexis, and I
went back to the school for a refresher, and then I took the test again. And the ladies over
at the ed [education] center, they knew who I was because I was over there every day

studying, and then they knew me because we were taking college classes and everything. When I tested I went back over and I was like, "Yeah, I came to get my scores for my ASVAB."

And the lady at the desk, she said, "Rhonda, I am so, so sorry, but you're going to have to go back and see—"

I'm holding on to my belly and I'm like—

[Basic Skills Education Program (BSEP) classes, part of the Functional Academic Skills Training (FAST) program, provide Soldiers with on-duty instruction in reading and math. The goal is to improve job performance, prepare Soldiers for more advanced schooling, increase reenlistment options and enhance trainability]

TS: Aww.

RS: Tears were forming in my eyes.

TS: Right.

RS: So I go back and I see the lady, and she says, "Rhonda, you didn't get the score you wanted." I put my head down and tears. And she said, "You did better!" [both laugh]
I was like, "Yes! Yes! Yes! Yes!" I got a 116.

TS: Alright.

RS: Yeah. And then I had Alexis. But then I had to get back into shape, because when I was pregnant I was just eating everything that I wanted to, because I knew that the army weight standards were, like—

TS: You got a break from that.

RS: Yeah, I got a break. So then Bruce left—

TS: That's your husband?

RS: My husband, yeah. He left and went to NTC [National Training Center] or JRTC [Joint Readiness Training Center], somewhere back down here in the lower forty-eight [states], and he told me, he said, "I want your packet gone by the time I get back."

TS: To put in for the warrant officer?

RS: For the warrant officer. That's where the pressure come[?], because he told me, he said, "You're doing everything that he's doing."

I was like, "Okay."

I didn't put the packet in until that March or something; that March of '95.

TS: Okay.

RS: Yes, I think that's when it was, March of '95.

TS: And then you got accepted?

RS: Well, then we came to the lower forty-eight on leave. We went to Chicago first to visit his mom. Then we came here to Fort Bragg to visit my mom; here to Fayetteville. And then we had some friends that were working at the ASP at Fort Bragg. So we decided to call the—our branch manager, because we knew next summer that we would be coming back to the states, so we were trying to get an assignment. We called the enlisted branch manager and they said it was too early to give us an assignment. So then we told them that I had put in a warrant officer packet, so she was like, "I'll transfer you."

So then I told the lady, "Hey, my name is Staff Sergeant Sloan and I had put in a warrant officer packet for ammo."

She said, "Hold on, let me check." And she came back, she said, "Rhonda?"

I was like, "Yeah."

She said, "Well, congratulations."

And I was like, "Oh, my gosh."

TS: Now you got to do it?

RS: [both chuckle] Yeah, now I got to do it. I had mixed feelings about it, and I asked her, "Well, when do I go to school?"

And she was like, "Well, I don't know when the class is."

So then we went back to Alaska, and I didn't tell anybody.

TS: No?

RS: No. I didn't tell—

TS: Husband?

RS: Well, my husband knew. Yeah, we—I mean, yeah, we celebrated about it.

TS: Okay.

RS: Then when we went back I did, I told Debbie, because—I mean Sergeant Hunter—she had helped me. She was an E-7; the admin in the orderly room. She knew me because I had to have a letter from the company commander and my battalion commander.

TS: A small circle.

RS: Yeah, small circle. Then the selection for E-7 promotion, and they called all the E-6s that were eligible up to the company, and the first sergeant was calling us in one by one to tell

us yes or no if we made it. And so—I think Bruce was gone to JRTC or NTC something again. So I went in, and somebody had already told me that Bruce had made it, and I knew I didn't make it, but I wasn't mad because I was going to be a warrant officer.

TS: That's right.

RS: And I go in and he said, "Well, you didn't make it."

I said, "Alright."

He says, "You're not mad?"

I said, "Nope."

TS: [chuckles]

RS: He said, "Are you serious?"

And Debbie was in there and she said, "She's going to warrant officer school in January.

He says, "I didn't know that." And so, now it's public.

TS: Now it's out.

RS: So then I asked him, I said, "Well, what's my husband's number?"

He went and looked. He said, "Oh, congratulations." I think my husband's number was, like, seven or fourteen, something like that.

TS: Pretty high?

RS: Yes. Yeah. And so, then when I came out there was this one guy out there and he said, "Did you make it?"

I said, "No."

He said, "You're not mad?"

I said, "Nope."

TS: [chuckles]

RS: And then there was Debbie. Debbie says, "She's going to warrant officer school."

TS: Well, in the ammo world—in your MOS—is that a big circle, is that a—It's not that big?

RS: It's not that big.

TS: No?

RS: No. We have less than—warrant officers?

TS: Just in—

RS: Or the field in general?

TS: The field in general, and then I was going to have you narrow it to the warrant officer.

RS: We're not as big as—We're a class of supply, but we're not as big as, like, general supply.

TS: Okay, right, because it's more specialized.

RS: Yeah. Yeah.

TS: Okay. Because I know a lot of times one of the things about the army, and any service, is, like, when you got your MOS you don't get to go everywhere all the time.

RS: Yes.

TS: You can't necessarily go to every single fort.

RS: No. No.

TS: It's where your job is.

RS: Right. Yes.

TS: And so, that narrows the kind of places you go—

RS: Right.

TS: —and the people you get to meet, and things like that, right?

RS: Right.

TS: And so, when you're a warrant officer, does it narrow that down even more?

RS: Yes. Yes.

TS: Okay.

RS: Yeah. Like—Oh gosh—Like when we were at Hunter, at Fort Stewart, my husband was going to go recruiter, right? He'd already been drill sergeant, so he says, "I'm going to go recruiter."
I was like, "Okay."
So he had put in whatever it was, and then when they seen that I was a warrant officer, he couldn't go, because of the married army couple. Because if the spouse can't go—because recruiters—

TS: It's like a three year—

RS: Yeah, but recruiters go to some off the wall places. Say, if my husband got selected to go to San Francisco, I can't go to San Francisco.

[Speaking Simultaneously]

TS: Okay, you can't go. Right.

RS: Yeah.

TS: So he couldn't do the recruiter?

RS: He couldn't do it. Nope. No. Nope.

TS: So that kind of narrowed his things that he could do, to check off.

RS: Yes.

TS: I see.

RS: But he knew he didn't want to go recruiter.

TS: No? [chuckles]

RS: No.

TS: What's the difference in the job, then, for you as a warrant officer and as enlisted? How is that different? Can you explain it to somebody who doesn't know anything about what a warrant officer is? Like, what does it mean in the army?

RS: Well, there's different types of warrant officer. There's technicians, and then there's pilots. Some—They used to say you're a walking warrant or you're a pilot, and I'm a walking warrant. I'm a technician's[?]
—You're supposed to be the subject matter expert, but I don't like to say that. I like to say that I'm the technically educated, because you're supposed to be the person that knows right from wrong, and if they say, "Oh, you're supposed to be the guru."

"No, no, no. I'm the technically educated one. I'm not the subject matter expert because I'm not an expert at anything. I'm not an expert at being a mother, a wife, none of that. I'm still trying to figure that out. I'm just technically educated. I've gone to school, I know how to read, all that good stuff."

TS: How's that different from enlisted, and the officers?

RS: The—Well, I tell people like this: When you go to school to be a warrant officer in a technical field, you don't get warrant officer smart by going to be a warrant officer. You had to have known something when you were enlisted, because—I'm serious, you don't—if you didn't do anything or know anything when you were enlisted, you're not automatically going to be smart. You're going to—

TS: [chuckles]

RS: You're going to fine tune—

TS: That title doesn't give you the—

RS: No, it doesn't. No, it doesn't. And that has been proven here lately with the conflict over in Iraq and Afghanistan.

TS: In what way?

RS: Well, one, in the ammo field, they have to be accountable officers for large amounts of ammo. And so, say if you didn't learn how to be an accountable officer, if you didn't learn the techniques to—how to run the [unclear] box, or how to account for anything, then once you're thrown in there as the warrant officer, supposedly the technically educated person, then you don't have a clue. So you've lost accountability, and you don't know if you have the right stuff to give the right guys.

TS: Does that happen?

RS: Oh, it's happened.

TS: Yeah?

RS: Oh, it's happened. There's—It's happened.

TS: Yeah?

RS: Yeah. And I was just fortunate enough that when I was—the assignments that I had, that I stayed in the trenches. I was always in the forward support battalions. I was always out in the field. I was always not in that warehouse, not in that orderly room, I was always out in the dirt.

TS: So that's different from the first time you went to Germany where you said that they didn't have the housing; you kind of went out in the field and then they pulled you back a little because you're the only woman?

RS: Yes.

TS: And then, now, later, as your career goes through, then you're always in it.

RS: Yes.

TS: How was that for you as a soldier? How did you feel about that, as you're participating, in the dirt?

RS: It was a learning experience each time. I mean, every time that I did something I learned something. The—I remember the first time that I went to the field. It was in Hohenfels[?].

TS: Hohenfels[?]?

RS: Yes.

TS: Where's that at?

RS: In Germany. And Sanders, oh, Sanders, you got to love him.

[Speaking Simultaneously]

TS: Sanders is still there.

RS: You got to love him; you got to love him.

TS: Alright.

RS: Took me out to the field and gave me two MREs [Meals, Ready to Eat], and I had my canteen, and I was supposed to get relieved. I'm out in this big field with—

TS: Like, guard duties?

RS: Guard duty.

TS: Okay.

RS: I'm guarding some rockets; some [Hydra 70 or Mk 4 Folding-Fin Aerial Rocket?] 2.75 rockets for aircraft.

TS: Okay.

RS: Okay. And it's—what? —three o'clock now?

TS: In the morning?

RS: No, in the afternoon.

TS: In the afternoon. Oh, you mean what time it is here.

RS: Yeah.

TS: Okay.

RS: So 4:00, 5:00, 6:00, 7:00, 8:00, 9:00, it's starting to get dark, and you know out in the woods in Germany, boars.

TS: Yes.

RS: I start hearing them little piggies, and I'm like—I jump on top of them rockets.

TS: Were you really?

RS: Yes! Because I'm like, "Oh, no!" I knew that they couldn't get on top of me—I mean up there. So then—

TS: Did you see them?

RS: I saw them.

TS: Okay.

RS: And I'm like, "Is somebody going to come relieve me?" And all I had was just my gear on. I'm glad that—

TS: And your two MREs.

RS: And my two MREs. And I'm like, "Okay."

TS: Now, were you armed?

RS: I had my weapon, I didn't have bullets.

TS: You just had the show—

RS: That's it. That's it. So I'm like, "Rhonda, Rhonda, Rhonda." At that time I'm thinking, "Is this what I signed up for?"

TS: This is in your first year; couple years?

RS: My first year.

TS: Yeah.

RS: My first year. I'm glad it wasn't the dead of winter—

TS: Oh, my goodness.

RS: —or I would have had frostbite, I'm sure.

TS: The pigs might not have been after you.

RS: No, no. I stayed on top of the rockets until the next morning.

[Speaking Simultaneously]

TS: The whole night?

RS: Until the next morning when, I guess, my platoon sergeant asked him, "Well, where's Crawford?" Yeah, they didn't come till the next morning.

TS: Did they forget about you or did they just leave you?

RS: He forgot about me. Yeah.

TS: Took you a while to warm up, I bet.

RS: Oh, man. Some things you just—I mean, they're just like etched right there. Yeah.

TS: When you joined the army, back in '83, what was your expectation? How long did you think you were going to be in, or did you even have an expectation?

RS: I did.

TS: Okay.

RS: I did. You've been laughing at me the whole time. I told my mother that at first I wanted money to go to college, because I knew my mother couldn't do it. And that's when they had the Veteran's Educational—

TS: VEEP—Assistance Program.

RS: Yeah, the VEEP. So I put my money into VEEP, and I told my mom that I was just going to get the money and I was going to come back and go to college. But then I came back to Bragg, and Stephanie was here, and then my mom moved here.

TS: How long had Stephanie been in by that time?

RS: Three months—Six months more than me.

TS: Oh, okay. Oh, because you all kind of went bang, bang, bang.

RS: Yes.

TS: Alright.

RS: Yeah, Teresa went in June, and then Stephanie went in February, and then I went in October. So then I came back to Bragg and I reenlisted.

TS: Because?

RS: I really don't even know.

TS: They were just here and—

RS: Yeah.

TS: Like, here's home, here's family.

RS: Yes. And I reenlisted and they said I could go back to Germany. I had met my husband at that time and—

TS: Were you married yet?

RS: No.

TS: Okay.

RS: No. I asked him to marry me and he told me no. I said, "Alright, I'm leaving." And I left. Yes.

TS: How long did it take for you two to get back together?

RS: I want to say six months or something.

TS: Not too long.

RS: Not too long, because he realized I was a catch.

TS: Obviously.

RS: He wrote me a letter and asked me to marry him, and then I wrote him back and said no.

TS: Payback.

RS: Yes. [both chuckle] Yeah. Yeah.

TS: But you worked it out apparently.

RS: Oh, yeah.

TS: You worked it out.

RS: Yeah.

TS: Okay. You went in and wanted to get some money for college.

RS: Yes.

TS: Then you reenlist; your family's all here.

RS: Yes.

TS: Was Teresa and Stephanie both here?

RS: No, Teresa was in—

TS: She was off at MI world somewhere, right?

RS: No, she was originally personnel.

TS: Oh, personnel, okay. So she could have gone anywhere.

RS: Yeah.

TS: A lot more open field, really, then.

RS: And then she changed to MI after—Was she in Germany? Yeah, I think she might have been in Germany.

TS: Okay.

RS: Germany, then she did Korea, and then Fort Drum [New York], I think; I don't know.

TS: Well, did you have places that you wanted to go? Like, did you get your dream sheet filled out? Did you say, "I want to go here?" You didn't? You never—No? You just like—"Wherever they send me?"

RS: Yes.

TS: Really?

RS: Yes.

TS: Not at all?

RS: Nope.

TS: Why was that?

RS: I wasn't picky.

TS: No?

RS: No.

TS: So you reenlisted. Now, did you originally sign up for four or three [years]?

RS: Three.

TS: Three. Okay. How many did you reenlist for, when you reenlisted?

RS: The next time, three.

TS: Three? Okay.

RS: Yes.

TS: And so, at the end of that, then you're at six.

RS: Then I was in Colorado, I think.

TS: Yeah, that would have been it.

RS: Yes. And then they told me that I would have to go to Korea—

TS: That would have been the first time in Korea?

RS: Yeah, yeah—to come—

TS: Is that your single tour?

RS: Yeah—to come back to be close to my husband.

TS: Okay.

RS: And—Because I left Germany and went to Colorado, and then that's when I reenlisted to—

TS: For the third time?

RS: —for the third time—and—to go to Korea to come back to be close to my husband, and now I got Fort Campbell.

TS: Now, were you just thinking about going along here or were you thinking about making it a career? When did you start thinking about it in terms of—

RS: Career?

TS: Yeah.

RS: I wanted to get out when I was pregnant with Alexis.

TS: Okay. This is around this time, the third—

RS: After—Yeah. Because I had told my husband—I said, "Well, I think that I'm going to get out and take care of our baby."
And Bruce said, "And do what?"
I said, "Take care of our baby."
He said, "Okay. And then after she goes to school, then do what?"
I said, "I'll get job."
"Doing what?"
I said, "Well—" I didn't have a plan.

TS: Right. You were just ready to get out.

RS: Yeah, I thought I was.

TS: Okay. But he made you think about it; like, what's the long term?

RS: Yes. So I was bullied again. [both chuckle]

TS: It doesn't sound necessarily like bullying; it sounds like good questions asked.

RS: Yeah. Yeah.

TS: But he made you think about it.

RS: Yeah, he did.

TS: But you still weren't sure.

RS: I wasn't sure.

TS: Okay.

RS: I wasn't sure. Because I told my mother the second time I went back to Germany I was going to get a husband or a Porsche.

TS: Yeah?

RS: I got my husband.

TS: Okay.

RS: I still have yet to get the Porsche.

TS: No? Well, that's probably all right.

RS: Yeah. And then I told my mother that I was not ready to disfigure my body and have a baby.

TS: And then you got pregnant right away.

RS: I had a baby.

TS: [chuckles]

RS: And got stretchmarks.

TS: How was it being a mother in the army? Did it get better over time, or was it—

RS: It was challenging.

TS: In what way?

RS: It depended on the unit and the supervisor. When I first had my daughter I was in Alaska, and Chief Strumps[?] and his wife had five kids, but she didn't work.

TS: She's civilian?

RS: Civilian. And I remember one time I had to take Alexis to get her shots [vaccinations], and we were doing inventory or something, and he said, "Well, can your husband take her?"

I looked at him, I said, "No, I'm taking my daughter to get her shots."

And he said, "Well, are you coming back?"

I looked at him and I told him, I said, "Well, I'm going to be a mother for life. I may be a soldier for twenty years. You can write me up and I'll sign it when I come back." I got my stuff, went and got my daughter, got her shots, and took her back to the babysitter, and then when I came back I said, "Where's the counseling statement?"

He said, "Oh, we're good."

But then his wife needed a break, and he was like, "Oh, I'm going to take off Friday. My wife wants to go to Anchorage."

I was like, "Oh, your wife needs a break, and you're going to take off? We're good." Yes.

Then I had a soldier—Runningberg[?] was his name—he was in Alaska too—and his wife had a civilian job, right? And you know soldiers; we get paid whether we're there or not. And his son had touched his wife's curling iron. Yeah. So every morning he had to take the son to the clinic for them to change the bandage. And Strumps[?] wanted Runningberg's[?] wife to do it. "She's on the clock. Why can't Runningberg[?] do it?"

"No. He needs to be here."

I said, "You know what? [unclear] What is it that Runningberg[?] has to do?" He was the computer operator. I said, "I will do that until Runningberg[?] gets here. You got a problem with that?" That's where the fairness comes in.

TS: Right.

RS: I mean, did it make sense? No. You understand what I'm saying?

TS: I do. I understand what you're saying. So this is like the mid to late-eighties. Eighty-seven, '88?

RS: No, this was '90.

TS: Nineties. I'm sorry, nineties.

RS: Ninety-five. Ninety-five.

TS: That's right, you had your daughter in '94.

RS: Yes. This was in Alaska.

TS: In Alaska, okay. Was there a gender issue with the—whether man or woman take off for the children?

RS: You know what? I kind of thought that maybe. I mean, now that you're saying it, but—yeah, maybe. Maybe he thought that it was the wife's place to deal with the children.

TS: But unless you're working as a soldier.

RS: Yeah. Yeah.

TS: Because then maybe your husband should do it because you're not working—

RS: Yeah, maybe because we worked for him.

TS: Yeah.

RS: Or that he was in that—I don't like to say "worked for him" because he didn't pay me—that he was in that supervisory position.

TS: Right.

RS: No. I mean, I would stay late there more than he would. If we were running a report or something—"Oh, I got to go." Because you got to go home and relieve the wife with all these kids.

TS: Right, because he had to get home.

RS: Yeah.

TS: She was done. [chuckles]

RS: Yeah.

TS: Okay, let's say they put you in charge of the army child issues. What things would you change?

RS: Army's child issues?

TS: Yeah, like, you're in charge of fixing whatever issues there are with families who have children in the army. What do you think they could do better?

RS: The cost of childcare.

TS: Okay.

RS: Because on post, when I got to Savannah—to Hunter—they charged based on your income, and I didn't think it was fair. I mean—

TS: Kind of a progressive structure, though.

RS: Because if I waited to have a baby to when I could afford it—and that's what we did—well, I did—because when I got there they asked me was I married? I said, "Yeah." What rank is my husband? "He's a E-6 right now." Then—

TS: You want me to pause?

RS: Yeah, please.

TS: Okay.

[Recording Paused]

TS: Let's see. Okay, we took a short, little break there, but we're back. You were telling me about the childcare costs, right.

[Speaking Simultaneously]

RS: Childcare costs.

TS: Right. And they went by how much money you make.

RS: Yeah, how much money you made. And I didn't think that was fair. Because I think having children is a responsible thing—that's just me—and we were in the highest category. And then we had a friend who had twins. Both of them were E-7s—Forrest and Darlene—and they were paying more in childcare than their mortgage. Yeah. But then you had this E-4 that had three kids and they were paying as much as one of ours. Do you think that's fair?

TS: Are you asking me, personally?

RS: Yes.

TS: Well, it seems like the military pay, based on how many dependents you have, and what your rank is, the rank thing seems to be fairly the same.

RS: Yeah.

TS: But how many dependents you have, you get BAQ [Basic Allowance for Quarters], or things like that, that go up depending on how many dependents you have. Some people say that's not very fair.

RS: Yeah, maybe. But they're all drinking the same amount of milk.

TS: [chuckles]

RS: They're all eating the same amount of cereal.

TS: Yeah.

RS: Is my baby going to get more milk?

TS: Depending on how much money you're getting in.

RS: Yeah.

TS: Yeah. So when you're talking about how fairness makes it all equal for the pay, for that, shouldn't you also make it equal for all the way across the board for things that you get paid for, right? Like, if you're E-5 and you have four kids, you get a stipend for having dependents. If you're an E-7 and you have no kids, you don't get that stipend, right?

RS: Well, that is true because you do get BAH [Basic Allowance for Housing] with dependents and BAH without.

TS: Right. Yeah. Single people might say, "Well, that's not really fair for me. I decided not to have kids. Why do you get more money?" Even though it costs you more, obviously.

RS: Yeah.

TS: I mean, there's that argument too.

RS: Yeah. But now they're—

TS: I don't have a dog in that fight, so.

RS: There are systems out there now that you do get assistance with that, regardless of rank now, from what I understand. I mean, I've been out of the—

TS: Not long. Not that long, right? Well, for childcare.

RS: For childcare. For childcare, yeah.

TS: That's true.

RS: I haven't been getting assistance for nothing.

TS: [chuckles] No?

RS: No.

TS: When you say it, what do you mean?

RS: No childcare breaks.

TS: Okay.

RS: We stopped getting a childcare break when Alexis turned fourteen; for tax purposes.

TS: Is that right? Is that when that stopped?

RS: Yeah. When she—thirteen or fourteen, something like that.

TS: In all these places that you've been, which I wish we could talk about every single one—

RS: But you were asking me was it hard for me as a parent.

TS: Yeah, as a parent, right.

RS: And I said it was, depending on the assignment, the command.

TS: Yeah.

RS: Well, I was at Fort Hood and I was the accountable officer. That was somewhat difficult because that account—being the accountable officer—it was a difficult account and it took up a lot of my time. I would go in before the sun came up and come home way after it was down.

TS: This is at Fort Hood?

RS: Fort Hood.

TS: Now, is that for the whole base that you're in charge of for the—

RS: The ASP, we issued to the whole base and—

TS: Wow. Because that's huge.

RS: Yes. And not to mention, the reserve universities, because we issued to Texas A&M.

TS: Wow.

RS: So yeah, it was huge; huge. And—But after me and my team—because I didn't do it all by myself—we cleaned up the account to where it was manageable—where we knew where everything was in there—and we got everything in a smooth operating pattern, then I was able to see my child.

TS: But until then it took a while.

RS: It took a while. And then when Bruce would have to go to his events or something, it made it worse.

TS: Right.

RS: But we had a good system in place, because I had a friend that I had met in Alaska, she was stationed there, and at that time her husband had retired, so we had a good system. She jumped in and took Alexis.

TS: Do some childcare, things like that?

RS: Yeah. And she was the IG [Inspector General]—she worked at the IG's office so she didn't have to go to the field or anything.

[Speaking Simultaneously]

TS: Nine [a.m.] to 5:00 [p.m.] kind of job?

RS: Yeah.

TS: I see. Well, was there other ways, like being married in the army, that was complicated?

RS: Oh, yeah. When we got to Bragg in 2002 and we were in processing, the—was it the general, or DCG[?]
—he was a general—General Smith—he said, clear, "You will deploy." We got here in July, January my husband left—January '03—going to Iraq. He was in that convoy. He went to Kuwait and he was in that convoy going into Iraq. And then April of '03, I left, going to Afghanistan, and we were just coming back from Korea, so we had to leave our daughter again. That was difficult.

TS: Was that one of the hardest things?

RS: That was; it was.

TS: The hardest?

RS: The hardest, of all of my military career. It—I didn't talk to my husband for months. I would check my email once a day just to see if he did email me, and the only thing that I could do was hope that the chaplain or no one came looking for me.

TS: Right. Right. You really had no idea what was going on for months.

RS: For months.

TS: What was his job?

RS: He was a ammo specialist.

TS: Like you?

RS: Like me. We met here at Fort Bragg.

TS: Oh, that's right.

RS: We were in the same unit.

TS: What kind of contact could you have with your daughter?

RS: Well, when I got over to—when I got to Bagram [Air Base] I called her. There was a phone that we could use to call, I called—because she was with my sister. I called and let them know that I was here and I spoke to her. She was—what?—eight? Eight, yeah. Eight. And now that we talk to her she'll just say, "I don't know what you guys did. I just knew you was in the army. That's all I knew."

TS: [chuckles] Is that right?

RS: Yeah.

TS: Yeah. You're gone.

RS: Yeah. And then she told, she said, "I thought Daddy had died, but I was scared to say something."

TS: Aw.

RS: Yeah. But then—

TS: Because she didn't hear from him.

RS: Right.

TS: I see.

RS: But he called when he could, but he talked to my mother or my sister.

TS: But not her.

RS: But not her.

TS: Oh, I see.

RS: Yeah. But then in—when was it?—Mother's Day? I think we did a VTC [video teleconference].

TS: What's that?

RS: Video conference.

TS: Okay.

RS: And they had set it up—

TS: Like a Skype [telecommunications software providing video chat and voice calls from tablets and mobile devices via the Internet], sort of?

RS: Like a Skype, yeah.

TS: Okay.

RS: And they had set it up with the brigade—no, the battalion that I was with, and my sister brought Alexis and I had ten minutes and, I mean, those are the best ten minutes of my whole life. I swear. I got to see her; I got to see Alexis.

TS: I bet she was excited to see you too.

RS: Yeah. And then Bruce emailed me and let me know that he had made it up to Baghdad [Iraq], and I was happy about that, and I emailed him back. Then I think he emailed me a couple more times, let me know when he was leaving.

TS: Yeah.

RS: Then we he got home in July—Oh, I have a picture of him too. Oh, he lost so much weight. Because my sister and her husband picked him up at [unclear], and the next day I went up into the battalion, and they had phones, and I talked to him for about thirty minutes. Then there was this W-5 [Chief Warrant Officer, Five], he was from AMC, and he was like, "You can come on in here." And I—Man, I talked to him for about an hour, because we hadn't talked to each other.

TS: Right.

RS: Yeah. Oh, yeah. That was the good parts. [chuckles]

TS: Well, how was the deployment for you? First you went to Afghanistan.

RS: Yeah.

TS: What was that like?

RS: [chuckles] Oh, my God.

TS: This is where I need video.

RS: That deployment changed me. I knew that I was—I knew that I was depressed; I knew I was. I knew that there was something wrong with me, but at that time, as a leader, and all the problems that people had when they came back, that you didn't talk about it, because, for one, I didn't want to get labeled, I didn't want to—I didn't want my career to end on a sour note. But it was a male lieutenant in the company—well, in my company we—the ammo company—we go three different ways; three different locations. Each platoon goes a different location and sets up an ASP, ammunition supply point.

TS: Okay.

RS: And I was supposed to stay at Bagram but we didn't have a warrant officer at Kandahar, so my company commander said, "Rhonda, you go to Kandahar with this male lieutenant," which he knew was a hothead, and he thought that I would be able to handle him. And then they got another W-3 from the MMC [Material Management Center?] to come down to Bagram, so they waited about another month or so. And then we had a W-1 to come in to come up to K2 [Karshi-Khanabad Air Base]. I got down there—I was supposed to go one day but I didn't, I went the next day. He didn't get my bags that was—that went the day before me, and my bags ended up coming back to Fort Bragg, but I didn't know this. My bag—

TS: You just didn't know where they were.

RS: My black tuff box; my black tuff box, right? The only thing I had was my ruck[sack] and my other bag, but I had a change of clothes in there. We—My meanest lieutenant had already bumped heads, because we had two other female lieutenants, and I was the only warrant officer in the company, and he just bumped heads with every female; Lieutenant Lunsford, Lieutenant Hauck[?], and me. I made sure that each magazine[?] platoon had everything the same, and he was like, "I don't have this. I have that."

And I had to explain to him, "Lieutenant, I'm going to make sure that all of you have the same; all the same equipment, all the same everything."

And then when I found out I was going down there with him, I was like, "Lord, I'm going to need you now."

So when I got down there he was just a asshole. I mean, he said, "Well, this is my computer equipment."

He thought that every morning he could come in and get on the computer and surf the net. "No, this is the computer system that I use for my accountability and you're not going to use it. I'm in charge. You're not going to tell me what I'm going to do."

"Okay. Fine."

So what I do, I go and see the property book officer for the battalion, who is another warrant officer. "Chris, how can I sign for this equipment?"

"Too easy. I just take it off of his property book and you get your own."

I signed for it. "Make me another copy of that, please." I put it in a document protector, put it right over the computer system, "It belongs to me, now get off of it."

TS: Did that work?

RS: Yeah, it worked.

TS: Okay.

RS: So then in the evenings he would come and get on that system. And then he would leave his spit bottles from his tobacco, trying to be smart. And then every day when we would go out to the ASP I would give him a three by five card of what we did yesterday on one side and what we're doing today on the other side, in case the colonel, any VIP [very important person], would come out and want to know what's going on. Right? "I'm not trying to sabotage you, but stay out of my way. Let me do my work so that you can go on out there and shine."

So Colonel Dyer[?] comes out. I wanted to ask him what's going on. He don't know what's going on. He walks away, comes back. But my NCOIC talks to the sergeant major, and then tells the sergeant major all the stuff that's going on, right? And during this time the lieutenant had been talking about me to different people, and little did he know that I was stationed with this guy right here [referencing photograph]—

TS: Yeah.

RS: —and just because they the same color, doesn't mean that he's not my friend. So he calls me a black bitch.

TS: To this guy?

RS: To this guy.

TS: That's your friend.

RS: He comes back and tells me. I'm like, "I can't take much more of him."

TS: Right.

RS: So one day I'm sitting in front of my computer, I rode[?] my hands across the keyboard like this. I was ready to hit him in the head with it because I was just—enough. He would talk down to every soldier to the point where no one wanted to talk to him. Like, he thought he was up here, these were all his servants. You can't ask them to do anything. "Could you get that for me, please?" No, he's like, "Get that over there!"

I'm like, "Really?"

TS: So just, kind of, on a power trip.

RS: Yeah. "Do you have to talk to somebody like that? We're all going to be here—Remember me telling you about the family? Do you have to talk to them like that?"

TS: Right.

RS: And the clerks that I had in there with me, one of the females, before we left she had found a lump in her breast, and he's going to ask her, "Oh, is your tittie okay?"

When she came to tell me I said, "Why didn't you tell me that before we left?"

She was like, "Chief, I just didn't want to be around him. I did not want to be down here in Kandahar." She thought she was going to Bagram.

I was like—I said, "I got it. I got it."

She said, "I don't even want to be in this room with him."

I said, "I got it."

So after I got to where he wasn't in there during the day, she was like, "Thank you. Thank you." And we're still—Me and her are still friends on Facebook.

But then after—And I came back and asked him. "Well, I didn't say that about you."

I said, "Okay." I said, "But if you have something that you need to say about me, be man enough and tell me to my face. Don't run and tell anybody else."

So then he—Every time that I would say something, it wasn't bond[?]. He would go and ask the E-5, "Is this right? Is this right?"

So that E-5 would come back and ask me, "Chief, why is he asking me?"

TS: Right.

RS: And E-5's a white guy. And then when my NCOIC had to leave because the first sergeant left, and then this other E-6 became my NCOIC, and me and Sneed[?], just like this. He was like, "He's a trip."

I thought about me leaving, because I was to the point where, one, my husband's in Iraq, I don't know what condition he's in, stress level is beyond, and accidental discharge I could go home. Accidental discharge would ruin my career.

TS: What do you mean by accidental discharge?

RS: Make my weapon go off.

TS: Okay. You had thought about that?

[Speaking Simultaneously]

RS: Put the magazine in the chamber and just—Yeah, did. I did. And then I thought about hitting him in the head with an ammo can. I thought about so many things because I just did not want to be there anymore.

TS: Right.

RS: I mean—And we worked every day. Every day.

TS: It's not like a 9:00 to 5:00 job.

RS: No. Every day. I mean—And it was like he couldn't say thank you to the soldiers for anything. I mean, they could have busted their butt all day in the hot sun, and Sergeant Sneed[?] may have went and made a deal and came back with some ice cream or something, and you think that you have to go first to get the ice cream? No, leaders are last. I'd have to say, "LT, let the soldiers go first."

"Why?"

"Really?"

TS: You ever wonder how they get to that point; how they—

RS: Yeah. And I'm like, "Are you serious?" I mean, it just got to the point—and we were attached to a unit out of the 82nd, and I went and talked to the first sergeant and I told him, I said, "I can't take it. I can't. It's not your problem." I emailed my company commander at Bagram and I told him, I said, "I can't take it."

So my first sergeant emailed me and told me that, "You need to email our brigade commander."

And I emailed him and I told him that I need to do an EO [equal opportunity] complaint, gender discrimination. Then my brigade commander emailed my company commander, and CCed [carbon copy; a way of sending copies of an email to additional people] me and my first sergeant, and told the company commander that lieutenant is a liability, I'm an asset to [unclear].

The company commander emailed me and told me that in two days he'd be down there to get the lieutenant. So he came down—him and the first sergeant—and the lieutenant's going to look at me, says, "We'll be—I'm going to be back and we're going to work on this." Yeah.

TS: He's gone.

RS: He was gone.

TS: Didn't come back?

RS: Didn't come back. But then the EO complaint went through.

TS: Then you've got to deal with that.

RS: Then I had to deal with that. But the army is small, because the battalion commander that we fell under at Bagram, I was stationed with him at Fort Campbell. He was the company commander and I was an E-6. And—I mean, the lieutenant, he was nasty, didn't like to wash his butt. He was just—Ugh. He got a general letter of reprimand. I got a Bronze Star; he was mad about that. Be mad about something else. But when I—And I knew that I was depressed, I knew that I was, and it changed how I looked at people.

TS: Yeah? How do you think?

RS: To really show people with—or treat people with a lot of respect. I mean, I do always say "thank you" and we've taught our daughter that. Please, thank you, and all—but I can't see how you have to treat your subordinates like they're nobody. And he did. You don't have to. I mean, you need to treat them like they're human beings just like you, because they are, but that wasn't his mentality. Wherever he got that from, I don't know. I mean, it was sad, sad, sad. Yeah.

Then I ran into it again—another arrogant asshole like him—when I was in Iraq.

TS: Really?

RS: Yes.

TS: Both times you deployed?

RS: Yeah. And then this guy had no deployment experience—it was his first deployment—and he was the SPO for the brigade.

TS: And you're deployed. Where'd you go there? Al Asad?

RS: Al Asad.

[Ayn al-Asad Airbase is an Iraqi Armed Forces and U.S. armed forces base located in the Al Anbar Governorate of western Iraq. It was the second largest U.S. military airbase in Iraq during Operation Iraqi Freedom]

TS: This is '07, '08?

RS: Yeah.

TS: Okay. Same sort of situation? Similar?

RS: This guy had no tact.

TS: Another lieutenant?

RS: No, he's a lieutenant colonel.

TS: Okay. So he had a few more—

RS: Yeah.

TS: Wow.

RS: Oh, me and him bumped heads; [chuckles] bumped heads. I'm like, "We're the ones who make you shine. Come on."

TS: Right.

RS: But yeah. Yeah.

TS: So you just had to ride that one out more?

RS: But this time there were more people that saw his flaw, and it wasn't just me.

TS: Right. Not one person [unclear].

RS: Yeah, not one. Yeah, it was more than that, but.

TS: Harder to dislodge a lieutenant colonel than it is a lieutenant, right?

RS: Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. But more people saw it. But that lieutenant—I mean, it made my shell a lot harder, it did, but I've had a lot of incidents like that. But that one right there, I knew that I had to mask things.

TS: Mask? Yeah?

RS: Yes.

TS: How long did that go on, then?

RS: Me masking?

TS: Yes.

RS: Oh, until I started seeing a therapist and a psychologist.

TS: Is that while you were in the service?

RS: Yes.

TS: Did that help?

RS: Oh, yeah.

TS: Is that part of, like, PTSD [post-traumatic stress disorder]?

RS: I don't have PTSD. I just—just depression.

TS: Yeah?

RS: Yeah. It's not—

TS: You think it was something that was triggered by being away from your husband, away from your child?

RS: Yeah.

TS: Away and deployed, and it's war.

RS: Yeah.

TS: All that.

RS: All that.

TS: Yeah, just kind of came crashing in. It seems reasonable to think that would bring on the depression.

RS: Yeah. But I call it putting on my game face. If my pillow could talk, when I was in Afghanistan, it would tell you, "Oh, that warrant officer, she's a crybaby. She's not as tough as you guys think."

TS: Just trying to hold it together.

RS: Yeah. Put on that face and—I mean, I'm Rhonda and I know when I walk outside I'm chief.

TS: Yeah.

RS: Yes.

TS: Well, you'd had a lot of years in by then; twenty, right?

RS: Yeah.

TS: At that point, and to be disrespected by somebody who's not been in probably very long.

RS: Yeah, probably not even a year.

TS: Right.

RS: But then there was this W-4 that was in the unit with us because he had left—he had PCSed—and went to Fort Rucker. And a Chinook [Boeing CH-47 cargo helicopter] had went down over there in Afghanistan and he was part of the team that came over to

investigate. And I was in the office that day, and I swear, God knows when you really, really need him, because the gate guard comes in and he says, "Chief Barra's[?] outside and he wants you to come outside."

And I'm like, "If you don't get out of here and leave me alone." I said, "If Chief Barra's[?] outside, you tell him to come in here." And I just kept on doing what I was doing.

He comes back and he says, "Chief Barra[?] said you better come outside."

And I was like, "Look. If he's outside, tell him to come in here."

He comes back and he says, "He said come out here."

I said—I don't remember the soldier's name—But I got up, and I went outside, and there was Chief Barra[?].

TS: [In this picture?]?

RS: Oh, yeah. Right there. Right there.

TS: Okay.

RS: Oh, when I seen him, and it was during that time, I ran up to him and you would swear that I was his wife or something, I was just hugging him.

TS: [chuckles]

RS: I was like, "Oh, Bob, Bob, Bob. Oh, God, I love you, I love you."
And he was like, "What is wrong with you?"

TS: It just all came out?

RS: It came out. And he was like, "What?" I mean, and I cried.

TS: Yeah.

RS: And he'd never seen me cry, and I told him, I said, "I'm going to hurt him. I'm going to hurt him."

And he said, "I got this. I got it."

I was like, "Hold on, let me get myself together," [chuckles] because it was just me and him, and I was like, "Let me get myself together. Let me get myself together."

And so, then he said, "Where is the lieutenant at?"

I said, "He's around here somewhere."

He went and found that lieutenant—Because he knew him from the company, because Bob has just PCSed maybe six months. And, oh, Bob and him walked downrange—or down into the ASP—came back. That lieutenant's face was red.

TS: Oh, yeah?

RS: Bob is an Italian guy from Detroit [Michigan].

TS: Yeah.

RS: Yes. But then I had already put my complaint in, and then he had emailed the company commander as well. And then he was there when the company commander came down, and he told them, he said, "No, he's garbage." He said, "You need to send him back to the States." But he couldn't. Yeah.

TS: Because of how they have to allocate people at that time, yeah.

RS: Yeah. But that was the—that was the—Oh, God, it was what I needed.

TS: To have him come?

RS: Yeah.

TS: Emotionally, right?

RS: Yeah, but I would really have needed my husband.

TS: [chuckles]

RS: Yeah.

TS: Right. Maybe better that your husband didn't come.

RS: No. No.

TS: He would not have been happy.

RS: No, because—oh, there was an incident—oh, gosh—when I was in Fort Campbell. My battalion commander made a pass at me [idiom, meaning "to flirt with or suggest sexual activity with someone"].

TS: You were married.

RS: Yeah. And my husband was at Fort Camp—I mean down at Redstone [Army Airfield, Alabama]—and I told my first sergeant—No, I told another platoon sergeant because I was a platoon sergeant—and I told the other platoon sergeant and he said, "Well, you need to tell the first sergeant." He said, "And you need to tell your husband."
And I was like, "Okay, I will."
Then—Because I stayed in the NCO barracks because my husband was someplace else, and me and my friend Jamar used to always watch the soap operas at lunch; we'd go get something to eat and go back to my room.

TS: Right.

RS: And he showed up at my door.

TS: The one that made the pass at you?

RS: Yeah.

TS: What was his rank?

RS: He was a sergeant major.

TS: Oh, he was a sergeant major.

RS: The battalion sergeant major. I said, "Oh, no" I went, told my first sergeant, called my husband.

First sergeant said, "Oh, I got this."

I don't know what my first sergeant went up there and told him, but after that it was like our company was untouchable.

TS: Oh, yeah.

RS: Details or whatever.

TS: You didn't have to do anything? [chuckles]

RS: Nope. I was like, "Y'all using me." [chuckles] But me and the first sergeant and the other platoon sergeant were the only ones who knew.

TS: Okay. In the course of the time that you're in the army, and you're navigating these kinds of things, right, as a woman, as a black woman, as a woman who's in a field that's pretty much predominantly men. When you look back on it, did you think that the way that you had to deal with the different levels of discrimination and harassment—what do you think about all that? Now when you hear it in the news today—when you hear about women talking about sexual harassment or even sexual assault—what are your thoughts on all that? Just put it in a little nutshell for me. Whatever you want to say.

RS: I hate to hear it when someone says it was her fault. But then there are those who think that their looks will take them somewhere, and they'll use everything that they have to try and get ahead, opposed to just doing your job. I've been that person to—"Let's just do the job and see how far that takes me." I mean, just like I explained to you about me doing everything that I thought I was supposed to.

TS: Right.

RS: And it got me so far.

TS: Right. When you look at a woman who's using her wiles or whatever to get—

RS: Yes.

TS: And then you look at maybe a man in the ol' boys network using that to get ahead, when you put those on scales, which one do you think has more impact? Which one is getting ahead more, when you look at that?

RS: The good ol' boy.

TS: You think that's a bigger network?

RS: It is. Because that girl's going to get used and thrown away, just like a tissue that you blow your nose with. Those good ol' boys are going to stick together and continue to talk about her. Yes.

TS: So she can only get so far?

RS: She can only get so far; so far. And then they're going to get tired of her, push her aside.

TS: And yet, when you're talking to someone about all the time you and your sisters spent in the army, different experiences, you have a lot of pride; just sitting in this house there's a lot of pride in the army.

RS: I saw you looking at the pictures. [chuckles]

TS: Yeah, I know, they're really neat. How do you explain to someone, yes, we had to go through this, and it wasn't fair, but I'm still proud of being a soldier, right? Would you say that? How would you explain it to a civilian that really doesn't understand? Why would you stay in if all this stuff is happening? Why'd you stay in for so long?

RS: I think that's kind of like—Change takes time, and in order for things to change you have to stay there and continue to help with the process. You have to. And I know that they have sensing sessions in the military. They want to know: What's wrong with the company; what's wrong with this; what's wrong with that? And then they send out surveys and want to know about the atmosphere, and this and that.

And things have changed over the years. From when I first came in as a private until I got out as a W-4, I've seen things change. I've seen where there were no—I didn't see any female sergeant majors when I first came in, and when I got out—well, when I retired, not got out—when I retired—how many female sergeant majors, and then female generals, to General [Ann E.] Dunwoody, with four star. I mean—

[General Ann E. Dunwoody is the first woman in U.S. military and uniformed service history to achieve a four-star officer rank, receiving her fourth star on 14 November 2008]

TS: Having female role models, you think that made a difference, or makes a difference?

RS: Yes. Yeah, it does. Because, I mean, you look up and you see someone, and you're like, "I could do that." But I didn't really have that female role model, other than my sisters. Like I said, I had that E-6, and then as I was coming along, me and my husband were—our—I don't know how you would say our—he wasn't my competition. I mean, we were our—

TS: Your own unit, really.

RS: Yeah. Yeah, because we held each other up. I mean, he was my rock, and I'll always say that. I mean, he pushed me to become that better soldier. He pushed me to—oh, gosh—to become who I am, who I became. Because he said, "Oh, you can do that. You can do that." And I look back on it and I'm blessed that that man is in my life, because he pushed me to do all these things.

TS: Sometime I hear—some of the women I've interviewed—when they're in whatever unit and whoever's in charge of them would say, "I want you to do this," and they think there's no way they can actually do this, but their supervisor says, "I think you can." And so, there's a perception sometimes that people who are in the army or in the military are just followers, right, and that don't have a lot of independence. And yet, when I talk to a lot of them, and they say often, "But they gave me these challenges that I never thought I could meet, and then gave me the support to meet those challenges." Even though you've talked about some people have been very undermining.

RS: Yes.

TS: On the other side, did you have that experience, too, where people were just lifting you up? Besides your husband, of course.

RS: Oh, I've had people to doubt me, but then I've had people to challenge me too. When I first got to Fort Campbell—that's air assault—and when I first got there my platoon sergeant told me that—He says, "Well, you're going to go to air assault school."
I said, "Okay. Where are you going?" He wasn't air assault qualified. I said, "I'm going to go where you go." We were in the same class.

TS: [chuckles] How'd you do?

RS: I need to show you my picture.

TS: Well, maybe. [both chuckle]

RS: Yeah, I'm air assault qualified.

TS: Are you? Awesome.

RS: Yeah. And—But then there was a doubt when I got there, because I was a staff sergeant when I got there and they didn't make me a squad leader. They made a guy a squad leader, but I guess they didn't think that I was going to be able to make the two mile run in my boots. That guy that they made a squad leader didn't make it, and then they moved me there.

TS: And then how did you do?

RS: Oh, ran, ran, ran, ran, ran. And then when I went to Warrant Officer School, I was coming—I came from a Alaska there, and I had to get my wind, and like I told you, I was the only female in my warrant officer class.

TS: That's right.

RS: And when we were—Before we went over to first WOC [Warrant Officer Candidate] we were in second WOC. That's like the "Snowbird" phase, and then you move over to the actual—when you start actually training. And so, we went on a run one day and I was winded. I have asthma and I was winded so I fell back. And they circled around. He said, "You're going to be my pace setter from now on."

I was like, "Oh, goodness."

So when we finished WOC School you go on a senior run, right? And those guys that I told you—

TS: Right, the [unclear].

RS: Yeah. They were calling cadence. And we would start running—we would start—well, we would run and—I mean, so good, let me tell you. I could do a two mile run—I could do, like, a six minute mile. I was pinkie-big [thin?] then. Yeah.

TS: Wow. Very nice.

RS: Yeah. You'd have to talk to—Oh, they would tell you—that one guy Goldman?

TS: Yeah.

RS: When we were taking our PT test—because you had to wear your dog tags—and he was like, "I am not going to let you catch me."

TS: [chuckles]

RS: Because I was on him.

TS: Yeah?

RS: Yeah, but some of the guys were like, "Sloan, we're not trying to break no record here."

TS: [chuckling] "Don't show me up?"

RS: I'm like, "Okay." And I did. I did. Oh, man, we were moving that day.
And the commandant, he was like, "Are you going to push me any faster?"
I was like, "Can you go faster?" [chuckles]
But Lee and Carter, I mean, he was out there calling some cadence that day.
Yeah.

TS: Yeah.

RS: Yes. But, I mean, they pushed me. I mean, when I got to WOC School, I was sitting there in the room and I would hear the door open, and I'm, like, thinking, "I'm going to get a roommate today. I'm going to get a roommate today." And no one ever came.

TS: Right.

RS: And then it came time for us to move over to first WOC, we were all out in the parking lot lined up with our bags, and then they were calling them out by twos, right; about who their roommate was going to be. And I'm looking. I'm standing there by myself. And they were like, "It looks like you're by yourself."

TS: [chuckles]

RS: I was like, "I can do this."

TS: Now, that's because you were a woman and you didn't have any other women there?

RS: No other women.

TS: Yeah. And you did it; you did it by yourself.

RS: Yeah, I did.

TS: Is that one of your prouder accomplishments?

RS: Yes.

TS: Is there anything else that you're especially proud of?

RS: Childbirth.

TS: Childbirth. [chuckles] I don't think that had a lot to do with the army, but okay.

RS: [chuckles]

TS: Somewhat.

RS: Yeah, it—Air Assault School was—it had to be Warrant Officer School.

TS: Yeah. How about a special award or any kind of recognition that you might have gotten?

RS: Well, I got a Bronze Star, but everybody got a Bronze Star.

TS: Well, not everybody gets one. That was in Afghanistan?

RS: Afghanistan, yes. No—Yeah, that's when they were difficult to get in Afghanistan, in '03, because everybody got one after that. Yeah.

TS: Who would you think of—it doesn't have to be military—but your heroes?

RS: My mom.

TS: Yeah? Why is she your hero?

RS: She's the strongest woman I know. She's been through a lot.

TS: Yeah.

RS: I mean, that came out so easy. Yeah, my mom.

TS: Yeah. We talked about a lot of different things here. Did you supervise anyone ever?

RS: Oh, yeah.

TS: Lots of times?

RS: Yes.

TS: Did you have to discipline them?

RS: Yeah.

TS: How was that? Was that tough? Because somebody under your wing, right? You got to—

RS: Yeah. Yeah. You mean for Article 15s [non-judicial punishment for minor offenses] or something like that?

TS: Anything. It doesn't matter.

RS: No.

TS: No?

RS: Not for Article 15s.

TS: So, like, verbal?

RS: Yeah. The last thing that I had to do—I had a soldier at Fort Hood, his name is Darren[?]. He was an E-5 when I met him. He went to E-6 for—He made E-6 in, like, four years. Smoking. Smoking. Made Sergeant Audie Murphy—everything. And then I left and went to Korea, and then his wife got killed. Yeah. They had four kids. She had two before they got married and then they had two together. So he got out the military, and then he went to do contracting work and went overseas. Then he came back. Then he came back in the military. And then he ended up at Fort Bragg, so I saw him again. He was a E-5 and, I mean, smart, outstanding; one of the best soldiers I've ever had.

So then he went to the E-6 board, and I had—I already talked to him about being a warrant officer when we were at Fort Hood, so he said he wanted to be a warrant officer, and no doubt, I said, "I'm going to write your letter of recommendation." Because at this time you had to have a letter from a senior warrant. And so, I was like, "I'll write you a letter."

I took him to the battalion, he got on battalion commander's calendar. I took him up there, and the battalion commander said, "Okay, she wrote your letter. You got the company commander's letter. Where's chief?"

"She's outside."

"Tell her to come in." I went in and he was like, "Chief, you think he's good to be—"

I was like, "Yes, sir."

He said, "Well, write the letter, bring it back, and I'll sign it."

I was like, "Okay." I mean, and—me and the battalion commander, he gave me Above Center Mass [highest performance evaluation rating], too. Yeah.

So I wrote the letter, took it back. The XO was like, "Ma'am, you want to write me a letter?"

[The Sergeant Audie Murphy Club is a private U.S. Army organization for enlisted non-commissioned officers whose leadership achievements and performance merit special recognition. Non-commissioned officers meeting these prerequisites may then be recommended to participate in a rigorous board examination process]

TS: [chuckles]

RS: So I—And he went on the Warrant Officer School. Any who. Time went by. Darren was in Iraq same time I was, and he got shot right above his heart. Missed his heart. He got a Purple Heart [a U.S. military decoration awarded in the name of the President to those wounded or killed while serving].

Time goes by. Darren gets DUI [driving under the influence] in Colorado. But Darren has had a drinking problem. He got a DUI after his wife passed, and then he got this one. Darren was supposed to come back here, and he had to do a—they were going to put him out.

TS: To go through a program?

RS: Yeah, he had to go through a board. And they were going to put him out, so he needed letters of—character letter.

TS: Right.

RS: So he had asked me to give him a character letter, and I thought about it, I thought about it, and I was like, "Okay, I'm going to give you one." So in my character letter, I told them who I was, how I met him, but then I wrote the whole time that every time that I've talked to Darren, he has apologized to me for him letting me down, because he thought that he owed me something because I've always held him up so high. And then I went on to say he apologized, but it took a lot of courage for him to seek help and now he has to wait for a judgement. Then his lawyer called me afterwards and said it was my letter that helped him to stay in, and I was like, "Really?"

TS: Yeah.

RS: I was like, "Wow." Are you getting teary eyed over there?

TS: Yeah. [both chuckle] It's a good story, what can I say? Is he still in?

RS: Yeah, he got—he got to stay in, and he's just going to do his twenty and get out.

TS: Yeah. Well, that's stories of mentoring people yourself too. I mean, that's totally—

RS: And that's what I said. I said I never realized that he considered me a mentor, but he did. When he said, "You are my mentor." And that, now that—I mean, people call me now that I'm out of the military, but people have always called me, and I see it; they say, "You're my mentor."

And I'm like, "What? How could I be your mentor?"

"You know how many times I call you and ask you stuff?"

I was like, "I just thought maybe you's was just asking me."

"Who else do I call?"

TS: Well, you answered the phone, [unclear], right?

RS: Yeah.

TS: You know what I mean? I don't mean literally.

RS: Yes.

TS: I just mean, like, you seem like someone who they ask, you're going to respond.

RS: Yeah.

TS: And give them the straight answer. Yeah. Let's see. We're getting to the end, believe it or not.

RS: Okay.

TS: Okay, so you were in '83 to 2013, almost?

RS: Yes.

TS: And you had a series of things happen, like '83, just before you went in, we had the Beirut Bombing, but that was before you got in. And then we had Grenada.

[The 23 October 1983 Beirut barracks bombing were terrorist attacks that took place in Beirut, Lebanon during the Lebanese Civil War. Two bombs simultaneously struck separate buildings that were housing Multinational Force in Lebanon peacekeepers. The attack specifically targeted American and French service workers, and resulted in the deaths of two hundred and forty-one American and fifty-eight French peacekeepers, six civilians, and the two suicide bombers]

[The Invasion of Grenada was a 1983 U.S. led invasion of the Caribbean island of Grenada]

RS: Grenada, yes.

TS: And then we had the Panama.

[The Invasion of Panama occurred between December 1989 and January 1990. The United States broke both international law and its own government policies by invading Panama in order to bring its president, Manuel Noriega, to justice for drug trafficking, as well threatening the lives of 35,000 U.S. civilians living in the Panama area]

RS: Yes.

TS: And then the Gulf War.

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

RS: Yes.

TS: And then everything that's happened in the last ten, fifteen years.

RS: Right.

TS: Fifteen now, right?

RS: Yeah.

TS: And so, you've seen a lot of change, as far as war goes, really. And you've been in war. Do you have any thoughts on that? I mean, if you're reflecting about being a soldier, going to war, and everything that that involves for families and soldiers. Not an easy question.

RS: Families go through so much. It's hard on the soldier, or the service member, but then it's hard on the child too. It's hard on the other spouse that's left back here, but it's hard on the child. I've seen it, because of my baby, and just looking at her when we have to go away. She says she's okay as long as one of us are there, but I know she's not, because I'm not. I was on a plane going to Kuwait when she was going to her senior prom, and that's a time where a mother and daughter are supposed to be—I'm supposed to be there.

TS: Right. You had to miss a lot.

RS: Yeah. I mean, the service member does miss a lot. I mean, they miss graduations, they miss proms, they miss college tours, they miss childbirth; yeah, they miss a lot. It's hard. It's hard. But then, that's their job. That's the thing that—"I solemnly do swear—" they weren't drafted.

TS: Right; volunteer army.

RS: It's a volunteer.

TS: I don't know, maybe she asked or thought about it, but what if she wanted to go in the service?

RS: Oh, no, she's not.

TS: What if she had though?

RS: What if she does?

TS: Yeah. No, what if she had wanted to or does want to?

RS: Oh, she can.

TS: Yeah.

RS: That's her choice.

TS: Yeah. What kind of advice would you give any young person that wanted to join the military?

RS: Pick a job that you can use when you retire. Yeah. Yeah, that's it. And make the best out of it. Don't limit yourself. The army has a lot. Any branch has a lot to offer, but if you don't take it, they're not going to give it to you. Education. Look at education. Look at how much time I wasted. I didn't take education serious until I was at year twelve, and then at year twelve till eighteen is when I really got serious about it. Look at how much time I wasted.

TS: But then you took advantage of it.

RS: Oh, I took—I was racing to take advantage of it. But there are people that, you have it, they don't take advantage of it, and then you can't give it to somebody.

TS: Right.

RS: Yeah, so much. So much free stuff that the military offers.

TS: What other kind of free stuff?

RS: Medical, dental.

TS: Vision.

RS: Vision, vision, vision, yes. I mean, yeah. And then look at home loans. Who wouldn't pass on that? When we bought our first house, yeah, we had to put—we put down—what is that?—that money?

TS: Escrow?

RS: No, no, no. Good faith.

TS: A good faith estimate?

RS: Yeah.

TS: Or good faith down payment?

RS: Yes.

TS: Like, "We want to put an offer in?"

RS: Yes. Okay. And then when we went to sign the thing, I wrote a check for fifty-six dollars. Can you beat that?

TS: No.

RS: I mean, you don't have to put 10% down.

TS: Right.

RS: You can't beat it.

TS: No[?] mortgage insurance.

RS: And then you hear, "Oh, I couldn't join the military." Okay.

TS: More sacrifices.

RS: Yeah. And I retired and I get a check for the rest of my life. Can't beat it.

TS: Yeah.

RS: Can't beat it.

TS: Well, we talked about you weren't really all in on going for the twenty years, until when? Because the last time we talked about this when we were talking, you were going to have your child, you wanted to get out, and your husband says, "What are you going to do?" And so, you stay in. But at what point did you decide, "Yeah, I'm going to retire"?

RS: When I talked to that lady on the phone and she told me I got selected.

TS: Yeah? For warrant officer.

RS: For warrant officer.

TS: That's when you knew you were in?

RS: Yes.

TS: It wasn't much longer, then, after that.

RS: Nope. Then I said, "You know what? I can do this. I can do it."

TS: Then we talked, mostly off tape, about the reasons why you got out, and when you got out, because of no select, right?

RS: Yeah, I was a two time no-select for W-5.

TS: Yeah. And that even though that's not a happy way to end when you wanted to stay and you want to have that rank.

RS: Yeah.

TS: Besides that, what about the transition to the civilian world was complicated?

RS: Whew. Well, I retired at Fort Lee, Virginia, and my family was here.

TS: Now, was your husband already retired?

RS: Yes, he was retired. He retired in the summer of '08. I was still in Iraq.

TS: Okay.

RS: Yeah, and then he got his civilian job in September of '08. He retired in July and got a GS [General Schedule; the predominant pay scale for federal employees] job on Fort Bragg in September, so that was great. The transition—The disappointment is trying to get a job—a GS job—and how that system works, I just don't know. And with the veteran's preference, I just don't know. I am serious. I've applied for so many jobs that my—
[unclear]

TS: Right.

RS: After the army book[?], I've applied.

TS: Yeah. So that's been the frustration.

RS: That's the frustration. Right now I work part time at Fayetteville Tech [Fayetteville Technical Community College], which I need to call my supervisor to tell her that I may have to—yeah, but—

TS: You need to do that right now?

RS: No, I can wait a few minutes.

TS: Okay.

RS: Yeah, but—Yeah, it's—that's the frustration, is trying to get a job.

TS: That's why you say taking the job you had in the military into the civilian world?

RS: Yes.

TS: So ammo tech, not so much.

RS: No.

TS: It doesn't transfer [unclear].

RS: Yeah, yeah, it could, because that's what my husband does now.

TS: Okay.

RS: My husband, he's a training specialist and he's doing the same thing that he was doing, but he was a manager—ammo manager—when—because he was a ammo specialist and he made it up to E-8, and at that time you're not getting your hands dirty; none of that. But he's doing the same thing.

TS: So he transitioned pretty smoothly?

RS: Yeah.

TS: But for you it's been different.

RS: Yes. And, one, I didn't retire here, so I didn't—

TS: You didn't have all the contacts and everything.

RS: Contacts, right.

TS: Because you're up at Fort Lee.

RS: Yeah.

TS: So you're working in the civilian world. How was that different?

RS: I'm no longer CW-4 Rhonda Sloan.

TS: [chuckles]

RS: I am just Mrs. Sloan. I teach at Fayetteville Tech and some of these people that come through—because I teach Human Resource Development—and it's helping them with job searching skills and stuff like that. I mean, it's fun, but I think that sometimes they think that I owe them something, because if they're not working it's free—the class is free; we have to fill out paperwork and—if they fall in a certain category of income it might be free, and they don't want to work hard for it. They—It's like they don't want to pay attention, they don't—I'm like, "Do you want to work or do you want to stay the same status that you're at now? Let's try to go to college, do something. Or do you want to continue being a bartender, and do you want to continue working at fast food places making minimum wage?"

TS: Is it, do you think, a matter of ambition or work ethic.

RS: Right there.

TS: Or a combination?

RS: Of both.

TS: Yeah?

RS: Ambition. What do you want to do with the rest of your life? There's more out there.

TS: Some people have said there's a lack of—they notice—a lack of a sense of urgency to finish a job too.

RS: Yes.

TS: Not that people aren't hard working, but it's more by the clock than by the job.

RS: Yes.

TS: Not that the people that aren't there don't work hard every day, but if you're like 10:00 till 5:00 and you've got twenty more minutes to finish the job, we'll just finish it tomorrow.

RS: Yeah.

TS: That sort of thing.

RS: Yeah.

TS: But it'll get done.

RS: It is true, there's no—have some pride in something. The civilian life is—And when you see someone who has been only a civilian, you can tell. Because my husband, he

normally calls me at five o'clock, or 5:10, when he gets off work, and he has to talk about work and vent a little bit. And so, one day, 5:15 went, 5:45, 6 o'clock.

TS: No call.

RS: Yeah. And then 6:15, and then he called the house and I see it's his number from his desk and I'm like, "What are you doing? Are you getting overtime?"

He says, "No. I just had to make sure that this was right." dah, dah, dah.

And I was like, "Man, First Sergeant, you're back at it again."

TS: [chuckles] Right. Yeah.

RS: But that's his commitment to soldiers still.

TS: Right.

RS: Now, when I was at CASCOM [Combined Arms Support Command, Fort Lee, Virginia], my last duty station, I worked for a female who had never been in the army, and I had to give a briefing to a colonel. I was still in uniform. The colonel was in a meeting. She left at 5:00. She told me, "Go ahead and leave." You see your face?

I'm like, "No." This was on a Friday and I knew I wanted to come home to North Carolina, which I left. I said, "Nope. I'm waiting for Colonel McGinnis[?]. Nope."

TS: Right.

RS: Then she called me back at 5:30. "You're still there?"

I said, "Yes, I'm waiting for Colonel McGinnis[?]." Because that Monday I was going on leave because it was Alexis's spring break.

And so, six o'clock, Colonel McGinnis[?] was out of his meeting and I was right there, right outside his door. He said, "Chief, you waiting on me?"

"Yes, sir, I am."

He says, "Alright, come on in here." So I went in, we went over the slides, he says, "You need to change this, this."

"Okay, sir. When do you want me to come back?"

He said, "Well, come back next Tuesday."

"I'm on leave next week." But luckily, I was going home and bringing my daughter back to Virginia because we were going to do some things in the Richmond area. I ain't telling him that. I said, "Okay, sir. What time?"

And he said, "One o'clock."

I said, "Okay, sir, no problem,"

TS: Nothing about, "I'm on leave. [unclear]"?

RS: Nothing at all. So then Tuesday, about 10:00, I came into the office. She says, "What are you doing in here?"

I said, "I've got to brief Colonel McGinnis."

"You're on leave."

I said, "Okay."

"You're going to take your leave to come in here? That can wait," dah, dah, dah.

And then there was a civilian guy, he's a retired sergeant major that was either retired W-4, W—retired first sergeant—all these other retirees—and they said, "Chief know what she's doing." I mean, come on now.

So I went up there, I briefed him. Took all of twenty minutes. And then I'm like—called my daughter; "Alright, are you up and dressed yet? I'm on my way."

TS: Yeah. There you go.

RS: It didn't take anything away from my daughter. Yeah.

TS: Right.

RS: I didn't even tell her. I knew that I needed to brief this man, but that's all part of me being a soldier. But she didn't understand that.

TS: Right.

RS: See, you understood that, but she didn't understand it.

TS: Yeah. Well, there's a couple things that happened when you were in the service too. Well, you were there for the implementation of "Don't Ask, Don't Tell," and the repeal of it, and even before it was "Don't Ask, Don't Tell." So the idea of homosexuals in the military. What are your thoughts on that whole process?

RS: I think that—I think that it was a great thing, "Don't Ask, Don't Tell," but then love is blind.

TS: Why did you think that it was a great thing, first?

RS: Why? Because no one was all in your business. What you did, no one had to know. But then love is blind. You don't know who to love. Love doesn't say, "Okay, you're going to love this person and only this person." Because if you look at—go back to the Loves.

TS: Right. The Loving case.

[*Loving v. Virginia* was a landmark civil rights decision of the U.S. Supreme Court, which invalidated laws prohibiting interracial marriage]

RS: Yeah. They weren't supposed to love, because he's white, she's black; you're not supposed to love. It was against the law. So now—You love who you love. I mean, and that's just another reason for the whole military to hate President [Barack Hussein] Obama.

TS: [chuckles] Well, it's interesting, because when I first started asking this question it was still in place, and then it's been repealed since then. And I've also talked to women who—it wasn't even there [unclear] you get kicked out because of it.

RS: Yes.

TS: And so, it's just been interesting, the time process of whether it was a good thing to put in, and you said it was a good thing. It's interesting you say that, because some people think now, well, that was a terrible thing, but it served a purpose at that time.

RS: It did serve a purpose at that time. It did. It did, because—I mean, and he said, "Okay. It's your business, leave it your business. Keep everybody out your business." It was good. It was good. But now, I mean, you would see people at a military ball. We—Everybody knew which way you were swinging the bat. And you come with your cousin. Okay, but now you can bring who you want to the ball.

TS: Right. And nobody really cares, right?

RS: No.

TS: But some people do.

RS: Yes, some people do. Some people do. And just when you could watch a TV show, and—I don't know—do you watch *Nashville*?

TS: No, I don't watch much TV.

RS: Oh, God, I love *Nashville*.

TS: I've never even heard of it. [chuckles]

RS: Yeah.

TS: But that's alright, go ahead.

RS: I mean, it's a good show. The one guy, he came out that he was gay, but he had married a girl, then they got divorced because he was gay. And everybody was hating on him, but that's him. And then they wanted him to start working with this big time producer, but they—his wife is a activist for—she doesn't believe in homosexuality at all.

TS: Okay.

RS: So his wife and kids went away one weekend, so the producer that he's working with says, "Let's go to my cabin and work." Come to find out, that he's gay, and Will

Lexington—that's his name—"Oh, you bring me here because you think we're going to do—" Yeah. So—But just be who you are. It doesn't—

TS: From '83 to 2013 you obviously knew about some people you served with who were homosexual.

RS: Yes. Yes.

TS: Did they do a good job, or was that more the concern about it, or—

RS: No.

TS: No?

RS: They were soldiers just like we were.

TS: Yeah.

RS: I mean, you knew but it wasn't a big thing. I mean, you could look at a general and tell that that—was gay.

TS: Yeah. But if you're in a unit where your leadership is focused on that, then you're kind of in trouble.

RS: I haven't—

TS: A lot of people got discharged.

RS: Yeah, people did get discharged. Yeah, they did; they did; they did. And—

TS: But at the working level, it seemed like it was a lot [unclear].

RS: Yeah. But if you were in a leadership position, yeah, they were looking at you. But why? Why?

TS: So now, just recently, we had the three women pass the Rangers—

RS: Two.

TS: Three though. A third one.

RS: Oh, there was another one?

TS: Two did it once and then another one did it after, like a month later or something.

RS: Oh, okay.

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

TS: So there's been three. And so, there's controversy about that. But is there anything that you think that women should not be permitted to do in the military, whether on submarines or Rangers or SEALs ["Sea, Air, Land" teams], or whatever it is that—the controversies?

RS: Well, I think like this: Females' bodies are different than males' bodies, and our bodies can't take a lot of punishment like theirs can. I remember back in ninety—the girl from The Citadel—

[Shannon Faulkner was the first female cadet to enter the day military Cadet Corps portion of The Citadel, on 15 August 1995. After about a week, she voluntarily resigned, citing emotional and psychological abuse and physical exhaustion. After her departure, the male cadets openly celebrated on the campus]

TS: Yes.

RS: She disappointed me.

TS: Because she dropped out?

RS: Because she didn't prepare herself.

TS: And then dropped out.

RS: Yeah. It wasn't so much that she dropped out, she didn't prepare herself.

TS: Okay.

RS: Now, if you look at the two females that went in to the Rangers, they prepared themselves. They knew what they were getting themselves into, right? She didn't prepare herself. Just as I knew that I was going to Warrant Officer School and I knew that I was going to run, I knew that I had to do pull ups. Just as I knew when I went to Air Assault School, I had to run in boots, I knew I had to do a twelve mile ruck march in three hours. I knew that I was going to have to do all this crazy stuff so I trained up for it. They—We would do air assault PT prior to. I think—I mean, this is just me speaking—there should be a limit to somethings that females should do, or shouldn't do. Because I watched that

movie—What is that movie where they're falling down that cliff? [*Lone Survivor*] With Mark Wahlberg [American actor].

TS: I don't know. But okay, so.

RS: There has to be a limitation, because our bodies aren't the same as theirs.

TS: But if you have an individual woman who is capable, should she have the opportunity?

RS: Yes.

TS: So when you say "limit," should you exclude all women from a job just because—

RS: No. No.

TS: But if a woman can meet the qualifications, you think she should be able to go forward.

RS: Right. Right.

TS: Even if she's the only one, or one of—two of a hundred.

RS: Yeah. If they can do it, then yeah, give them that opportunity. Yeah, but—

TS: It's interesting how you said that. Faulkner, was that her name? Shannon Faulkner?

RS: Yeah, that's her.

TS: So you're disappointed in her, now, because she didn't prepare properly.

RS: Yes.

TS: And so, when you were in the service and you saw a woman who failed in whatever, do you think she's more of a reflection on all women, and so that's why she had to keep that standard up, than if a male in the same position failed, he's a reflection on his individual. Do you think that maybe that—

RS: Yeah.

TS: So it's like an unfair standard.

RS: It's a very, very unfair standard.

TS: But that's how it is?

RS: That's how they look at women in general. Now they're thinking, "Oh, now there's going to be a couple more of them going to come and try."

TS: Right.

RS: And that was exactly what happened. More females came and their—they didn't prepare, and that's what they should have done—prepared—because you know that you have to go through that hell week. And I will tell you, when I went to West Point for cadet training—one summer we had to go up there to—the 82nd sends a brigade up there, and we had to go and run the ASP.

TS: Okay.

RS: If they're not prepared, what happens, they get kicked out. So you have to prepare. Just like with anything, you have to prepare for it. If you want it.

TS: So women have to actually prepare even more because of that double standard, though, of having—

RS: Yeah.

TS: Do you think there's a race double standard too?

RS: Oh, yeah.

TS: Same sort of thing?

RS: Yeah.

TS: You get looked at through different lenses because—

RS: Yeah. I've got to no-goes. I'm a little black girl. I mean, throughout my whole career, I will tell you, I have always had to do more than the white male. I don't care who hears this, who reads it. I've always had to do more, and I know that I've had to because of that; because I'm not given that same—What am I trying to say?

TS: You don't get a pass when you falter at all.

RS: No. I have to make sure that I'm on top of my game. I have to. I have always had to read more regs [regulations], I've had to know exactly what I'm talking about, I—always.

TS: Because even when you do, you still get questioned.

RS: I still get questioned; still get questioned.

TS: And so, when you go from place to place, unit to unit, you have to prove yourself again and again.

RS: Again and again.

TS: You think a guy goes in, and unless he screws up, he's already accepted.

RS: Exactly. Exactly.

TS: But for women or a black woman, or black man, too, maybe, same sort of thing, right?

RS: Unless there's somebody already there that you know invalidates who you are.

TS: Then that helps?

RS: Just like when I went to Korea, and Colonel Strong[?] validated who I was. He was like, "She on point;" that validated who I was.

TS: But you had to prove that to him earlier.

RS: Yes.

TS: That's really interesting.

RS: I believe so. And I'm sure that you could ask any one—any female that has made it so far—that has really made it; that you know didn't make it on their looks, their knees, their back [through sexual favors] or whatever—that this is how it was.

TS: Do you need to make a call before 5:00? If you do, I can pause it.

RS: Please.

TS: Okay.

[Recording Paused]

TS: Okay, well, we're almost done.

RS: Okay.

TS: Here's a simple question: Do you think your life has been different because you joined the military, and if so, how?

RS: Oh, it's been different. I would have never—I was shy.

TS: Were you?

RS: I was shy. I would have never been such an aggressive, assertive person if I wouldn't have joined the military.

TS: Why? Do you think maybe that was in you and it was brought out because of the military? Maybe it really was in you.

RS: No.

TS: You don't think so?

RS: No. I was really self-conscious about my color—how dark I am—and I would have—no. Nope.

TS: How was it that the military made that different for you?

RS: Getting away from home and—this guy told me that I was beautiful without my skin and without any makeup.

TS: Oh, yeah?

RS: Yes.

TS: You don't think you would have heard that otherwise?

RS: No. Nope.

TS: It gave you some self-confidence.

RS: Yes.

TS: Well, this next question, we've kind of talked about it a little bit, but I want to see if there's anything else you wanted to add to it: Is there anything in particular that you would like a civilian to know or understand about what it's like to serve in the military that they may not understand or appreciate?

RS: I think it's the true meaning of being an American. I mean, I know they know what it is to be an American, but I think that once you've been to combat, or once you've put on that uniform, that you understand what U.S. really means. Because it's more than just that right of being born here. You're actually serving the country that you were born in, and I think that just means a little bit more; that you're giving something back.

TS: That goes right into my next question. What does patriotism mean to you?

RS: The love of this country. Because I remember when I was first in Germany and you go to the movie theater and you have to stand up [during the playing of the National Anthem]. And after I first served—When I first went to Afghanistan, and now when you have to

stand up for the National Anthem, now it's touching and it'll bring tears to your eyes. I know every word now. It's just—I've got flags places. [chuckles] Yeah, it's—it warms your heart to—

TS: Yeah.

RS: Yes.

TS: Well, is there anything that you would do differently?

RS: The army?

TS: Yeah.

RS: Other than starting my education earlier.

TS: Right.

RS: No. I'm glad that I made the choice to join. I really am. I mean, a lot of great things came out of it. I met my husband and I had my baby. I've seen the world. Because I didn't know where Iraq was, or Afghanistan. I wouldn't have been to China. I've done a lot of things. I've seen a lot of the States—the United States because of Uncle Sam [Uncle Sam is a common national personification of the American government or the United States], because I was in the military.

TS: Yeah.

RS: Yeah, I went to Alaska. We drove to Alaska and, I mean, how many people can say that, other than people that were in the military? I mean, you don't just say, "Oh, come on, hon [honey], we're going to spend seven days driving to Alaska."

TS: Right.

RS: No. Nope. Yeah. I mean, I've loved it. I must have, I did it for almost thirty years. Yeah.

TS: Well, I know you did almost thirty years and there's many things I know we haven't even touched on.

RS: [chuckles]

TS: There's no way to cover every—We're just getting a little baby snapshot of some of your time in.

RS: Yeah.

TS: But is there something we haven't talked about that you want to mention? Because I don't have any more formal questions, but is there something we just haven't covered?

RS: Well, I told you I met my husband in the army. That's one of the best things.

TS: Yeah. And the friendships you talked about making lifelong.

RS: Yeah.

TS: Family. You still feel like you run into somebody that you met thirty years ago, and you run into them today, haven't seen them.

RS: Yeah, and it's like—Yeah, that you saw them yesterday, and you catch up. But then sometimes you get lost, because you were stationed with this person here, and then you'll see somebody, you'll be like, "Do you remember—" No, you wasn't there with that person, and you get confused.

TS: You get them kind of mixed up with who they are.

RS: Yeah.

TS: Is there anything that you'd like to add about your service?

RS: I'm just proud to say that I served, and I'm honored that you wanted to come and talk to me. Yeah.

TS: Oh, it's been a pleasure talking with you, Rhonda, really.

RS: Yeah.

TS: We've got to get your sisters on tape.

RS: It was fun. Yeah. [both chuckle]

TS: That's what I'm thinking. Well, I'll go ahead and shut it off, then, okay?

RS: Okay.

TS: Unless you have anything else you want to add.

RS: No. Thank you.

TS: Okay.

[End of Interview]

