WOMEN VETERANS HISTORICAL PROJECT

ORAL HISTORY COLLECTION

INTERVIEWEE: Rachel Puckett

INTERVIEWER: Therese Strohmer

DATE: 11 July 2016

[Begin Interview]

TS: Today is July 11, 2016. My name is Therese Strohmer. I'm actually at [Walter Clinton] Jackson Library, here with Rachel Puckett, to conduct an oral history interview for the Women Veterans Historical Collection at the University of North Carolina at Greensboro. I'm also here with Kimber Heinz, who's observing today, and she might actually ask some questions, so if her voice pops up—to the transcriber—just letting you know. Rachel, why don't you start off here by just saying the way you'd like your name to be on your collection.

RP: Rachel Puckett.

TS: Okay. Well, Rachel, why don't we start off, then, for the interview, for you to tell me a little bit about where you were born, when you were born, and growing up.

RP: I was born August 18, 1994 in Lexington, North Carolina. And then around age four or five we moved to Browns Summit, where a lot of my mom's family still lives. We moved just a couple of different houses around Browns Summit, but then for, I guess, the past ten years, we've lived beside my grandmother. And then beside my grandma we have my other aunt and uncles, cousins, houses down—still aunts, uncles, cousins. So I have a lot of family—

[Speaking Simultaneously]

TS: All in the Browns Summit community?

RP: Yeah, I have a lot of family. And then some different golf courses out there are owned by my family.

TS: Really? Nice!

RP: Yeah, Monroeton[?] and Crooked Tree Golf Courses are owned by my family, so.

TS: Are you a golfer?

RP: I've never played golf before.

TS: Really?

RP: I've never—I don't know why, I've just never been into it but—

TS: It sounds like it might be in your blood, so you might have to give it a try.

RP: Yeah, my grandmother was a huge golf player. That was, like, her favorite thing, but for some reason I just never really got into sports. I was very clumsy—child—still, and I'm clumsy. [chuckles]

TS: Do you have any brothers or sisters?

RP: I do. I have—My sister, she's about to turn seventeen.

TS: Okay.

RP: And yeah, so. She will hopefully be coming to UNCG [University of North Carolina at Greensboro] too. We're thinking that's probably where she wants to come.

TS: Good. That'll be great. Well, now, when you were growing up, what did your folks do for a living?

RP: My mom ran daycares—actually, a daycare out in Browns Summit—and my dad works for Asplundh Tree Company.

TS: What tree company?

RP: Asplundh.

TS: Asplundh, okay.

RP: It's a German—German last name.

TS: Is that based here in Greensboro?

RP: It's originally based out of Pennsylvania, but they—they're all over the country, and I think in places in other—in Canada and Puerto Rico or something. But they work with Duke Power. They clear—They maintain the power lines and things.

TS: Oh, got it. Okay. Well, they probably were busy recently, with the storm.

RP: Oh yeah, yeah.

TS: As a young girl growing up in Browns Summit, it sounds like you had a big extended family that lived out there.

RP: Yes.

TS: What was that like? Was it kind of a rural area?

RP: It was, yes. I grew up on a tobacco farm, so—and the cool thing was all the land was family owned land, and we all had golf carts, and there were, like, trails back behind that we could just drive to each other's houses on the golf carts and stuff, so that was really fun. So yeah, I always had cousins around to grow up with and—I mean, just my—the school was right down the road, and then we had the community areas, and it was fun. It was good growing up there.

TS: What kind of things did you do? Besides driving a golf cart.

[Speaking Simultaneously]

RP: Well, I did play—Well, I did play some sports. I never really stuck to one, but I did do soccer, basketball, cheerleading—I did—my parents tried to find one for me to do, it just didn't really happen—

TS: To keep you active and busy?

RP: Yeah, they did; they did try to keep me active. But like I said, my mom ran daycares, and so she did that, so I was able to be around her all the time since she ran a daycare, which I think was really good.

TS: You got to play with those kids [unclear].

RP: Yeah, and I was always around other kids.

TS: That's pretty neat. As you're growing up, and you're learning to play some sports and stuff like that, what kind of things really interested you?

RP: I was really, actually, into video games and stuff [chuckles].

TS: Yeah? What'd you play?

RP: Well, now there's the resurgence of, like, Pokémon and stuff, so that was a big thing.

TS: Did you collect those little coins—Pokémon coins?

RP: I did, so that was something I was really into. Swimming; into swimming a whole lot. Fishing with my dad, that was always just a thing. And gardening a lot. My parents still do, and with my grandma because their houses are together. And so, we have a big family garden in front of the tobacco fields that we did—

TS: Do you do a lot of canning?

RP: Oh, a ton of canning, yeah. Actually, I think my mom and grandma are doing pickles today.

TS: Today?

RP: Yeah.

TS: Now, do they enter it in the fair?

RP: No, no.

TS: Nothing like that?

RP: We just give it away a lot of the time, because they grow—I don't understand why they do as much as they do.

TS: I'm going to have to make a drive up to Browns Summit. [chuckles]

RP: Yeah! Well, no, like, my dad decided to do jalapeños last year and decided we needed three rows of jalapeños, so—this was actually about two years ago, and I worked at a Mexican restaurant out towards there, and so we actually gave the jalapeños to the restaurant. Because I'm like, "What are we going to do with thirty jalapeño plants?" It was ridiculous, but it was fun. I love doing that.

TS: Well, it sounds like you enjoyed living out there and the way that you were growing up. How about school? Did you like school?

RP: I did. School—Because I went right out there—out towards the house to Monticello-Brown Summit Elementary School, and then I went to Northeast Middle School, which is not—Northeast Middle and [Northeast] High School aren't some of the greatest schools, so for high school I went to [Walter Hines] Page [Senior High School] and did the IB program my parents wanted me to have.

TS: What's that program?

RP: The International Baccalaureate Program. So that was the first year—I guess it was—I think 2008 or '07 was when they got that program. And so, I went to Page in 2009, or I would've been going to Grimsley [High School]. But it's just a more advanced magnet program, so I was able to transfer schools and not go to the Northeast High School.

TS: Okay. As you're growing up, just say, as a young girl Browns Summit, riding around golf courses [both chuckle]—or golf carts—and playing in the garden, did you have dreams about what you wanted to be?

RP: Well, in eighth grade I had plans of being a nurse in the military, so it was actually—

[Speaking Simultaneously]

TS: Oh, really? Wow! How did that come up?

RP: Well, my grandfather retired as a lieutenant colonel in the army, and he passed away two years before I was born, so that has always been, like, a driving force for me. And I am the only grandchild of his that is in the military.

TS: Wow. Okay.

RP: I just kind of always felt like that was meant for me to do. My dad's father was also in the military; he was only in for a short amount of time. But my grandfather—my mom's dad—made a career out of it. He was in Korea twice, and Vietnam, and suffered a lot with PTSD [Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder], and just had a lot of problems.

TS: Were you aware of that as a young girl?

RP: Yes. I was, yeah. So that was always kind of a driving factor. And then I do have another aunt and uncle that are in the [National] Guard, still, currently. So I do have a little bit of a family history, but I do feel like my grandfather was definitely—it was like a driving force; that the military was just something that I was going to do; I never really thought about it.

TS: Really?

RP: I was just like, "That is what I am going to do." And I knew they would help me pay for school, and I'd have really awesome experiences, and I wouldn't have to really worry about—with school and everything. So I just knew—And I'd get to travel and do all sorts of different things.

TS: Yeah. Well, what about the nursing part?

RP: I've always been interested in the medical field. Actually, that was something I should have mentioned earlier, about what I liked as a child, because I always watched all the medical shows. I love *Trauma: Life in the E.R.* [emergency room], and *Mystery Diagnosis*, and all of those really—pretty graphic medical shows. My mom could not stand it.

TS: [chuckles]

RP: I'd be watching dinner—watching brain surgery in fifth grade or something, and she'd be like, "How do you do that?" She—But I have always been fascinated with the human body, and how much trauma it can go through and still survive, and just how everything works. So it was really—I never struggled with what I wanted to do. It was always, like, medical field and the military.

TS: So nursing rather than being a doctor?

RP: Well, that was something that I actually just decided about a year ago. I got a work study in the nursing school through the VA [Veterans Administration]. I was—I guess it's been over a year and a half now, I started in January 2015—I'd been working at the restaurant. It was really hard trying to do pre-med [pre-medical], and I was studying psychology. I was like, "It's really hard working in a restaurant with these hours, and in the [Army National] Guard trying to do training. I cannot manage—I can't keep the grades that I want."

So I was out of work for, like, two months, and then Elizabeth Cranford, our former VA certifying official, called me and was like, "Hey, we have a work study." I had turned one down before at the VRC [UNCG Veterans Resource Center], which is where I'm working now." She's like "We have one in the nursing school. I know you're doing pre-med. If you want to do this—"

I was like "Sure, I'll try it I guess. I mean, I do need a job." [chuckles] So it just kind of fell into my lap.

And Brad Wrenn who was the coordinating—who was the program manager at the time—who is now running the VRC—he was my boss first, for about a year. And he was asking me what I was doing when I first got the job there, and I told him, "I don't really know. Just pre-med and psychology."

And he was like, "Well, why haven't you thought about nursing?"

I was like, "I have, but I'm still trying to decide."

At the time I was thinking psychologist or psychiatrist. I'd never really looked into nurse practitioners and psych [psychiatric] mental health until I started working in the nursing school. And then I realized that is the perfect combination of—because as a psychiatrist I want—they're more so there to prescribe medications and that's it. And with psychologists, they don't have the power to manage medications, and I think that is the most important thing with psychiatric care now, is having proper medication management. So I realized as a nurse practitioner, they also have more of the patient centered model, and so I really like that better than the disease based model that doctors really have. So I like the training better—

[Speaking Simultaneously]

TS: That's a really interesting take on all of that.

RP: Yeah.

TS: You've really thought about that for a while.

RP: I did for a while, so—but it was like when I read about nurse practitioners, I was like, "Wow. This is what I want to do." Turns out also, through the army on active duty side, they have a health profession scholarship program, and psychiatric nurse practitioners are one of their key jobs they need, so I'd be able to have the army pay for my grad [graduate] school too.

TS: Excellent. Very good. You've got a plan.

RP: I do; I do have a plan [chuckles].

TS: Well, let's back up a little before we get—

RP: Sorry.

TS: No, no, it's quite alright. You're going to high school, and you're in this special program.

RP: Yes. It was very difficult. I actually struggled a lot.

TS: Yeah? What was the most difficult for you?

RP: It was—I've honestly had classes here that have been a joke compared to high school classes that I had at Page.

TS: Really?

RP: Yeah. I mean, it was just so much work. And I did get college credit for them. But there have been some intro [introductory] classes here where it wasn't a whole lot of work, it was just—which, a lot of it in college is just lecture—but just constantly—I mean, we were reading just a ridiculous number of novels. Like, there's actually a guy I know now, there—a book he is reading in his 400-level lit [literature] class I read in eleventh grade [chuckles]. So I'm like, "What?"

But no, it was just extremely difficult; much higher level than I was prepared for going to Northeast Middle School. But I knew it would be better off struggling there in the program than easily going through Northeast. I'd probably be—I was at the top of my class at Northeast, and go to Page and I struggled, but it was a better—

TS: Foundation?

RP: —it was a better foundation for me going to college. But because of that I was already—at first I was thinking about ROTC [Reserve Officers' Training Corps]; that had been the goal to do that. And I was applying for a navy ROTC scholarship, because I did navy JROTC [Junior Reserve Officers' Training Corps] at Page, but I just was not ready to

start college yet. And that's when I was talking to other recruiters about what I could do enlistment wise, and I talked to a National Guard recruiter whose daughter also went to Page, so I trusted him, and he was like, "You could go to training for a year, come out, and then your school would be paid for, and you'll have benefits, and you can do ROTC later on if you want to do that. And if you do this—You'll be able to make more money if you do ROTC after you enlist."

And I thought that was—it was the best decision I made; was to be out of school for a year, do training, and then go to college, because I was ready to start. I had a lot of friends who went to college right after high school and they failed out. They weren't ready and they couldn't—they weren't ready for it or they couldn't handle it, and so I knew I wasn't ready for it. And I've done much better now, I think, because I waited and had a gap year.

TS: What year did you graduate from high school?

RP: Two thousand and twelve.

TS: Two thousand and twelve. Were you working at the time, when you were in high school at all?

RP: No, I was not working while I was in high school.

TS: Okay. Had you already made this plan to go into the—

RP: National Guard. Yes.

TS: —National Guard before you graduated?

RP: Yes, I enlisted before I graduated.

TS: Okay. How old were you when you enlisted?

RP: I was—let's see—seventeen?

TS: Seventeen. So you need your parents to sign?

RP: Yeah, my parents had to sign for me to enlist.

TS: Okay. What did your parents and your sister think about this plan?

RP: They were very, very supportive of it. Yeah, they knew the military was what I wanted to do and—I mean, they were obviously scared, a little nervous about it; that their first born was leaving and going to do this. But, no, they were always very supportive of it. I actually had other family members that were not. They just had this idea that I wasn't going to go to college, and I wasn't—I don't know—on the right path or whatever. It was

very bizarre between some of my aunts and uncles that just didn't think I was doing the right thing. And I'm like—

TS: Did they have a little misconception about what they thought the military was like?

RP: I think they did. They did. And I'm like, "You do realize your dad enlisted—" He did end up—He had enlisted and then he went to college through the army and everything—"That's what your dad did, and retired as a lieutenant colonel. Why do you think I am doing anything different?" I think it was just that I was the only grandkid at the time that didn't go into college. My cousins Katie and Adam were the—the star grandkids and—

TS: Well, did it have anything to do with you being a young woman?

RP: I think so. I think that they just didn't—I think some of my family members were very much like, "Oh, well, the man is the head of the household and the woman—" very traditional kind—in a sense, and so they just—I don't know why. I mean, I still look back now like, "Why did you think—"

And now, even years later—four years later—I still feel like I'm still proving to them—and even they'll ask, "Is Rachel in nursing school yet?" And this was a few months ago.

"I told you six months ago I got into nursing school."

It's almost like a competition and I've—me and my parents—I've never felt it, but it was just a bizarre thing. I feel like a lot of—when men enlist they get this whole thing like, "Oh, my gosh, that's so great!" And, "That's awesome!" And I didn't get any of that. It was very bizarre.

TS: There was no party for you, right?

RP: No, it was very bizarre, like, "Why would *you* do that?" Even from—at school and things, like, I was actually the only person at my high school, or one other—there was a man—or one male—and then me. But even in ROTC that I did in high school, and JROTC, no one enlisted except for me my school year.

TS: Really?

RP: Yeah. There was another guy that did but he didn't do ROTC. But it was just weird, the attention that a guy would get for enlisting versus a woman. And I never really felt that. I just thought that was really bizarre. I think—I don't know if they were just surprised because I was—I am very girly, I normally just wear dresses all the time, I was really into Vera Bradley [American luggage and handbag design company] and all the flowers and everything, and people maybe were just shocked by it. Or a lot of people just didn't think I was going to college, and I'm like, "I'm in the Guard, I'll be gone for a year, and then I'm starting school." I think it was a lot of that people just didn't understand what I was doing, but I didn't feel like I need to explain it to anyone—

TS: Right. Why should you?

RP: —because it was what I was doing, yeah.

TS: Well, think about how old you were when 9/11 happened; you were seven?

[The September 11, 2001 attacks, or 9/11, was a series of four coordinated terrorist attacks by the Islamic terrorist group al-Qaeda on the United States on the morning of 11 September 2001. The attacks killed 2,996 people and injured over 6,000 others]

RP: Yeah. I was—yeah.

TS: Seven years old. You've really grown up with the United States in this war environment, right? What do you think about that? Do you remember 9/11?

RP: Yeah, I remember because it was my friend's birthday. I remember at school it was up, like, on the TV and people were—parents were coming to get their kids out of school. It was—I just remember seeing it on the TV at school. And then my mom, of course, ran a daycare, and it was my friend's birthday, her mom also worked at the daycare, and we were eating cupcakes celebrating her birthday, watching this happen, like, on the TV.

TS: That dreadful day.

RP: Yeah, it was just a really weird kind of contrast.

TS: Kind of surreal, sure.

RP: Yeah. And my Aunt Kay actually worked in one of the towers and just happened to be in the New Jersey office that day; just happened to need to go over there a couple of hours before that happened. And her apartment was severely damaged. Luckily, her cats did—were able to be rescued, but she's had—she's suffered a lot from that. And she still works in New York, but she won't live in New York. She lives in New Jersey now and everything. But yeah, that was really—that was really a lot because—but we didn't hear from her for a while. We didn't know if she was okay or not because of—the communication was down for a while.

TS: Right, it was really difficult to get a hold of people.

RP: Yeah, it was hard to.

TS: What do you think about this experience of growing up with us in two different wars?

RP: I think it's just like everything I've known has been conflict growing up. I mean, I can't remember a time when we weren't, because we have always been in conflict. And so, I just know we need people to support our country in any way that they can, and a lot of people, especially my age, don't do it. They just don't want to do it, or I feel like a lot of

people my age have been babied growing up, or they've been really taken care of and haven't felt like they need—I don't want to make it sound bad—but they all—a lot of people say now, "Oh, yeah, we need to do—start another war," or, "We need to fight," or, "We need to do more than what our country is doing now to fight ISIS, or whoever, in the Middle East." But they're not willing to actually enlist themselves or go do what they can to fight for it. But I've just always felt like it's just something that needed to be done and that I would want to do what I can.

TS: Well, it's interesting the roles that you're playing now—which we haven't talked about yet—compared to your goal to be a nurse, because nursing is seen as a more conventional role for a woman.

RP: Right.

TS: And so, women that I've talked to in Vietnam era and World War II that were in nursing, they all felt like someone needed to take care of the soldiers, right? Do you have that same sort of sense or do you have a different idea about it?

RP: I do. I do feel that way for sure, and that's why I want to do psychiatric mental health, is for soldiers that have had TBIs [traumatic brain injury] and PTSD and improperly treated or not correctly medicated. That's definitely something I'd like to eventually work in. But then for other personal reasons also, like ADHD [attention deficit hyperactivity disorder] and anxiety in college-age students. There are different things I want to do, but definitely stemming from what my grandfather went through. At the time, they didn't know what PTSD was or anything like that, so he was not taken care of like he should have been, but we didn't know how to. And even now, we're still figuring out how to help soldiers with PTSD and coming back from theater.

[Speaking Simultaneously]

TS: A lot of invisible wounds, right?

RP: Yes, a lot; a lot.

TS: Well, one other thing happened that I wanted to ask about before you went and joined the National Guard was the Fort Hood [Texas] shooting.

[On 5 November 2009, Nidal Hasan, a U.S. Army major and psychiatrist, fatally shot thirteen people and injured more than thirty others during a mass shooting at Fort Hood, a military base near Killeen, Texas.]

RP: Right.

TS: Did you have any kind of reaction to that?

RP: I mean, it feels like there's constantly another shooting and—but definitely that was—

TS: I mean military related.

RP: Right, right, military related. I mean, that's definitely just—I don't know—because a lot of people then just want to throw PTSD up there; "Oh, this is what someone with PTSD looks like." But that's not what people with PTSD necessarily look like. I hate when they're like, "Oh, Fort Hood soldier—shooter suffered with PTSD," and then that's what people—people don't want to talk about PTSD because then they don't want to look like they're this violent person. That's not what people with PTSD necessarily look like. It is—They suffer internally themselves, and then they don't want to talk about it because they don't want to be perceived as this violent person, or not taken seriously.

TS: A lot of the criticism directed at that shooter, too, was because he was Muslim and wanted to kill American soldiers even though he was one.

RP: Yes. And see—Yeah, and that is—I don't know—it's hard to—because I don't know all the details of it, but—and that's another factor laid on to it. We don't know what's going on in his mind with—or what his other previous diagnoses were to even really comment on it. But that then makes other Muslims perceived as terrorists now, too. And, I mean, we have Muslims in our unit and I wouldn't have even really—

TS: In the unit that you work in?

RP: Yes, my unit now, and they don't—just like people who are Catholic in our unit, we don't just openly talk about whatever your religion is. We don't talk about it just like when we were in Fort Hood. They went to this service, other people went to that service when we were in training. But they don't—I never would've known if—I had asked them about it when they were going to a service, but I wouldn't have known—

RP: Otherwise.

TS: Yeah. I mean, people have this idea that people are—Muslims look like this or talk like this or act like this, and they just seem like normal Americans because that's what they are. They're just here and they have a different religion than someone who is Catholic or Jewish. I don't look at it in any different way. We're all—We're all soldiers.

TS: Interesting. Right. Why don't we talk about your soldiering years, then?

RP: Okay [chuckles].

TS: You decided to go into the National Guard right after high school, because you signed up for delayed entry.

[Speaking Simultaneously]

RP: Yes, I enlisted the day before my senior prom. [chuckling]

TS: That's a pretty interesting day to do it.

RP: Yeah. I went to Charlotte the—yeah, the night before my prom—or two nights before my prom. The next day went through MEPS [Military Entrance Processing Station] in Charlotte, enlisted, did all that. Got back late that night. Next morning started doing my hair and make-up for prom.

TS: [chuckles]

RP: So, yeah, it was very—but that's very me, so that's how it would happen.

TS: Well, you had talked about how you had considered the nursing program for the navy?

RP: Right.

TS: Now, had you considered any National Guard in-reserve units or anything? Why did you pick the National Guard over reserve or something else?

RP: Well, really it was because of my recruiter. He was probably one of the—And a lot of the times I think it comes down to who, kind of, gets to you first, or how they present it to you. But I knew eventually I'd probably want to go active duty army, so it'd work best to be in the National Guard. I didn't talk to any reserves recruiters, I just really trusted my recruiter because I knew his daughter went to my high school and he was just a really—he was a really awesome guy, so I trusted him. And the National Guard does the same training as regular army. I think some people don't think that we are part of the army, in general. I just knew they would have great education benefits and that'd be a good thing for me to do.

TS: Okay, so when you went to basic training, where did you say you went, Fort Sill?

RP: Fort Sill, Oklahoma.

TS: What month did you go there?

RP: September.

TS: Oh, okay.

RP: So it was still, like, super-hot, but then towards the end, in November, it was freezing in the morning. And so, we were on the ranges trying to shoot, it was so cold. And then

also, they had—I didn't realize they had just—scorpions and tarantulas just out there. They're just out there, naturally, and I was not prepared for that.

TS: They didn't put up a little flag and warn you, "Hey Rachel! Look out! There's a scorpion here!" [chuckles].

RP: No, no. So that was definitely interesting, just—yeah, it was weird[?], because I'd never even been in that area of the country before. I had really only stayed along the East Coast. I visited New York a couple of times to visit my family, but other than that I had never even been on that long of a flight before, so it was—

TS: Was it the longest period you were away from home?

RP: Yes, yeah, that was the longest period.

TS: How did you handle that?

RP: It was fine. I mean, I was still—it was hard because I am really close to my family, but we were able to keep in touch with letters all the time. And my parents sent mail, like, every single day, so I was constantly getting those, and packages of shampoo and all of those kinds of things.

TS: So at mail call you were the one everybody's like—[both chuckle].

RP: Oh, yeah. And my parents sent packages all the time, but they would also send stuff for other people, too, if they didn't have family that could send them things then—There was one funny story. Our female drill sergeants decided we couldn't have razors for some reason, and technically that was against regulation for us to just not be able to have them. But we weren't allowed to use them for, like, three weeks or something before they found out and were like, "No, you can use them." Well—So they took all of them, but then my parents had already sent a package with more in them, but at that time it was a male drill sergeant that was handing out packages. Because what they do is, when you get a package they just dump it on the ground to check it and you have to put it all back. But he didn't know we couldn't have razors, so my parents had sent me like eight, and so then all the females in the barracks were coming to me, like, "I'll do whatever you want. I just really want a razor."

TS: [chuckles]

RP: So I had one wash my boots for a week or something. I had traded out stuff for razors.

TS: Nice.

RP: Cough drops was a big thing because we couldn't have candy, but we could have fruit punch flavored cough drops. So we were constantly eating cough drops, which was—

TS: That's interesting! I've never heard of that.

RP: Yeah, it was—and then—because it was a scandal, my parents would also—my parents were so bad. They're—I mean, they were good, but they would have fruit punch flavored ones, but they would open up the bag and then put other flavors in it and then close it back up, so then I would have different flavored cough drops. [chuckles]

TS: They had to have learned about that to be able to—

RP: Well, I told them. I mean, I told them things to do but—so it was—it was fun. They would send me stickers to decorate envelopes and things with, and it was just—and then we would all have at night, if we—towards the end we had more time at night to, like, write letters and stuff, and so everyone would come to my area in the barracks and we'd all decorate our letters and have cute stationary and pens and stuff my parents had sent me because I'm kind of into that, but it was fun.

TS: That's pretty neat. Where'd you keep all that stuff?

RP: We had one personal drawer. We could have whatever we wanted, and I had a ton of stuff slammed[?] in that drawer.

TS: In the drawer?

RP: Yeah.

TS: It wasn't inspected?

RP: Not—That drawer wasn't.

TS: No?

RP: No. I mean, they would kind of look at it just to make sure paraphernalia wasn't in there, any contraband, but other than that—

TS: They didn't care about you having stickers.

RP: No, I could have cute stickers. [both chuckle]

TS: Well, that's really interesting. During basic training, you describe it being really cold and really hot and the scorpions and things like that.

RP: Yeah.

TS: Was there anything really physically difficult for you?

RP: I felt like I was pretty prepared before because I did do NJROTC, and I had our marine instructor train me the summer before I left, so I felt pretty prepared physically for it. The ruck marches were rough, though, because we did a sixteen k [kilometers] ruck march, which is, like, 9.6 miles [correction: 9.9 miles]. That was pretty rough, mainly in the boots. I lost toe nails from my feet being blistered, and it—that was probably the worst, was breaking in the boots.

TS: That's interesting, because the boots have been a problem for women since—

RP: Forever.

TS: Yeah, it's like they can't get it right.

RP: Yeah, I would have to put, like, pads to pad my feet in the boots, to protect my feet. Yeah.

TS: So they wouldn't keep rubbing?

RP: Yeah

TS: Wow.

RP: That was a problem for sure.

TS: How much did you have to carry in the ruck sacks?

RP: I don't even know exactly how much it was, but it was pretty—it was pretty heavy. I still have problems with my left shoulder, probably from what I did in training. Because, I mean, I—I'm definitely not one of the strongest females out there, [chuckles] by any means. I mean, I could do—I can do the PT [physical training] test, but weights and things—I just did Cross-Fit for the first time Saturday and my body is hurting so bad right now.

[CrossFit is a branded fitness regimen created by Greg Glassman. Promoted as both a physical exercise philosophy and also as a competitive fitness sport, CrossFit workouts incorporate elements from high-intensity interval training, Olympic weightlifting, plyometrics, powerlifting, gymnastics, girevoy sport, calisthenics, strongman, and other exercises]

TS: This past Saturday?

RP: Yeah. It's hard to sit up and stand. I'm, like, wobbling everywhere. But especially at that time, my body was not physically prepared for things like that, and I'll just say it, men's bodies are better prepared for things like that, and I, physically, was not, so I did end up

hurting my shoulder and my hip. Not severely but—my hip is fine now, but I still—I mean, it still pops a lot; I'm very poppy. [chuckles] My body is—but—

TS: You're too young to be poppy.

RP: I know! I know! But yeah, I think, definitely, my shoulder has kind of become an issue over the years, but other than that, no. The gas chamber was the worst; after that it was fine.

TS: What was that like?

RP: So that was—yeah, that was pretty horrible. And that was, like, the third week, so once that—

TS: What did you have to do in that?

RP: For the whole week before, you do training on how to put on your gas mask, and what situation you'd use it, and CBRN—it's Chemical, Biological, Radiological, and Nuclear training—but for the actual—for that day you line up in your platoon—which is about sixty people—you go into a two-room building. The first—And they're just basic squares or rectangles. Everyone just lines them against the wall, and the first one, they check that the seal is on, because they have a little bit of the gas around, just make sure it's sealed. Then you file into the next room, where they have people in sets of ten stand up in a line, where then they throw, like, the pellets up and they ignite for the CS gas [chlorobenzalmalononitrile; tear gas]. And what you do after that, everyone has to remove their mask, take a breath in—which, I mean, it's the worst pain I've probably ever felt, because the pellets, it's—the CS gas, it's—they're like crystals in there, so it's like scraping your eyes and your throat and your sinuses and your lungs. But everyone has to take a breath in, and then you have to stand at a—

TS: [sneezes] This is making me sneeze!

RP: [chuckles] I know! You have to stand at attention, and everyone has to be looking at the drill sergeant before they'll let you do a left face and file out. And you have to walk out. And if you, like, push ahead, they're going to push you back. And so, of course, I was in the very back of the set of ten, and there was a girl—or no, actually, it was a male. He—It was this male who was in the second—the second slot and he was on the ground, and everyone was like, "Get up! You need to get up!"

TS: You had to wait for him?

RP: Yeah, we had to wait for him, and that was pretty rough. But the good thing was, I have really bad allergies, and I had a sinus infection, so after that I did not. [chuckles] Because it just totally—

TS: It cleared everything out?

RP: —clears everything out. And after that, then we got to do marksmanship, and I love shooting.

TS: Did you?

RP: So that's—that was the best part of basic.

TS: What kind of weapons did you get to shoot?

RP: In basic we shot, like, a wide variety. Of course, the M16A2 is what we trained on there in my unit. I have—A lot of people either have M4s or M16s. But then we shot other lightweight machine guns, so, like, the M240 Bravo or M249. Which my assigned weapon now in my unit is the M249, which is a lightweight machine gun that is about sixteen pounds, and it's, like, giant and everyone laughs at me because they're like, "Why do you have that?" Because everyone else has their little M4 and I have this giant machine gun.

TS: Is it because you're the driver?

RP: I don't know. I think it was just, like, random selection, kind of. I was one of the last people, I guess, in the unit, and they're like, "Oh, no, we're just—" or probably just—

TS: Someone needs to carry this and—

RP: Yeah, and so that was me. I was, like, one of the only females in the unit that got it, but it's really fun to shoot so it's fine.

TS: [chuckles]

RP: But yeah, that's a lot to carry around though.

TS: Now, did you throw the grenade?

RP: Yeah, we did that too. It's required that you have to throw two live grenades to graduate from basic so we did that, and that was very scary as well.

TS: I bet it was.

RP: That was pretty terrifying.

TS: What do you have to do to throw a grenade?

RP: You, like, get on the ground, you hold them to your chest—and I'm trying to remember—you pull the pin out, you keep the thumb clip on, and then when you throw it the thumb clip falls off of it, and that's what, like, starts it to be, I guess, ignited or started, and then

you throw it. And then you, of course, get on the ground, but the screen, you get to watch it explode because the screen is clear. So it was pretty neat. But you have a drill sergeant—

TS: Oh, from where you're hiding?

RP: Yeah, from where you're hiding. But you have a drill sergeant right there with you, so—

TS: Grab it and throw it if something goes wrong?

RP: Yeah, so we were good. We were good. But, yeah, that was pretty terrifying. It was storming that day, too, so it was really eerie, like, over Oklahoma; it was very eerie skies but it was fun.

TS: Oh, my goodness, okay. When you were going through basic then and you're having this experience, are you thinking "Yeah, this is okay," or "What am I getting myself into?" Did you have any of those kinds of thoughts?

RP: I think the bus ride from the airport to Fort Sill I was like "What am I doing?" Like, "Did I actually like do this? This is crazy." But no, half—within the first few weeks I was like, "This is fine. This is good." I mean, I know there's an end date, I know I'll be fine.

TS: Yeah. How did you feel looking at the young women around you? You were probably one of the youngest.

RP: I was, yes.

TS: How did you feel like you were holding up, compared to—of course you're getting all the goodies from your parents.

RP: Right, right.

TS: Everybody is making friends with you, I'm sure. [chuckles]

RP: Yeah, I think—Well, the think that bothered some people because I am pretty quiet and, I mean, I—if I don't know people very well I'm pretty quiet. If I know people then I'll be more extroverted, but I was pretty introverted going in. And I think that bothered—like, some people take that the wrong way. Or if I'm not talking to everyone in my platoon then I'm just—I don't know—like, maybe I just put off the wrong vibes with some women, but I did much better—because I think the other people my age, or a little bit older, saw everything as a competition, like with grades and everything, and I didn't, but I was doing very, very well. And I actually ended up making friends with the older women who were in their late twenties, early thirties, much better than people my own age. Which still is kind of like that in college now. Like, I do better with people who are older than me than my age.

TS: Well, you seem to carry a really high maturity level anyhow.

RP: Yeah, I just can't deal with like—just the girls who are trying to get attention from males in basic, that kind of thing. And I was in and out of a relationship when I was in basic, but that was the last thing on my mind, was getting male attention from other guys who were there. And I just felt like I already had a different plan than a lot of these people, and so I just didn't want to get in trouble, and I just wanted to get through it and not deal with petty things. And I think where other girls had these other complexes where they wanted to be the head female, or wanted—very power hungry, and I just never dealt with those people, and so maybe I may have been standoffish to some people, but I just can't deal with things like that. I just can't deal with it, so I was friends with other people than them.

KH: Did you stay friends with some of the other—

RP: I still keep in touch with—Yeah, two of the girls, now, I still keep in touch with. Actually, I did get tagged on—in a Facebook [social networking website] video from right after we graduated with some people. But it's interesting to see where people are now, or you think people would be in different places now than they are and they are still kind of just where they were when we graduated four years ago. Like, those in the Guard, or some people got into basic and they were at the top of their class and you thought they were going to stay in the military for a career and then they got out in four years or something. So it is—

TS: Just one enlistment or something?

RP: Yes, they just did one and that was it. So it's just, like, interesting to see where people are now compared to how they did. Because I definitely—I wasn't one of the biggest strugglers in basic, but I wasn't the most physically fit. I feel like definitely that's always—it doesn't really matter how smart you are. If you're not getting really, really high PT test scores you're not as—I was mid-range so I kind of stayed on the—didn't get a whole lot of attention on those kind of things, but now, like, looking back, I'm probably one of the stronger people now coming out of basic and out of AIT than I was out of basic.

[Advanced Individual Training (AIT) is where enlisted soldiers go after basic/boot camp to learn the skills for their MOS (Military Occupational Specialty/job).]

TS: Well, let's talk about AIT.

RP: Okay.

TS: When you signed up for the National Guard, did you pick a job then or did they—

RP: I did. I wanted to try to get a medic position because that's—I knew I wanted to go into the medical field so I wanted to be a medic, but they did not have any slots in the Greensboro/Asheboro—the area that I wanted to stay in, because I knew I'd probably be going to UNCG. I was going to be living in Greensboro. I didn't want to have to travel for drill. Like, I wanted to keep everything in the same area, so I was like, "You know what? This training will get me back in school next summer." So I knew I'd be able to be there from September to April, and then I can start school in May, so that was my plan. And so, I didn't really know about this job. I just knew it was kind of like, "Oh, you do logistics, keeping track of supply—" whatever.

I'm like, "I'll take it, that's fine. "Because if I did wait to get a medic position, that training is way longer than the job that I had, and so I wouldn't be in nursing school right now, probably, if I had taken longer training, so it was fine.

TS: And so, where'd you go for that training?

RP: I went to Fort Lee, Virginia.

TS: Not too far away.

RP: Yeah, so it was about four hours from here. I really—It was—I say I [chuckles] really liked it, but compared to basic, we only had one or two roommates, and that's where, though, it was a lot more competitive for grades. Because it was—we were in school. That's what we were doing, was school, and we did do physical—we still did PT tests, all of that, but the competitive—really competitive time came with AIT. Because we had tests every week or every two weeks before we moved on to a different section. Which luckily though, I'm good at school, [chuckles] so—but I just do not do well with—like, I am a competitive person, but I'm competitive with what my own abilities are, and so I do not feel like I am competing with other people, but other people—I mean, they were—girls were just mean.

TS: What did they do?

RP: And guys not—Really, the guys not so much. It was really the women that took the competition with me a lot more seriously. But I just didn't really let my grades get known a lot, even though I was doing, like, the best in our class, but I just felt like the—there were some guys that didn't take it well that a female was doing it best, and there were some other guys that they just didn't really care, but it was the women that I felt like, actually, were meaner about the competition and stuff.

TS: Give an example of how they were mean.

RP: Well, I had my wisdom teeth removed when I was in, in January. That was after I got back, because I got to go home for two weeks, and they had to take them out that day. Like, I was kind of having some pain. I didn't think they were going to actually take them out that day, but it was three days before we had an exam, and it was a terrible procedure. You think they're just going to put me to sleep. Nope. They used just lidocaine local

numbing. But my—the roots were curved and they were severely impacted and it took them about two hours, and actually I have a lot of TMJ [temporomandibular joint dysfunction] problems now because my jaw was partially dislocated from it.

So for two days after that I was drugged in my barracks on Percocet, missed two days of class, and then Friday had to go back and take my exam. And the girls were, like, happy that I was going to fail this exam. They were terrible about it. They were really mean. They were like, "Oh, well, she just missed two days of class. She's going to be out of the running for distinguished honor grad—honor graduate—whatever." Turns out I actually got a hundred on the exam somehow. Don't know—I still don't know how, to this day, that I did—

TS: Percocet works some wonders on you?

RP: Right after that exam—I think I was just so stressed out and, like, anxious about it, it gave me the energy and adrenaline to get through it. Took the exam. And I was the first one to finish, because I was falling asleep because I had woken up that morning and I guess took another Percocet, but we were getting up at like 5:00 [a.m.]—4:00 [a.m.], 5:00 every day, and so I don't even know what time I took it. It was that day—or those few days were a total blur.

So our teacher—we had really cool contractors as professors, sometimes people who are still in the military—but he was really awesome to me and knew what was going on, and he was like, "Let me grade your exam right now." And he graded it and was like "Well, Puckett got a hundred!" And said that in front of the class while they were still taking their exam, and people were pissed. They were so pissed.

And I was just like "Okay. Okay, cool," and just left and went to sleep. But people were pissed that I did.

And still a few months later I was still keeping my grades kind of secretive, but it turns out—it was the day before graduation, they were going to announce who was a distinguished honor grad and other honor graduates, and I ended up being the distinguished honor graduate. And one of the people beside me, her grade point average was, like, one point less than mine and she was furious. Like, she was so mad, but she had to sit beside me during graduation. [chuckles] I mean, it was fine, but I just—

TS: Now, did getting distinguished graduate benefit you in anyway?

RP: Yeah, I mean, I did get an Army Commendation Medal. And then it was kind of weird, because when I got to my unit there was another guy in my platoon at Fort Lee who ended up coming to the same unit as me, which I thought was really weird. And then—But I ended up getting the job to be the Humvee driver for our lieutenant colonel and sergeant major when he actually does the job that we trained for. So I don't know if it had anything to do with that. People said it might have. Like, if they saw that you had—you're really capable in what you did there, and then if you could come and work for the lieutenant colonel and sergeant major. Because really their Humvee driver is really like their personal assistant, almost, too. You just do whatever they need you to do. Which for me now, I run computer systems for them.

Because, I mean, they'll joke, "Back when I came into the army we barely even had fax machines, and now they expect me to learn at age fifty how to run these computer systems." And they're like, "Yeah, that's not going to happen. We'll get these young kids to come in and do it for us." So that's pretty much what I do, and I'll help them with whatever I need—people said that probably had something to do with it though; that they saw I had this award versus not.

TS: Well, sometimes even in basic, being a distinguished graduate, you can pick your unit that you want to go to, or your assignment. I've heard many different ways that you can get benefits.

RP: Yeah, I'd never even heard about that, but that would—that makes sense. I just knew I was going to be—

TS: You knew where you were going.

RP: I knew where I was going because I chose—I got to kind of choose where I wanted to be stationed here in Greensboro.

TS. Pretty neat. Anything else you want to say about your AIT? How were the relationships? You talked about the relationships with the women and their competitive nature. Did you have barracks?

RP: Oh yeah, we had little rooms, so we had, like, two or three roommates—

TS: Suites?

RP: Yeah, so it was just bed, bed, bed, one bathroom that we all shared, and then, like, places to put our clothes and stuff.

TS: Okay.

RP: But we kind of [chuckles]—I made friends—I still wasn't really, like, friends with a lot of people—with the guys my age, we were cool, but the other women I didn't really deal with as much, but I became really good friends with Audain[?]. She was twenty-eight. And then Vance[?], she was thirty-four when she enlisted, so she—because you have to be—you have to enlist before you're thirty-five—three kids, and she was like, "You know what? One day I want to enlist in the army," and she went airborne. She actually was in Italy for three years and just came back recently. But they were my best friends in AIT. And we always—we look like the good—the good kids, which we were, we didn't do anything bad, but we just could kind of get away with a little bit of things.

Often times when new students were coming in they would make everyone else move, or they would put us—and one time we got put downstairs in this really awful room that—it said it was a mold room or—we kind of made it like there was more mold than there really was, and that—and I do have really terrible allergies. On the first floor, it was really loud, and so we just went to our platoon sergeant and was like, "Is there any

way we could change rooms because it's super loud, we're not able to breathe very well in here. I have terrible allergies."

And so, he let us move to another floor, and he was like, "Yeah, just—Y'all are good. Just y'all better not do anything bad." But he trusted us. Other people he would not have let do that, but they were older. I was doing really well.

So we moved to the very end of the hallway on a whole other floor. Audain[?] ended up just taking her own room by herself, and I was with Vance[?], so it was—and somehow, they never made us move after that. So we had, like, our own floor for a few weeks before these other—new class came in, and so we just got to have—we just did whatever we wanted at night. They never really checked on us a lot. I mean, they would, but it was like we just had our own area of the building and weren't really concerned with—I think it was just because they were older—like she was twenty-eight, Vance was thirty—almost—yeah, she was thirty-five at that point, so they weren't really concerned with us. But we would sneak food back into the barracks and, like, hide it because we weren't supposed to have food.

TS: You weren't?

RP: Yeah, no, you couldn't have food in the barracks.

TS: Only at the chow hall?

RP: Yeah. So I guess that was kind of like a bad thing we did. We tried to see what we could get away with food wise. Because, like, we'd go—we only got to go off post, like, three times because it was on lockdown because of sexual assaults that had happened, and so we would—if we'd go to fancy dinners at Red Lobster and we'd want to bring our food back, and so we would sneak it in. That's probably the worst thing we did but—

TS: That doesn't seem too bad.

RP: No. But it was—it was fun. It was much more fun there, I guess, than basic, but it was a—no, and I still talk to them pretty frequently.

TS: Your roommates that you had?

RP: Yeah.

TS: Yeah. That's pretty neat. So you started that training in—from basic in September 2012, and so about what time do you finish your AIT?

RP: I finished that in—it was, like, the end of March.

TS: Of 2013?

RP: Yes.

TS: Okay. And so, now you're coming back to civilian National Guard life.

RP: Yes.

TS: Tell me about that transition. You've been in this army environment—

[Speaking Simultaneously]

RP: It was pretty hard. Yeah, it was pretty difficult transitioning. And I didn't really think it would be that hard because I was only gone for a year, but at that point it's like everyone—every decision—I've never really made decisions since I'd been there in training; everyone just tells you what to do, where to go next. The only decisions we had to make was when we went off post; like, where do we want to go eat. We never really needed to make decisions. And so, getting back home, trying to get back into school, and just coming back home was really hard because I realized all my friends were doing completely different things. I'm not—It was hard trying to stay in touch with people when I was gone. A lot of friends I was really good friends with in high-school I'm not really friends with any more just because they're doing their own thing. I still have some guys—like guys from JROTC, though, we're still really good friends, and whenever they come back home we get together and—but other than that it was very difficult. Because then I moved back home for—I was home for a year before I moved out, but that was difficult just living at home. It was only for a few months but it was weird. It was just very hard coming back home.

TS: Well, you sort of had to like de-compress and prepare for this different—

RP: Yes. Right. And then I only had a few weeks to get ready for summer school, so I just went to GTCC [Guilford Technical Community College] and took a couple of classes to try to get back into it before I started here in that fall. But I just remember I was angry. I've never been an angry person, but coming home—and I was only gone for a year, and so that's why I feel like it was kind of ridiculous.

TS What do you think you were angry about?

RP: I don't know. It was just hard, I think, being around college students. Like—

TS: So you were angry in the summer?

RP: Yeah, because—well, I remember—well, I started working in a Domino's [American pizza restaurant chain] or something when I got home just to stay busy when I wasn't in school, because, like, I had to stay busy because it was hard just sitting at home. I hadn't worked for a month when I got back and it was just really weird. And I was in a relationship that wasn't—did not help that at all, really, because my boyfriend wasn't in the military. He ended up enlisting later, but it was just—it was hard. And I remember

having to come to SOAR [UNCG Spartan Orientation, Advising, and Registration] here, and it was one of the later ones so I had to spend the night here, and I was just so pissed about the whole situation; like, "Why can't I just come register for classes? Why do I have to be with all these SOAR happy peppy people?" Like, the SOAR Posse or whatever. The ones that like run around and—You know what I'm talking about? Yeah, okay, those people, which that was kind of mean but—

TS: I don't know what that means.

RP: They run SOAR, and they have little groups that they separate you with, and they're like, "Let's get everyone to know each other!"

And I'm like "I do not care to get to know any of you people." That's just how I felt, and I didn't—I mean, I was not—I'm not like that now, but I was very—

TS: It's almost like you should have another option; you could go through this integrated program with everybody, learning, or you could just register.

RP: All of the one day SOARs were already filled because they were—and they were while I was gone. So I get back and all the summer ones were the two day, spend the night ones with these people who just graduated high school. They haven't done what I've done. I just felt like I just could not relate. It took a long time for me to settle down and relate to other students like I could again. I was just—Luckily, one of my friends from high school was starting when I was because she graduated a year later, so we were in SOAR together. And then her last name is a "C" but mine is a "P" so—that's how they separate you, is by last name. So I just totally ignored that and went with her group because I didn't want to be with people I didn't know. It was just—Looking back I'm like—it was so ridiculous. I was never even like that in high school—that moody teen thing—but I felt like I went through that my first, like, six months out of training. I was just frustrated.

TS: Sometimes they say as you get older you gain tolerance but you lose patience.

RP: Yeah, yeah.

TS: Maybe it hit you really early. [chuckles]

RP: Yeah, I think so. It was just everyone walking around just happy and peppy, and then just having to wear the lanyard all the time, and then it was just—I don't know—I was just so not in the mood to be around college students or something. I think just everyone in the military, too, we're very sarcastic, and we're a weird pessimistic, optimistic kind of personality, and we're just different. And so, if people didn't know me they would take me way too seriously or something; I'm like, "I'm just joking." But luckily, in the fall when I started I met a lot of other veterans and other people in the military that I'm still friends with now.

TS: How did you meet them?

RP: In my biology class actually.

TS: Oh, really?

RP: Yeah. So I was—I met people. It's so weird, we all find each other; all of us military people. We won't even realize it. People never think I am because I don't—a lot of the guys, they'll wear their combat boots still, or they have their ruck sacks—they'll have something showing they were in the military—but for girls, a lot of us don't, it seems like. Maybe they don't look like it, like the guys do, but we just find people, which is nice.

TS: So how do you feel being part of UNCG, and it purports itself to be really supportive of veterans and people in the military that are trying to get an education. How long have you been doing that now? A few years.

RP: Yeah, this is my fourth year at UNCG, coming up.

TS: What would you say about that kind of support? Do you feel like you've gotten support?

RP: Oh, 1000%!

TS: Yeah?

RP: For sure, yeah. I mean, definitely. And then all of my other friends that aren't in the military, a lot of them have had family that have been in the military—their parents were—and they totally understand it; everything[?] my friends have gone through. Because I haven't been deployed, but my other friends have been deployed and they've struggled a lot, but we all have a community of—whether they're veterans or not, that they support everyone. And with the Veterans Access Program now for nursing students, that's an amazing program that, of course, I worked in, and now that I'm in for military that have—you technically don't have to have medical training, but if you have you're able to go through the program faster, but its slots for us in the nursing program, which is amazing.

[The UNCG Veterans Access Program provides medically trained veterans access and specialized support in an innovative educational program to obtain a Bachelor of Science in Nursing degree and be employed in the high demand field of nursing]

TS: So you feel like the institutional support has been strong.

RP: Oh, yeah, yes.

TS: And the personal support that you're getting within your classroom has been strong?

RP: Oh, yeah, definitely.

TS: I remember talking to some [veterans] early on when the wars were really difficult and there was a lot of anti-war fervor, that some students felt unwelcome—at least their viewpoints felt unwelcome—in a classroom setting. Have you ever experienced anything like that?

RP: I haven't really felt any of that. I know, at least, my views are pretty different, I think, than actually people in the military. I'm pretty—I'm a pretty big pacifist. I don't agree with a lot of the things that the military is doing, but that doesn't mean that I can't be in the military and support our country. So I think that sometimes can even be hard for other veterans to understand where I am coming from. I kind of feel like I'm a weird combination of a traditional student and being in the military because I've been in the military and a student about the same time, and I don't have the same experiences as my friends have being deployed or being on active duty, but I do have a different perspective as other traditional students. So I'm kind of a bridge between all of us. So it is—it is definitely a different situation, but I've never felt like we weren't—I didn't feel safe on campus or we weren't treated right. I think UNCG has been very good at helping me get my benefits ready. I remember my first year I had to leave the semester early—only two weeks or so—but I had to take all my exams early so I could go to annual training and my professors were really good about it, getting me prepared. I've—have had one experience with a professor who was not supportive and I was penalized for missing class for training, but other than that—

TS: Did you complain about it?

RP: I did—I wish I went to the dean of students about this professor, but I didn't just because I was going through a lot of other stuff that semester and I was just—I was like—I got a B+ in the class, it's whatever, I just got over it even though I probably—if I hadn't been penalized for other things I probably would have had an A- and I would have rather had that in physiology but, I mean, it's whatever. She was just—I'd tell her ahead of schedule I have these dates for training, and in the spring we have a lot of three-day drills and I always had class on Friday morning and she—if we had a quiz or iClicker [an audience response system that allows students to instantly provide feedback and answer questions posed by instructors] points—which actually play a really big part at the end of the semester, and I missed them—like, three or four Fridays—and she was like, "Oh, I just don't give them back to anyone."

TS: And there's no making up for that?

RP: There's no making up for it; it doesn't matter what you were doing; you're going to be penalized; it doesn't matter. And that's, like, against the law for you to be—pretty sure against UNCG policy to be penalized for military training, and I just came to a point where I just gave up because I just didn't care anymore.

TS: That wasn't a battle you wanted to fight.

RP: And I wasn't going to go to the dean of students over iClicker points, but it did make a really big thing at the end. And also, I just missed class and I didn't feel comfortable going to her to help me catch back up. And in my group—and people—pre-med and nursing students are super competitive so it was kind of hard to kind of go to someone—some people for help like—and some of my friends weren't the most studious to try to get help from—like, their notes, honestly—but it was fine. I just—I've never thought about that professor the same way after that.

TS: Yeah.

RP: But other than that, I've been treated amazing by professors.

TS: Are there any professors that you'd like to mention that you feel were really supportive and helpful?

RP: I think—Let's see. I'm trying to remember from the beginning, because it almost feels like it has been forever. Dr. [Pam] Landrow in the psych [psychology] department. I had to, like, make up my exams—three or four—almost all the exams it seemed like I had to take it a different time and she was—acted totally cool with it. Mr. [Mark] Moser [Bryan School of Business and Economics] I had last spring. I technically missed five days or something of the class and should've had a grade dropped, but he was like, "I know you have a lot going on. That's fine." I was also in my cousin's wedding that semester so then I had that to deal with at the same time. But it's like some professors, if you just go to them and tell them, "Hey, I have a lot going on, between doing pre-nursing and the Guard and all this other like personal stuff," and they will listen to you. And he just loved hearing about my story, and I would go talk to him; if I missed a class I'd go the next day or the next week and we'd sit and discuss what we did. He was really great—I'm trying to think, because the psych department—I was mainly taking psych classes at the time, but I'll try to remember some other professors, so I can get back to you with those.

TS: Okay, so you don't have a typical schedule.

RP: No.

TS: But could you describe for someone who maybe doesn't know what you do in the Guard how that process works, like, over the course of, say, a month?

RP: Yeah, well, for the Guard, normally it's just two or three days per weekend that you'll do training, but I try to do extra training so—well, this last semester is probably a good one. Dr. [Roberta "Robin"] Maxwell was really great, and Casey Taylor for microbiology, because I was in Fort Leavenworth [Kansas] for a week for training and I missed an entire week of classes and labs—I missed a chemistry lab—and normally they're like, "Oh, you have to make all that up within this certain amount of time." And I'm like, "I'm taking too many classes to even fit in making up something the next week," and they just

totally— "You're good; you don't need to make it up." They were just like, "You just come to us when you can and we'll go through it."

Because I had friends that semester—last semester that are not friends anymore because they were very competitive and tried to give me points off for not being there for a project when I was in Fort Leavenworth. So it almost seems like some professors have been more supportive than other students, due to competitiveness.

TS: Right, because in your nursing program you have to get a certain—

RP: Right. And this girl, she was already in medical school so I don't really get why she—

TS: Maybe she just felt like it was unfair.

RP: Yeah, and at one point I get that, because there's another guy who was in the group and he went along with her—tried to—and so—I mean, I got really upset because it's like I thought—from January we knew I was going to be gone for a week; like, this was already planned

TS: It wasn't a big surprise.

RP: No, I was like, "I'm going to be gone this week. This week, two of these days we are working on unknowns and I am not going to be here to perform tests." Before I left we already—because we were trying to identify bacteria. We already knew what they were. They just had to go through the work to try to figure it out. But we had—we luckily had easier ones. I kept in touch with them all week. She was like one of my best friends, I felt like, that I—we had known each other for—it was only, like, a year, but we were really close in school. And I get back and she had made comments about how I left lab early one day. I left ten minutes early to print off notes for one of the other guys and me for class, and she tried to make snide comments about that, or that I wasn't here to help them with tests. So I asked the other guy, "Are y'all going to give me points off for not being there?" It was just—It's such a small percentage of the grade for the project, but still, I feel like it's just a principle of why would you give me—why would you penalize me when I didn't have an option. I was being sent on the—half-way across the country for training.

TS: And maybe you added value in other ways when you were there, right?

RP: Yeah, so it was just—it was—and he was like, "We just felt like you weren't there to do the work so we're just going to penalize you." And they were going to give me, like, six out of ten. And I just felt like it was so unbelievably petty when I had helped this guy for two years through school, and you want to do this? And so, I talked to him about it. We actually got into an argument about it and he ended up not—he ended up changing it back, but I didn't talk to her, actually, about it at all because I wanted to see what she would do, and I haven't even talked to her, actually, since then really; this was like April [chuckles]. And I'm just not—because I don't deal with people like that anymore. I've learned you cannot—I don't have time for people that are like that—petty about things—

and so I just stopped really talking to her. And I ended up looking at my grade and the professor—I got a ninety-five for the project, so I knew—I mean, granted, the professor still has to give me points off depending on how people graded me, but I—probably wasn't a great thing that I did, but the paper—the sheets were just there to—we picked ours out of a list and I saw hers and what she wrote about me and I had a picture—I took a picture of it. And she gave me a four out of ten and wrote all these lies, essentially, about, "Didn't help perform tests, wasn't there," but didn't say, "Oh, but she was in military training."

TS: Right.

RP: She—and when—she would not—not concerned about her proper use of equipment to safely use bacterial specimens, and when told she was wrong she ignored me. Like, I don't know where this stuff came from.

TS: Yeah, out of the blue sort of.

RP: I mean, there were times she'd tell me I was doing something wrong, but you could use two different things if you wanted to but she thought you could only use one, and this isn't a person you would argue with, and I was like, "I don't care. This is petty stuff." And so, I got, obviously, really upset that like—why would someone who's a friend do that?

TS: Well, let me ask you just in general how do you think when you have students that have to go either on-the-weekend duty training—like that week training that you had to do—was that for a special class or—

RP: Yeah, so actually, Major Jennings, who I'm a driver for, he asked me specifically to go to Fort Leavenworth to do a warfighter [a computer-simulated war game], which is kind of what we did in Texas but just a shorter version where they simulate being deployed. So I was his person to run the different computer systems, and so they specifically asked me to go so I'd be better prepared for the training in Texas and when—if we deploy.

TS: Right.

RP: So it was something I needed to do. It wasn't something I'm going to tell him, "No, I can't do that."

TS: So you haven't had to deploy yet?

RP: No, I haven't had to deploy. This is preparation for it, because we're actually in our open year right now and we could be told anytime in the next year that we are deploying.

TS: Well, do you think that there's a way to bridge that communication gap between people who don't understand—and everybody has lives and everybody is doing other things, right, so there might be ways that somebody who is not in the military thinks they're being treated unfairly?

RP: Like, I haven't really had problems with anyone else. This weekend I have drill, but we need to be working on a project for nursing school, so they're like, "Just come after you get out at 5:00 [p.m.] or 6:00 [p.m.]," and they're cool about it.

TS: So most everybody's been accommodating?

RP: Yeah, most everyone has been very accommodating, it's just I think she just wanted a way to one up me, and was upset that I can study less than her and get the same grade as her or just a little bit less.

TS: Right.

RP: She's—yeah.

TS: Well, that's another story, right?

RP: Yeah. But it's like certain personalities won't sometimes click, but I've never—other than that I've never run into major problems with students like that.

TS: So it's been pretty positive.

RP: Yeah, oh yeah. That was just, like, a recent kind of thing that happened. That was a problem with training.

TS: You graduate in what year?

RP: Twenty eighteen. So I'm really hoping it's not until after that.

TS: Yeah. So what would happen then?

RP: They would hold my slot in the nursing program and I'd come back and start again.

TS: Start again?

RP: Yeah, not start all over, I'd start kind of where I left off. But say I deploy half way through a semester, I'd have to restart that semester when I got back, with whole other new people and totally—so what, I'm going to come back from deployment—but what if I deploy and I come back at a really weird time not in the sequence that they have that class and I have to wait seven months before I can start. So it's—

TS: These are things you think about, right?

RP: Yeah. I mean, I try not to because it's really stressful when I think, like, I could be deployed when I am about to take my NCLEX [National Council Licensure Examination], or have my one semester left, and that's really stressful.

TS: Well, when you're working in the Guard, the times that you're there, and you described how you're not—let's see—your MOS is 92 Alpha; Automated Logistical Supply?

RP: Yes.

TS: But that's not the field that you're working in. Is there a specific MOS that you could have as secondary that you are working in?

RP: I mean, I really don't even have a title.

TS: No?

RP: I just literally do whatever the usually higher-ranking officers need me to do. Like, I am put with another section just farther [unclear] started after me because I can't really just have—it's like—of course, the rank structure shouldn't be I'm just under a sergeant major and a lieutenant colonel or a major, whatever. So I am put with other soldiers. I still have to do E-4 [army specialist] duties. I'll do—If I have to do guard or some other kind of duty, then I will. But other than that, usually it is dealing with briefings, or like with the CPOF [Command Post of the Future] that I do, I keep in communication with different people to them[?]. Like, if there's an event that happens, I have to put it on the map—a significant event—if there is some kind of IED [Improvised Explosive Device] or something, and then I have to get this information to [people] higher up. The job I was doing was not at an E-4 rank at all, it should have been at officer level, but I was able to do it and I'm good at it so they put me in that position, and it's possible if I was deployed I would be doing the same thing.

[The United States Army's Command Post of the Future is a C23 software system that allows commanders to maintain topsight over the battlefield; collaborate with superiors, peers, and subordinates over live data; and communicate their intel]

TS: Very interesting. So you're in a brigade.

RP: Yes.

TS: About how many people would you say?

RP: I don't exactly know. I mean, it's a whole lot of people, because—and only a certain number of us are there at a time. But I love my unit so much and that's why I've stayed there for so long. I mean, if I would put state-wide for my promotion I probably would get promoted, but then I'd possibly have to go to a unit in Boone or Wilmington [North Carolina cities], and I don't have time to do that once a month. Like, that would be—that's too much for me to deal with while I am in school right now, and my unit is so unbelievably good with me in school. When I had that professor who would penalize me

for missing class, they would let me come to drill late on Friday, if we had drill, so I could take my class from 8:00 [a.m.] to 9:00 [a.m.] and go back to cla—or go to drill. And we were going on a convoy and they literally—I got there just in time to jump in a Humvee and drive after class.

TS: Yeah. So they were really being accommodating to your schooling.

RP: Yeah. Oh, they were really good. Oh, yeah.

TS: And so, how was your fitting into—as a woman within this environment? Sounds like the officers and the sergeant majors treated you pretty well?

RP: Oh yeah, the officers have been unbelievable, and that's why I don't want to leave either, because they know commissioning is my goal, and so they've definitely taken me under their wing to—kind of like as a mentor and make sure I'm doing the right thing. And—But it's kind of good because I have to be kind of like a different person—not a different person with them, but more on task, on goal. I think more about my future and everything when I'm working with them, but then I can be with the enlisted people my age and we just kind of have fun and—more like carefree kind of, and I'll enjoy hanging out with them and doing things, but then I feel like I'm being more productive and doing more for my future than when I'm working, obviously, for the officers. I just feel like it is more productive and better for my future to stay here with these officers than it is to get promoted to a sergeant. So I've taken that—I'm fine if I don't get promoted this time because I'm here with officers that are going to make sure I can commission when I graduate, because as a nurse I don't have to go through OCS [Officer Candidate School] or ROTC, I can direct commission after college.

TS: Right, so having made whatever rank isn't going to really make any difference in the way that your career goes.

RP: No. I mean, I'd love to be called Sergeant Puckett, but at the same time, I wouldn't be with the same people, and I really like the people my age in my unit, and they live here, so whenever—or some people that don't live here—whenever we come in from wherever we are in the state for drill, like, we always go out to dinner afterwards, or sometimes I'll have friends stay with me, because I live not that far from the armory, and we'll just—it's just fun; it's like a little reunion every month. Because before I met a lot of people here, it was like the one time I got to see people in the military was at drill, and so it's like in a weird way we all kind of dread it—having drill—but on the other hand we enjoy seeing everyone, so.

TS: Right. It's a mixed blessing.

RP: Yeah, it is; it definitely is.

TS: Now, do you have to do any kind of two-weeks thing like you do in the reserve?

RP: Yes.

TS: Okay. Where have you had to go for those?

RP: For the first two weeks in June, I was at Fort Hood, Texas.

TS: Okay.

RP: And so, that was—I got back two days before classes started, and so that's where I was doing—we were doing twelve, fourteen hour shifts because we were simulating deployment, and that's when I was running CPOF and doing the briefs and keeping—like, information tracking. And so, that was extremely stressful, being in that environment.

TS: You were out in the field?

RP: Yeah, we were out in the field. Of course, the group I get put with, we were out in tents—in DRASH [Deployable Rapid Assembly Shelter] tents—which—

TS: What kind of tent is that?

RP: They're—It's a system where—I mean, it does have air conditioning, if it's working, but they're—it's just a giant pop-up little mini city. And so, we practice doing these multiple times a year. We'll go out to the field and we'll build it, and then we'll sleep in the area, or we'll do convoys and camp and just practice doing that. So we had that in Texas and we worked in those for two weeks, while some other lucky people got to work inside a building with things like outlets and electricity, other than—

TS: Because you're associated more with the headquarters?

RP: Right, so that's why—

TS: Rather than down at a lower level.

RP: Yes. So we were there, but it was better because I was with the people—the top people that I'm usually working with, and I was on day shift, which they always say night sh—they put an equal number of the harder workers on both, and then people that maybe don't work as well on both, but really there's way more things to do on day shift than on night shift. So day shift was way more stressful, but I was with all the people that I'm normally with; like, all the officers I'm working with. I was working with a colonel and teaching him how to do CPOF, and showing things he needed to do, and building his slides, and it was, like, his last two weeks in the army. So it was really neat, like, working with him, and his retirement party is this weekend; his big ceremony.

TS: Neat.

RP: So yeah, with my unit, and I get that one-on-one training and working with these really high-ranking officers and enlisted soldiers. So other people I've talked to, and even in the unit, they don't get the interactions that I get in this unit. Or in other units that are really small, they're just at the company level or whatever, but I'm here—our officer population outranks our enlisted population at the brigade level. So I get really good connections that I've made here at this unit. I've been there for, I guess, like, two years now, so I really know these people. And a lot of people move in and out, but the people that I work with that are full-time in the National Guard—a lot of people in our unit are full-time—so they'll stay there, and so—

TS: Rather than part-time?

RP: Right, yeah, so it's good.

TS: Well so, a couple general questions then, since you've talked pretty specifically about what you've done and also here at UNCG. You've talked about PTSD. What about the issue of military trauma from sexual abuse and assault? Has that been anything that you have had any notice of, or experience with?

RP: I personally have never experienced it or witnessed it, or I haven't had—I know when I was in basic, or when I was in AIT, it never happened in our company that I know of. But before we got to Fort Lee they put pretty much all soldiers on lockdown; we couldn't leave post overnight, we couldn't go—like certain cities—I had family in Chester [Texas?] and I couldn't even go off post to see them because that was like a restricted area that we couldn't go to. Other soldiers, before, could go off post and party, do what they wanted. We could go off post for, like, eight hours at a time, and that was only three weekends at the end of training.

TS: This is for men and women?

RP: This is for both, yeah. They also had a buddy system, so you either had to be with groups of three—so it would be three women, three males, or it would have to be two females and a male, but it couldn't be two males and a female. So they were definitely structuring how we could be apart or together. But I have had—I mean, I've heard horror stories from my friends that were in—there was a woman that I met here who was in, like, early nineties, some of the first people deployed, and—around in Iraq—and she—I mean, it was—she was sexually assaulted and it was by a contractor; pretty much, "I need this from you and I'll get your soldier's supplies," kind of situation; or someone ranking above her was trying to use his power against her. And I mean, I definitely think a lot of it has been cracked down now. I've never experienced anything like that in my unit at all.

TS: Any kind of just sexual harassment at all?

RP: There was one officer. He's not in my unit anymore; he was only there for like—actually, he was there when I was first there. And I actually almost forgot about this because it's been so long. But I guess I went to Fort Lee, Virginia for my—or not Fort Lee—Fort

Pickett, Virginia for my first AIT. That was, yeah, the first of the three that I've been to, and he was just way too friendly to be an officer when I was—I had just gotten promoted to an E-4 at the time, and he was trying to get my [phone] number and, like, texting, and all of these things. That's way inappropriate for even someone just right over-ranking you, but especially, like, an officer. And so, it was mainly just inappropriate behavior. But that's the only time I've ever experienced that with an officer.

TS: Did you ever say anything about it, or just directed it to him?

[Speaking Simultaneously]

RP: No, I never said anything; I just kept it to myself. Or yeah, and I just didn't give it to him.

TS: [chuckles] You didn't give him the information?

RP: Well, no, I didn't give him—Well, he—See, the problem was, though, I was put in his section, so he did get it from another sergeant because we all needed communication with each other, so then he did have it from that, but he wanted to then talk about other things that were not army, work related stuff.

TS: Work related.

RP: So then I just ignored it. But other than that I've never experienced anything, I've just heard stories from other people where they were put in horrible situations; that those people never should have been in the military in the first place and never should have been put in power—any kind of power—and I think that's a problem with the military, is allowing people with certain personalities to get to certain power that they shouldn't. It's like people see—people—it's almost like when I've heard stories that people weren't surprised that this person did this because of how they acted before, and it's like but they didn't do anything to stop it or prevent it or talk to this person about it. And women—And I totally understand why women don't want to talk about it, or they didn't want to before. Now I feel like maybe it is a little bit easier, but because women were—I know my friend who had problems—now, this was fifteen years ago—the VA didn't really recognize her assault.

TS: Right.

RP: They didn't recognize it. She saw a VA counselor—She saw a psychologist with the VA. Never—Nothing ever got done to him—that guy—and she followed him; she knew what company he was with, followed him, as he worked through, and he was a contractor. And then she had another guy who ended up being a sergeant major that she had problems with, and it's just—it's a horrible situation. And then the woman looks like, "Oh, well, what were you doing to make this guy do this to you?" Like, there's nothing a woman does to make a man rape her. That's some of the worst things I've ever heard people do,

is, "Well, what were you doing in this situation?" That's no excuse for what a man did to you.

TS: What kind of training does the army offer now?

RP: SHARP [Sexual Harassment Assault Response and Prevention] is the big thing. It's Sexual Harassment—Sexual Harassment and Prevention, so they just talk about no fraternization. If you do have problems there are hotlines, and each unit has a SHARP representative. I know in our unit, our sergeant, if there's ever a problem you can go and talk to him and you can—they teach you about if you want to have a restricted report or unrestricted. If it's unrestricted then the police is—they're going to investigate, and there are different procedures that it has to go through. But unfortunately, a lot of women report it but they do a restricted report so nothing can get done about it. So it's like—it's—because they're scared about it; they don't want to get backlash from other soldiers; and it can be scary.

I had an experience with a student here. I mean, it wasn't that dramatic, but I was afraid to talk about it because I didn't want to—because we were friends and I didn't want there to be problems with our other friends, and I had never understood why women didn't talk about it until that happened to me. Because I didn't want to cause conflict with all of our other friends in school, and we worked at the same place, and with our boss, and so I just didn't really tell anyone about it. So I get why women don't want to do it, and then they look like, oh, they were blamed or they had a hand in it; like, that's not what happens.

TS: There's a rippling effect that goes through a whole community, whether it's a military unit or just a local school community. It's a great way that you describe it. Yeah, interesting.

RP: And the person that I had the problem with was in the military, and so I think about—I wonder if he had problems when he was in the military with the way he treated women because that's how he treats women now. And so, it was—yeah, it was hard, and it was really until that happened to me that I did not understand why women didn't just go and say it. Like, why didn't they—

TS: What did they have to lose?

RP: Yeah. And then I realized it's—it was a person I was friends with for two years, and so now we have this entire community of people that we all know.

TS: [unclear] people will take sides?

RP: Yeah. It sounds horrible, but luckily another event happened that was public, and so then people realized, like, what kind of person he was, but it had nothing to do with what happened with me. And so, we're not friends anymore and people aren't either, so it was kind of I didn't even have to bring up what had happened there. So it ended up working out, but, I mean, it was—it was hard; like, I'm in classes with this person; we're in the same program; we all have the same friends; both—we're in the military. And so, now I

get it. Like, if you're working every day with a person in the military, this happens to you, and you don't feel like—because, I mean, what if your sergeant was best friends with this person? And how are you going to feel comfortable going to him saying this happened?

TS: Because of the chain of command, who's rating you, who's doing your performance evaluation?

RP: Yeah. Right. And so, like—And a lot of the chain of command you already know because you work with them, unless it's someone much higher above and then you don't know that person. How can you just openly talk to someone you don't really know about it? So I totally understand why women don't want to talk, but I do feel like the military is making it a lot easier though. And they are teaching people about it, and are performing more and more investigations, and it's still going to be a long time, I think, before things get where they need to be, but I do think it's about—they need to be more careful about who is staying in—like, who they're allowing to—like, to re-enlist—and being more careful about paying attention to things like people's—how they just act in general; personality types. I don't know how they're going to do it, but I just know they are getting better about making women feel more comfortable about speaking out about things. But it's not going to change anything when you have a tight community. Like, it's still going to be difficult to do it, so.

TS: Right. Well, a couple broad questions about women in the military, not necessarily related specifically to you. I don't actually remember the year—in 1994, I think—"Don't Ask, Don't Tell" was put in, and was then it was repealed during your service.

["Don't Ask, Don't Tell" was the official U.S. policy on military service by gays, bisexuals, and lesbians. The policy prohibited military personnel from discriminating against or harassing closeted homosexual or bisexual service members, while barring openly gay, lesbian, and bisexual person from military service. "Don't Ask, Don't Tell" was repealed 20 September 2011]

RP: Yes.

TS: And now transgender has been opened up.

RP: Right.

TS: What do you think about that whole issue?

RP: With the "Don't Ask, Don't Tell?"

TS: Yes. Or just with the idea of having homosexuals and transgender in the military openly?

RP: Yeah, because I think I was actually in training. I can't remember when that got repealed; it was either right before or when I was in.

TS: It was right around that time.

RP: Yeah, because I remember it was right around that time and I was like, "Yeah, I already know plenty of gay people that—" I mean, especially in my unit, people don't care. Like, no one in the military really cares. It's crazy how in the military homosexuals or gays were allowed before marriage—gay marriage was allowed. You would think that would be kind of the opposite. But I feel like the military has been—at least since I've been in—more welcoming to people of different sexualities, but—and I'm so happy about that. Like, my Aunt Kay is gay and she actually had a direct appointment to West Point, and she had to turn it down because at that time she had to. She wasn't going to risk her life and her career because—I mean, my grandfather retired as a lieutenant colonel. She could've—she just had a direct appointment, but she just didn't take it because she was gay. I mean, how—

TS: She didn't go in the military?

RP: No, she didn't go in the military. And, I mean, I understand—I totally understand why—and that's so horrible that at the time she couldn't pursue that because of who she loved. So I think it's great that the military obviously repealed "Don't Ask, Don't Tell," because I know so many—I remember reading so many stories about other soldiers that told on other soldiers for their relationships, and then they were separated from the military because of that. I just still think it wasn't even that long ago and that was a thing. To me that's just bizarre. Because growing up, even though I grew up in the country, in the South, I was not raised—I never felt anything was weird about my aunt being with a woman. I never was taught or felt like that was weird. But I remember growing up, a lot of my friends did. They were like, "Oh, gay people go to hell," because that's what they were taught at church and that's what their parents taught them. I was never taught that, so growing up I never thought it was weird. So then, like, middle school was when I realized how people were taught different things. And so, I just never understood. And then with the military, of course, I'm like, "Yeah, that makes sense. Why can't they be in the military?" It's so bizarre.

TS: Yeah. What about now with the transgender issue?

RP: I think that—I don't—it'll be interesting to see what does that actually mean; what—I guess part of it is, too, like, how—I mean, I think totally they should definitely; anyone should be able to come into the military. I think the only thing that will be interesting is, like, health coverage, because I know they wouldn't pay for me to have my jaw fixed, but are they going to be putting money into helping people transition? I think that will be interesting to see how they're going to be doing that.

TS: Right, do you go into the military to transition; right.

RP: That's honestly—That's what I was thinking. I mean, that's an extremely expensive procedure.

TS: It's a good question.

RP: And, I mean, I've studied gender identity and disorder through school and different things and I feel—I mean, my heart breaks for those people that feel like they have been trapped inside the wrong body and—but I think just safety reasons or just how—do they have to be like fully transitioned before they come into the military? Like, how is that going to work? Because most people can't just afford to go through complete reassignment. I mean, it's horrible how expensive this is, and a lot of insurances don't cover it, so it'll be interesting to see how the military deals with that, or how other people—other soldiers. Like, I wouldn't have a problem with a male soldier—or a female soldier who was born a male who hasn't fully transitioned, but she's going to be living in our barracks. I wouldn't have a problem with that. She is not attracted to me. You don't have problem with gays, why would you have a problem with someone who maybe has a different sexual organ but they don't relate to that. Like, they're not going to do anything to you. People—It's just so bizarre the way the media portrays homosexuals and people—transsexuals. It's bizarre.

TS: It's new to a lot of people.

RP: Yeah.

TS: And it's a change that they're uncomfortable with outside of their zone of comfort.

RP: Yeah. I mean, I would be welcoming to someone in my barracks who hadn't been completely transitioned or whatever—who was working through it—but I think mili—because I always think since I've had problems with health insurance through the military, and just health insurance even private side, it'll be interesting to see how they do that. Because now Chelsea Manning, who has been in Fort Leavenworth, the army is paying for her transition. I don't know. It's just—I think that's where I'm kind of like I don't know how they're going to—how they're going to do it.

[Chelsea Elizabeth Manning (born Bradley Edward Manning) is a former United States Army soldier who was convicted by court-martial in July 2013, of violations of the Espionage Act and other offenses, after disclosing to WikiLeaks nearly 750,000 classified, or unclassified but sensitive, military and diplomatic documents. On 12 February 2015, USA Today reported that the commandant of the USDB wrote in a 5 February memo, "After carefully considering the recommendation that (hormone treatment) is medically appropriate and necessary, and weighing all associated safety and security risks presented, I approve adding (hormone treatment) to Inmate Manning's treatment plan." According to USA Today, Manning remained a soldier, and the decision to administer hormone therapy was a first for the Army.]

TS: Yeah. That's a definitely interesting case, too.

RP: I don't know. But I would be totally welcoming. I don't know how other people are going to accept it.

[Speaking Simultaneously]

TS: Are going to accept it.

RP: Because I—There were people in training that were not cool with some of the homosexual soldiers, but I feel like overall, though, most people were fine with the other gay soldiers. I don't know. But I know the army has—or all of the services have a year to implement and create a protocol before that's actually going to happen, so I guess we'll see in a year what they're going to do. It's definitely—

TS: Yeah, in flux there; it's in flux for sure.

RP: Yeah.

TS: But it's so new I thought I would ask you about it.

RP: Yeah, no, it's definitely a different—

TS: Well, there's a whole list of questions here about after the military, so we can't ask those.

RP: I mean, I have future plans.

TS: But there are two more questions I have for you. Is there anything in particular you want a civilian—which you are also, part-time, right?—to know or understand about what it's like to serve in the military that they may not understand or appreciate?

RP: I think—I don't know. I think it's maybe a lot of—at least with me being in the Guard and doing all these different things and being distracted, I feel like I am way more stressed out than maybe most people are. Or I feel like I have a lot more on my plate than a lot of other college students have, and so maybe just to appreciate that we have a lot going on and a lot happening and a lot of experiences that maybe you can't understand, but maybe show a little bit more—I don't know—

TS: Empathy?

RP: —empathy sometimes, at least for just—at least with students-wise, that'd be nice. [chuckles] Just a little bit. But I don't know. Other civilians—I think I've always felt like—maybe it's just a different path we took, but that doesn't make us that much

different than them. We just took a different path and maybe we have different experiences. Our personalities are usually a little different, but other than that—

TS: How do you think they're different?

RP: I don't know. I feel like some of us are just a little more, maybe, outspoken or direct, or maybe a little more loud. I don't know. I think it just—Maybe it just depends. At least the people I'm friends with are a little more sarcastic—maybe a little more just—I don't know.

TS: Military humor is kind of unique.

RP: Yes, it is. It's a little darker; it's pretty dark; a little more cruel—I don't know. But we're not—we don't get offended a lot so—but I feel like we maybe sometimes offend other people, or they may be a little shocked at how we act sometimes, but I don't know.

TS: This isn't my last question but you made me think of something that I used to ask a lot more a long time ago, and that was whether a woman felt she was independent, they all felt independent and that it wasn't the military that shaped that; they already had that in them. Do you feel that way too?

RP: I feel like me going into the military was a very independent driven move, because I knew going into the military I'd be able to pay for my own school, I'd be able to have—I'd probably be able to find jobs through that, and I'd be able to pay for my own rent. That's how I am now. All of my income comes through the military. I pay pretty much all of my own bills. I'm—My parents still help me out with a few things like health insurance—

TS: Care packages.

RP: Yeah. [both chuckle] Sometimes! Sometimes they bring me food. But, I mean, I do have some basic stuff through my parents, but other than that the army has allowed me to pay all of my rent, pretty much all my bills. I don't get a lot of help from my parents anymore. I'm only twenty-one and I moved out when I was nineteen. So—But I think going into the military, part of that was, like, me being driven to be a more independent person. And that helped me, but I do feel like I was already that way before I did go in.

TS: And so, maybe, the responsibilities that you're given at such a young age in the military enhances some of those real core values and skills that you already have, do you think?

RP: Oh, yeah.

TS: Sharpen them maybe?

RP: For sure. Oh, yeah. I mean, my friends who are twenty-one, we're complete different people—complete different people—and sometimes I just look, like, "What are you—

What are you doing?" Sometimes. It's like, oh, but they didn't have to worry about the practicality of, sometimes, their degree, or the practicality of their job, or how they were working, because their parents were paying for everything, or they were living at home, or they found a guy to pay for all of their things. I do have a lot of friends who just kind of got into relationships and they don't have to work because their boyfriends do; some of that kind of thing.

I think I wasn't—I never had the idea that—I think definitely relationship-wise I want to be in a relationship where it's like 50/50 and we support each other, but I don't want a guy completely having control and taking care of me. I want to be in a different kind of relationship than—I feel like that—that I can take care of myself, and so—that's fine. But I do feel like—But I do think the military, though, does—not enforce it, but it does help women. It's empowering. I think it's very empowering to women. And a lot of my friends that were in the military, they're all like that.

And so, I mean, I don't think it's a bad thing that some of my friends are in the relationships they're in or they're doing what they're doing, but I've been able to speed up the process of certain things because of the military, and I'll be able to start my career and start a lot of things in my life before my other friends will because I've had the—the army has provided me a lot of things to be able to do that.

TS: To support you.

RP: Yes.

TS: Well, what does patriotism mean to you?

RP: I think it means just supporting the people in our country and showing support for the people in our country. You may not necessarily agree with everything that's happening, but you still need to do what you can to support it and do what you can. I guess that maybe.

TS: [to Kimber Heinz] I was going to ask Kimber—you're writing like crazy over there—but is there anything that you want to ask that we haven't asked? And then I'm going to ask Rachel if she has anything to sum up with.

KH: Sure. Well, one question that kind of goes back to this idea of trauma and how important that's been as a [unclear] to your life—

RP: Yes.

KH: What was the impact of the trauma that your grandfather experienced on your family and on you and your choices?

TS: That's a great question.

RP: I always grew up hearing stories of how he became an alcoholic after he came out of the military because he couldn't—he didn't want to think about what happened, what he saw

in Vietnam, from what other soldiers did, or what he had to do, and he had some really horrible experiences. And I remember hearing about that growing up, and I never got to meet him, and that was like if I could ever meet someone from the past it would be my grandfather, because just to hear his experience, or what I'm doing, because I was the only grandkid to go into the military. So I think just hearing personal stories like that, that makes me want to help soldiers now.

TS: Yeah.

RP: And so, I haven't experienced any problems like that, but I know so many obviously have, and my friends have. And so, doing research with PTSD or helping soldiers like that. A lot of problems they have—they become addicted to narcotics and medications because they're over-prescribed medications, and so then that leads to a lot—here a lot of vets that are homeless and it's because they've had horrible medical treatment, and that is leading them to untreated mental illness and homelessness, due to drug abuse and sorts of other things. So somewhere there needs to be prevention and the line needs to be stopped before our soldiers are getting to that point. So that's definitely been a big part in driving what I want to do.

TS: Yeah, excellent. Anything else that you wanted to ask?

KH: No, I think that's the biggest one.

TS: That's a great question though, to see how it relates to your life, too. Well, you have a career ahead of you, I hope, and I hope that you come back and share that with us.

RP: Yeah, I think that'd be great.

TS: But is there anything that you'd like to say that we haven't asked you about, or if you'd like to just sum up where you're at in your experience so far.

RP: Well, I think it's been, overall, an amazing experience. I don't think I'd be in nursing school now if it wasn't for the army. I'd probably—I mean, I honestly don't know where I would be. I probably would be in school, but I wouldn't be as successful as I am today if it wasn't for the military, getting a—I mean, I had a foundation before, but I was really, really shy and—I'm still a nervous, anxious person, but the army has helped me go past it and give me the strength to deal with some of the other problems that I deal with every day. I know I have the military to support me, and I'm going to—I'll always have the military, that family, there. And they—I get amazing training and I've been able to go all over the country. Hopefully, eventually, I'll get to go out of the country. I mean, I know that sounds crazy but I do hope to deploy after college. I'll commission as a nurse, hopefully that will all work out. I'll do some traveling. And then the army will then pay to get my nurse practitioner and psych mental health and I'll still continue in the military—we'll see for how long—or at least work at maybe a VA hospital or with other veterans. I think that'd be really great.

TS: So you don't necessarily want to make it a career? Depends on how it goes?

RP: I think it just depends on how it goes. I mean, maybe not a full career, but I do want to at least stay in and finish my degrees, get some really good experience. I'd like to work at Walter Reed [Army Medical Center, Washington D.C.] because they have a really awesome—their psychiatric or neuro psychiatry is one of my favorite things, and to be able to study there and work with their top physicians there would be awesome; have that experience. And psych—psychiatry and all that has always been something I've loved to study. I worked at the ADHD [attention-deficit hyperactivity disorder] clinic here for a year and a half, and I think that would be something I'd want to look into other than in the military; that and anxiety disorders, that's something I'd really like to study, too. So I have things other than the military that I also want to focus on.

[Speaking Simultaneously]

TS: Right. You have a wide, wide world ahead of you, Rachel!

RP: There's so much that—I know. There's so much that I want to do, but I know I'll always have the military to support me, if I want that there, so it's like I've never—it's like I feel like I'm one of the few college students where I really don't have to worry about what my job is going to be when I graduate because I kind of have it—I kind of have it set.

TS: Excellent.

RP: I'm kind of ready; ready to go.

TS: Good.

RP: But I'm very positive about my future. Here at UNCG—I forgot to mention the Veteran Access Program that I'm in now. It's—Like I said, the nursing program for veterans, we have a cohort of twenty-four that they've added additional slots for. They give us a study room. We actually get free services at the psych clinic, which is really awesome. I've been trying to get some of my friends to go. I mean, I've gone and utilized it. I got free evaluations, and, I mean, it's just been a really awesome experience. Dr. [Susan] Letvak—she's the director of undergraduate admissions and runs the Veterans Access Program; she's the one who wrote the grant—she was a nurse in the navy, so—

TS: Oh, wow.

RP: Yeah. She's extremely busy, but maybe you can try to talk to her; Dr. Letvak—L-E-T-V-A-K. But she is an amazing, amazing woman and has kind of been a mentor to me. But her big part of writing this grant was—it's very difficult for soldiers, they had this amazing experience, way more than what some P.A.s have, but when they get out of the military it doesn't translate. So that's a way for—We had a Special Forces medical

sergeant that's going to be able to graduate the nursing program in a year and a half, and he's taking his NCLEX in December.

TS: Excellent.

RP: So it's a great program for people transitioning out of the military to come into this program. So that's what I'm—I helped recruit students into that, get them accustomed to coming to a university. There were some students we had were out of the military for five days when they came here and they were like, "I don't even know where I'm going to be living. I don't know how to set up my schedule." And so, I'd sit with them for, like, two or three hours just to show them how to register and get their classes right. And I kind of like the organization and guiding students because I had struggles with it, but I was only in training for a year; they were in the military for, like, eight years. So I'm able to help students transition, which I really enjoyed. And now I'm in the program, I'm not working there now, but I work at the Veteran's Resource Center that I started working there this summer after the nursing school, and so then we just help students with their benefits and kind of transitioning too.

TS: Well, it sounds like you have been a bridge in a lot of different ways.

RP: Yeah.

TS: And other people have been bridges for you, to school, to the army, and things like that.

RP: Yeah.

TS: I hope it keeps up. That's great.

RP: Yeah, I like continually doing stuff with veterans and for veterans. I think it's a lot of fun, and they need it a lot, so I have a lot of fun. UNCG in general, it is super military friendly and has been—I'm so happy I decided to come here and not—I thought at first, "Oh, I'll just come here for a year and then maybe I'll transfer or something to get out of Greensboro." Because I have family in Greensboro right outside—

TS: We all want to get away, right?

RP: —right outside of Greensboro. I went to [Walter Hines] Page [High School] and I just thought that—I never thought I'd stay in Greensboro for school, but then I came here and I'm like, "This is the perfect little community." And then moving into Greensboro was totally different because now it's like I'm able to—and, of course, once I turned twenty-one it was a lot more fun. But just—now it is like my home, and I've thought if—if the nursing school would get a psychiatric nurse practitioner program I'd totally come here for that, which I've been talking to them about that for, like, two years now; I'm like, "Can you get a psych program, please? Because I'll stay here; I'll stay here. And then the army will still pay for it. Then I might leave to get my doctorate, but I'll come back and teach."

TS: You got plenty of plans.

RP: But UNCG has been amazing in helping not just me, but other students transition too.

TS: Well, maybe we can end it there. What do you think?

RP: Yeah, that's cool.

TS: Does that sound good?

RP: Yes.

TS: Okay. Well, thank you so much for all your time, and yours, too, Kimber.

KH: Thank you.

[End of Interview]