

**WOMEN VETERANS HISTORICAL PROJECT**  
**ORAL HISTORY COLLECTION**

INTERVIEWEE: J'Metria M. Williams Anderson

INTERVIEWER: Tamara Shovelton

DATE: 4 February 2021

[Note: This transcript has been edited and portions will be restricted until January 1, 2047]

[Begin Interview]

TS: Okay, so I'm going to start. So today is February 4, 2021. I am interviewing J'Metria Williams, through Zoom [teleconferencing web application] because of COVID[-19]. This is going to be a history interview for the Women's Veterans Historical Collection at the University of North Carolina at Greensboro. J'Metria, could you please state your name the way that you would like it to read on your record collection?

JM: Sure. J'Metria M. Williams [JM changed to Anderson later].

TS: Okay. J'Metria, thank you for letting me come and talk with you today. Let's start off by having you tell us just a little bit about when you were born and where you're from.

JM: I was born in Gulfport, Mississippi. That's where I'm originally born and raised. I spent all of my youth down in Gulf Coast of Mississippi. I miss it so much. It's a coastal town in the Gulf of Mexico. Growing up, it was just a small town until the casino started taking over. And now it's like a little mini city, I guess. It's a touristy town now. Not so much because of the beaches, but because of the casinos or whatnot. But we are surrounded down there. We have the Navy Seabee Base and we have Keesler Air Force Base, and we also have the ship building yard of Ingalls, where they build military ships.

TS: Oh, okay. What did your parents do?

JM: My dad is an air force veteran. My mom was a stay-at-home mom. My dad was an engineer working at DuPont [American chemical company].

TS: Oh, okay. Very good. Do you have any brothers or sisters?

JM: I do, so many to name. [both chuckle] I have an older brother whom I grew up with, and a younger sister, who are both up here in North Carolina with me. They both had to relocate due to [Hurricane] Katrina.

TS: Oh, Katrina. That's terrible. Where did you go to high school?

[Hurricane Katrina was a large Category 5 Atlantic hurricane which caused over 1,800 deaths and \$125 billion in damage in August 2005, particularly in the city of New Orleans and the surrounding areas. It was at the time the costliest tropical cyclone on record, and is now tied with 2017's Hurricane Harvey]

JM: I went to high school at Gulfport High [School], Admiral Pride [The Gulfport High School mascot is the Admiral], yes, [football—JM clarified later] big down there.

TS: And what was you—Well, I'm sorry?

JM: High school sports is very big down further south?

TS: Yes. It's a lifestyle really.

JM: It is. It really is.

TS: What was your favorite subject in high school?

JM: Probably science and English.

TS: Okay. What year did you graduate?

JM: I graduated in '97.

TS: Okay. What did you do after you graduated? Did you go right into the military, or did you do something first?

JM: Oh no, two weeks after graduating, I left. I went straight into the military. I actually had to get a waiver from my dad because I signed up when I was seventeen, and so I knew that I was going to leave. So yeah.

TS: So you were in the Delayed Entry Program for the Marine Corps. Okay. When did you decide? You were seventeen, so you were probably a junior in high school?

[The Delayed Entry Program (DEP) is designed to give potential recruits time to put their affairs in order, finish school, etc. before shipping out for basic training.]

JM: No, I was a senior.

TS: You're a senior. When did you actually know that what you wanted to do was go into the military?

JM: Well, it wasn't until—I love art. Well, I should've said art is my favorite subject. I didn't know what I wanted to do. And in my school, we had Marine Corps recruiters, and we had the Marine Corps ROTC [Reserve Officers' Training Corps], which I never joined. I'm into all the sports, but never joined the ROTC. It was probably halfway—well, a quarter way into my senior year that I saw the recruiter in my school and was like, "Hmm, I think I want to go to the military," because I didn't want to waste the money. My dad gave me some ultimatums: You either go to college and I'll help you pay for it; you go military; or you get out and I'll help you pay for your first six months of rent and then that's it.

So I was like, "Well, I think I'll go into the military." He didn't want me to go in the Marine Corps though, he wanted me to go in the [U.S.] Air Force. But being a rebel that I am, nope. If I'm going to go into any branch, I'm going to Marine Corps because their uniforms are better. [chuckles] They have the better branch.

TS: That's true, they do have phenomenal uniforms.

JM: Yes. Yeah, in December of '96, I believe it was, is when I signed the papers to enter the Delayed Entry Program.

TS: Okay. The Marine Corps was the branch you chose.

JM: Yeah.

TS: And for no other reason?

JM: Their uniforms and that they were the best. [chuckles]

TS: Okay, that's totally fair. Is there a particular person who influenced you in your decision in joining the military?

JM: Nope.

TS: Nope. Okay. Were you influenced by recruiting posters or any other recruiting efforts?

JM: No. I made the decision and that was just final. If I can recall, I looked into their basic training. I just knew I needed some structure. I liked hard-to-do things that other people find difficulty in doing, and I just went with it. And I didn't even realize at that time that I had uncles in the Marine Corps.

TS: Oh, okay. How were women perceived who joined the military by the general public when you were joining? We'll make that sort of a two-part question: just the military in general, but also how were women perceived who joined the Marine Corps?

JM: Well, if we're going to be candid here, the only women to join the Marine Corps were gay women, hard women, not soft women. And that's what I was told. And my recruiter, though, they had all kinds of great things to say, because they needed the [recruitment] quota. [chuckles]

TS: Right.

JM: My dad didn't want me to join the Marine Corps because they were too hard, and he thought I would do better in the air force. He didn't think that I had the fortitude, I don't think, to hack it. I didn't talk to many people about joining; the only people that I do remember speaking about to join were the recruiters, to get their insight. And I remember them connecting me with female Marines that they had already signed, and I had conversations with them.

TS: Okay. And so, you said that your dad didn't really want you to join the Marine Corps, he would have been happier if you had joined the air force, but how did like your mom or your siblings, or your friends, how did they feel about you joining the military, and specifically the Marine Corps?

JM: Well, my mom passed in '95, so she was not there.

TS: Oh, I'm so sorry.

JM: It's fine. [comment redacted]

TS: Care, that's fair.

JM: My sister didn't know what was going on. She's five years younger than me.

TS: Oh, okay.

JM: And I didn't really have a relationship with other women in my life.

TS: And none of your friends, they didn't say anything? Or what was it like?

JM: I don't think they knew what they wanted. They couldn't really say anything.

TS: That's fair.

JM: I don't think I would have listened. [chuckles]

TS: That's fair. Did you sign up for a certain duration? What was your contract time?

JM: Yeah, four years.

TS: Four years. Okay. And then, I know we talked about this previously, before we started recording, but some of the questions, we're going to go over them more than once.

What date did you join and where? And so, "where" can be like—and I know, right, because you joined, you've got to go to MEPS [Military Entrance Processing Station], and you sort of signed the paper there. You can use where the MEP station was, or you can use where you lived at; it's up to you.

JM: Well, I joined in Gulfport, Mississippi. And what was the second question?

TS: When?

JM: It was December of '96, but I didn't go to boot camp until June '97.

TS: Because you were in the Delayed Entry Program.

JM: Right.

TS: Okay. All right, very good. When you left to go to basic training, was that the first time that you had ever been away from home?

JM: No. Well, by myself, yes.

TS: Yes.

JM: Yes, yes.

TS: And how was that?

JM: It was an experience. It was scary. I can remember looking for other women, or girls, because I was so young. It was my first flight. It was scary. I'm not going to lie to you, I was like, "Okay, well, I'm in here now." [chuckles]

TS: Can you tell me what you remember about your first couple of days in the Marine Corps?

JM: I was like, "Oh my gosh, why are they yelling at me? Okay, well this is it, I'm in it, but are they going to keep yelling like this?"

TS: Can you tell us again where you did your basic training at?

JM: Yes, it was Parris Island, South Carolina.

TS: Okay. Can you describe like a typical day of basic training in Parris Island?

JM: Wake up around 5:00-ish. We do PT [physical training], have breakfast. And then we do drills, training. It was marching, and learning the Marine Corps way of life, uniform maintenance, comradery and how to work as a team. It was a lot of physical work in our boot camp.

TS: Was your boot camp integrated? Was it male and female, or was it all female?

JM: All female.

TS: Okay. How about your drill sergeants?

JM: They were all female.

TS: All female as well?

JM: Yes.

TS: Oh, okay. Very good. Once you finish boot camp, you get to go to Advanced Individual Training. Where did you go for that?

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

JM: Once I finished boot camp, I went to Camp Geiger [part of Marine Corps Base Camp Lejeune complex] for two weeks for what we call MCT.

TS: Okay.

JM: And that's Marine Combat Training. You leave boot camp and then you go to Marine Combat Training. And that was hell, because at the time I chose to go to boot camp, I went to boot camp in the middle of summer, which I planned, but I didn't realize that I would have to go to MCT in the middle of winter. I was not ready for frozen feet and hands.

TS: Where's Camp Geiger located?

JM: Camp Geiger is in Jacksonville, North Carolina. It's right outside of New River Air Station. You have New River Air Station, Camp Geiger, and Camp Lejeune, all in the same area. That was more combat training. That's where you learn how to do warfare and all that stuff; more detailed, more work.

TS: When you were at your MCT, was that still all-female?

JM: Right. It was still all female, but we did integrate some with the guys.

TS: And was it still female trainers?

JM: Yes.

TS: Okay, two weeks of Camp Geiger, and then—

JM: Right, then I got to go to school.

TS: And you went to school where?

JM: Fort Leonard Wood, Missouri.

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TS: Which is an army base.

JM: Which is an army base, in the middle of nowhere, in the middle of Missouri. And here I am, coming from the coast of Mississippi where we may get about an inch or two of snow, to, I'm talking, a foot or more. [chuckles] So it was a culture shock. It was a culture shock.

TS: What was a typical day like at Fort Leonard Wood?

JM: Cold. Oh my gosh, it was cold. But we'd wake up, I remember doing training—PT—and we learned the trucks; the inside and outs of our vehicles. We'd drive around all day, every day. That is integrated; I was trained by mixed female and men. And also, we were integrated with the army.

We had horrible trucks. I think we had the scraps of military. But it was all about learning the maintenance and everything that we needed to know, as far as being in convoys and taking care of our gear, making sure that our loads are correct, and backing up and going forward. It wasn't the job I wanted, but it was the job I got.

TS: The Marine Corps, just so that people will understand when they listen to or read your transcript, when you joined the Marine Corps, you don't get to pick the job, right? You get to pick like a couple of options, correct?

JM: No, I was able—Well, yes, I think you get to pick three options and it depends on your score. And see, I did not score high enough on the ASVAB [Armed Services Vocational Aptitude Battery] to pick what I really wanted. I thought I was going to go in as, I believe, 3500, which was either a mechanical or driver. And I think admin [administration] because I scored really high in the admin portion. But I ended up being a truck driver an—I don't know—in hindsight now, I'm like, "Why did I do that?" But it is a lesson learned. But yes, you get to pick. If I'm not mistaken, you get to pick three, and then they choose it based off of your answer. But I could be wrong. It's been a minute.

[3500 Military Occupational Specialty (MOS): U.S. Marine Corps Basic Motor Transport]

TS: No, you're right. The Marine Corps, you pick three, and then based on your ASVAB and what the Marines need at the time.

JM: Right. Yeah, at the time, because I was upset I was a driver; thought I was going to be a mechanic.

TS: Yeah, because in the army, we picked the job we want; we know exactly what we're doing before. [chuckles]

JM: That is a smart way to do it.

TS: It does work. Now, when you went to Fort Leonard Wood, that was the first time in your training that you'd been integrated with males and females. How was the living situation in terms of living in the barracks? Did the men and women live on the same floors?

JM: I believe we had different floors, but we were in the same building.

TS: Same building?

JM: Yes.

TS: Okay. All right, once you finish AIT, you're going to go to your first duty station, which was?

JM: Guantanamo Bay, Cuba [Guantanamo Bay Naval Base]. And I can remember the day I was told I was going to Guantanamo Bay.

TS: And how did you feel about that?

JM: I was like, "What in the hell? We don't have a base in Guantanamo Bay. What do you mean, I'm going to Cuba? Aren't they communists?" [chuckles] And I was like, I don't think so. But it was one of the best duty stations. I swear it was.

TS: What was a typical day like in Guantanamo Bay?

JM: There weren't a lot of female marines. There were maybe three of us, were on what we call Marine Corps Hill. It is a Naval Base, it's not a Marine Corps Base. The navy have their section, the Marines have their section, which is on the hill. And then we also have a section on the leeward side, which we would have to take a boat over to get to. Typical day was—oh gosh—working out. They had me working out five, six days a week, and it was because Cuba is mountainous, and so if you can't keep up, then you're going to be in remedial. So I ended up being in remedial, having to run every morning, or every



evening, up and down mountains until I could get it right. I didn't get it right until I got to Jacksonville where it was flat, and I was the bomb [excellent] with running because I had been conditioned. But I'd PT every day, go to the motorpool, hang out. We do runs with the grunts—we call them "grunts" for infantry—because it is an infantry unit; so I was attached to an infantry unit. I would do night runs with them, or night drives. We'd do hikes. It was just, really, us staying prepared in case someone came over from the other side.

At one point I was the driver for our CO [commanding officer]. That didn't last long; I was a horrible driver. [chuckles] Oh gosh. But oddly enough, they asked me to extend in order to be the driver for Hillary Clinton [Democratic Presidential Candidate in the 2016 elections. 67th United States Secretary of State from 2009-2013. US Senator from New York 2001-2009. First Lady of the United States 1993-2001], because the Clintons were going to come over maybe a month or two after I was leaving. But I told them, no, I was tired I was ready to go.

But it was different. I enjoyed being there. I didn't realize how much I enjoyed it until I got to the state side. That's where travel and being around different cultures really opened my eyes to the world, because here I am, a little girl from Mississippi, and I'm around—we had Filipinos and Cubans and Jamaicans that were living on base with us. I didn't have that experience. In Mississippi, it was blacks, whites, and then mixed[?]; that's the culture I grew around. So it opened my eyes to a whole other slew of cultures, and I just fell in love with the island. It was beautiful. Couldn't go anywhere; couldn't go anywhere. [chuckles] I don't know when they stopped military from traveling across the border, but yeah, we were stuck right there. So we made the best of it.

TS: That's fair. And so, when you left Cuba, where did you go next?

JM: New River Air Station.

TS: What was your typical day at New River?

JM: Same thing. I know we trained Monday, Wednesdays and Fridays. We'd have—Fridays would be our group run where the whole squadron would run. I was part of MWSS 272, which is a Marine Wing Support Squadron. After training, I'd go to the motor pool, we'd start up all the trucks, make sure all the trucks were good, check all of the oils and everything, make sure everything was running, and take supplies back and forth between the different air wings.

I also did a stint where I was the dispatcher for MAG [ Marine Aircraft Group]-29, which is a part of the group that we supported. Because the unit that I was part of, we were a support group; we provided the transportation and the fuel. And this is a helicopter unit, so making sure that they had all of their things as well.

I love training, so I stayed training a lot. If they needed someone to train or go somewhere like [Marine corps Air Station] Cherry Point, I was there. It was just typical, like a regular job—like now except me working out early in the morning, I stopped that after COVID hit—but wake up, work out, go to work.

TS: Yeah. I think that's one of the things some people don't realize when they think about going into the military is, it's really just a job. I'm assuming you might get deployed, you might go to the field, but like, for the most part, you go in, and you come home, and you have your weekends off and stuff. Yeah.

When you were in Guantanamo, what was the living situation like? Where did you live?

JM: I lived in the barracks, and there were, again, three females. We had three rooms within a quadrant—I think there were four rooms within this quadrant—and that's where the females lived. And then we were surrounded by male marines.

TS: It was co-ed living?

JM: Co-ed living, yeah.

TS: Okay. How about when you got back stateside? What was the living?

JM: Same thing; we lived in a barracks, co-ed.

TS: Co-ed, okay. Let's see. In terms of your job assignments, what was your favorite?

JM: My job assignment?

TS: Yes.

JM: I think maybe when I was a dispatcher for MAG-29; I liked that job. It got me away from the motorpool and it gave me more responsibility than the typical marine going to the motorpool, starting the truck [JM clarified later], checking the fuels, blah, blah, blah. I was in control of ensuring that everyone at that airwing had what they needed, and I think that was my favorite, besides going to Corporal and Sergeants Course.

TS: Okay. What was your least favorite?

JM: Being at the motorpool. [chuckles]

TS: Totally fair. Do you recall any notable stories; maybe something happened that was super amusing, or something that you did that always sticks with you?

JM: None that I'd like to share. [chuckles] Marine Corps is different. I went through a lot in my first year being stationed in Guantanamo Bay, because, like I said, there were only three females. It's a white male-dominated culture and branch of the military service. So I felt like I was getting picked on a lot. And I remember one time—and I'm so sorry if he has nightmares to this day but—we were on a night drive, and my sergeant at the time, who did not want to recognize that I was the most senior member, he would always say, "Well, you need to drive." He has snuff [chewing tobacco] in his mouth. "You need to drive this truck."

JM: All right. Well, one night drive, I decided we're going to drive this damn thing—we're going to drive it right. And boy, I drove, and we were going down the mountain, the truck lifted up in the back. Oh my gosh, he was so scared, and he was, "What are you doing Lance Corporal Williams!?"

And I'm like, "You said drive. I'm going to drive this truck." [chuckling] So yeah, I hope he don't have nightmares. He might not. I mean, it couldn't have been the worst thing. But I'll never forget.

TS: That would be memorable for sure. You did serve overseas in Cuba. Can you tell me how you navigated some of the cultural differences while you were there? Or did you feel like there weren't any to navigate?

JM: No. In Cuba, there were no cultural differences to navigate. The only thing I can say—because we had Cubans, we had Jamaicans, we had Filipinos there. The only thing, being in Gulfport, Mississippi, growing up on the coast of Mississippi, I had never really experienced racism until I got to the military. So it was internal culture that I had to navigate. It was the, "you're a female, you can't do this," or "you're a black female, you can't do this." It was that mentality that I had to navigate, more so than the culture of the island that I was a part of.

TS: Okay. All right. And you never served in any combat zones?

JM: No.

TS: Okay. In what ways, and how often, were you able to communicate with your family and friends?

JM: Oh, this was the time the internet was popping up. We had email and phone. It was phone. I could make calls and do chat in the email.

TS: And what kind of topics did you discuss with them?

JM: Nothing really.

TS: You don't feel like you faced any kind of challenges in trying to communicate with your friends and family?

JM: No. A lot of my friends—I left everything. So yeah. And when I spoke with my family, it was over the phone. I didn't have a problem with communicating with them.

TS: What did you do in your off time?

JM: This is being recorded? [both chuckling]

TS: It is.

JM: We partied; we partied hard. Fridays, we'd have steak and lobster because the chowhall guys would cook for us. We'd go to the beaches, we had different beaches in Cuba, and we had us some parties, and we would [drink] and I'm over age now, but we had to let it out; we couldn't go anywhere. But we had so much fun. I still have the pictures now. We partied; every weekend we partied.

TS: Now, did you date while you were in the military?

JM: I did.

TS: How was that? Was that challenging?

JM: I didn't date enough. [chuckles] It was not challenging because I was surrounded by men. But trying to—I can say, I think going in so young, there should be some type of training for females; like, "Look out for this; be mindful of this. Don't get married too young; take your time."

But yeah, I dated. I didn't have a problem with dating, it was just trying to navigate whether or not, "Are you dating me because I'm the only female here or you're dating me because you really like me.?" So that was in the beginning; that was in Guantanamo. And then when I went to New River, I dated, but then that's where I met my husband.

TS: Oh, okay. Was your husband in the military too?

JM: Yeah.

TS: Okay. We'll get to that. Aside from dating, did you have any other close relationships with people within your unit?

JM: I did, that I've lost touch with. Cuba, yes; I had close relationships with almost everybody because we were so tight. New River. Yeah, some friends I still talk—I spoke to someone this morning; we were stationed together in New River. I have a family of marines that—we still keep in contact to this day.

TS: That's very good. You met your husband while you were in the military.

JM: Yes.

TS: And he was in the Marines too?

JM: He was in the Marines as well.

TS: And you're both stationed at the same duty station?

JM: Yes.

TS: Did you guys work together?

JM: We were in the same unit. He was in admin and I was in motor T [transport].

TS: Oh, okay. Okay. Was that frowned upon at all?

JM: I was warned not to get married. It wasn't frowned upon, but they were—I had a meeting, actually. My sergeant and my XO [executive officer] brought me in and they were like, "We don't think you should get married. You're a little young. You just got here. You have a lot going, you're one of our best performing marines," and I did it anyway. [chuckles]

But it wasn't frowned upon, but having a man talk to you about not getting married, you're not going to listen, you need a woman's perspective, and I think that's what was lacking. [Redacted] They would frown upon if you were NCO [non-commissioned officer] trying to date a staff NCO. If that's the case, you better not be in the same unit.

TS: Right. For sure. Now, did you have any of your children while you were in the military?

JM: I had my first born while I was still in, and he was born on Camp Lejeune. Camp Lejeune [pronounced "Lejerne"]; I can't say Camp Lejeune anymore.

TS: Very good. Now, what was the most memorable decoration or award that you received while you were in the Marine Corps?

JM: My sergeant—Oh my gosh, I shouldn't have gotten out. I was going to be Sergeant Major of the Marines. It was when I picked up E-5, and I did it in three years; I was a bad ass. Oh, I don't even want to talk about it. I could be retiring right now. Yeah, it was when I picked up ser—Oh, wait, no, I think when I passed Sergeants Course, because all the years I was in the Marine Corps, I had heard how hard it was. How hard it's going to be, and blah, blah, blah. And I was one of the top performing marines in that class. So yeah.

TS: What was the highest rank that you received?

JM: E-5.

TS: E-5. In general, how were your relationships with your supervisors?

JM: My first duty station, not so good.

TS: And I would assume—pardon me if I'm wrong—in Guantanamo Bay, your supervisors were all male?

JM: Yeah. Well, they were all male, period.

TS: Period. Oh, across the board?

JM: Right. Motor T is dominated by men. So yeah, they were—But I loved my supervisors in New River; they were more understanding. And I think as you do go up in rank, there's a little bit more respect. So that could have been a thing too.

TS: How would you describe your relationship with your peers?

JM: I was respected. They knew I played no games. Yeah, it was really tight. I, actually, still talk with a lot of my marines who were under me, now. Yeah, it was great comradery. When I got out, that's one thing that I missed the most, was the comradery.

TS: Yeah. That's true. Did you receive or give any mentoring during your years in service? And can you describe that for us?

JM: I did not give any, nor did I receive any, if you discount—No, no mentors.

TS: Okay. Did you receive any advanced training or education as your career progressed?

JM: Yes.

TS: In what?

JM: The Corporal, Sergeants Course. I did the—Oh gosh, I did a course on—I can't think of the name of it—it's for the warfare where they gas you—and I can't think of it.

TS: Guerrilla warfare?

JM: No, it was something different. I can't think of the name of it. I don't remember. I did some—I think that's about it. Yeah, as far as training.

TS: Okay. Were there any schools or special training that you would've liked to have been a part of?

JM: Well, if I had stayed in longer, I'm pretty sure I would have found some more classes to go to, but I didn't stay in long enough. I had trained in almost everything that I possibly could at the time I was in.

TS: Did you supervise or command troops or anyone, and how would you characterize your experience with that?

JM: I did, yeah. My experience was, I did what I was taught, or what I had learned, or what I had went through. As you go up, you kind of mimic your supervisor. So I was hands on, I didn't take excuses, but I showed—or at least I hoped I showed—respect. But I did make the pokes—the lower ranks—do all the work. [chuckles]

TS: That's fair. How did your subordinates treat you?

JM: Fine; they love me to this day. [chuckles]

TS: That's good. Did you experience or witness discrimination on or off the job?

JM: Yeah, on the job. If it was off the job, I gave two flips, because I was in my own barracks room or whatever. But yeah, definitely on [the job].

TS: Can you elaborate on the types of discrimination that you encountered?

JM: I don't think it was racial for me, I think it was more gender-based discrimination, and that was in the beginning, when I was in Guantanamo Bay. I was the senior, lower end, but I was treated as the lowest of the low; given the bad jobs to do, and not chosen to do other things, and someone less ranked than I was, was chosen. And so, he had to speak up and say, "I'm not even the most senior." Yeah, for me, it was more the gender; going through that was hard.

TS: Did you see any changes in the Marine Corps over the course of your career while you were in?

JM: No.

TS: No? Did attitudes towards women change while you were in the service?

JM: Yes. Attitudes toward women changed when I went to New River, and I constantly had to hear, they had never seen a female that was able to run or do pushups like me. And I would get praised for that, and that made me feel some type of way, because I'm like, "Well, I'm just doing what I was trained to do."

But to hear that constantly, it was something that I made note of. Attitudes did change, because they would always talk about women, especially if you got pregnant. Oh, don't get pregnant. That's a no-no. Once you get pregnant, then there's no coming back and you're lazy. But yeah, they love to categorize us as being the weaker ones, when it comes to doing certain things.

TS: Did you find that there were opportunities that you were passed over by because of your gender?

JM: Only in the beginning.

TS: How do you feel the military treated you regarding pay, promotions, and assignments?

JM: I think that it was fine. I was even nominated to do Meritorious [Promotion] Boards.

[Meritorious promotions are intended to promote "exceptionally well qualified" Marines whose performance is superior to that of their peers]

TS: Okay. In the recent years, reports about congressional investigations into military sexual trauma and sexual harassment have increased awareness of these issues. What is your reaction to the spotlight on these issues?

[Military sexual trauma (MST) is a term used by the Department of Veterans Affairs to refer to experiences of sexual assault or repeated, threatening sexual harassment that a veteran experienced during his or her military service]

JM: About time. [Redacted]. I found a lot of times that women were blamed, and I even blamed them myself, I was eighteen, just left the house. There should be more going on. There should be committees for every base—on every base—for that. It happens way too often. I don't know if they're doing enough, but they are at least acknowledging it.

TS: Did you experienced sexual harassment or abuse, or were you aware of any other, anyone else, being sexually harassed or sexually abused while you were in the Marine Corps?

JM: Yes [JM corrected later].

TS: Did you find that there was a higher percentage of domestic violence?

JM: No, not in any duty station that I was in. No.

TS: What was the hardest thing that you had to do physically in the Marine Corps?

JM: The mountains of Cuba.

TS: The mountains of Cuba. What was the hardest thing emotionally for you?

JM: I think, one, dealing with that harassment issue, and feeling like I was not worthy when I did lose my job of being the CO driver; I felt that pretty hard.

TS: Yeah. Do you feel like you lost your job being the CO driver simply because you're a woman?

JM: No, I think I was a bad driver. [both chuckle]

TS: Okay, that's fair. What was most rewarding about your military service—your military experience, I should say?

JM: I think the whole experience was rewarding.



TS: Okay. Now we're going to talk about some like personal views and experiences. One of the questions is, who were your heroes during this time, either as you were getting ready to join the military or while you were in the military. Did you have any?

JM: I can't say I had any, but I did look up to one of my drill instructors, because she was just a bad ass, and I loved that about her, and she could sing the cadences and I mimicked her when I left, and I was in a Corporal and Sergeants Course mimicking a singing cadence. So yeah.

TS: While you were in the service, what was your impression of the political and military leadership at the time? When you were in, it would have been President [William Jefferson] "Bill" Clinton [42nd President of the United States].

JM: Yeah. I had no care in the world about who was my Commander-In-Chief. I left that to my dad. When [George W.] Bush [43rd President of the United States] won, he told me, "You better get out of the military because that man's going to want to go to war." And sure enough, he went to war. [chuckles]

TS: That's very fair. What are your memories about 9/11?

[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]

JM: Oh man. I had just gotten out, and I was working as a dispatcher at a local HVAC [heating, ventilation, air conditioning] company. My husband was still in, and I saw the planes hit—Like, one plane hit and then someone came and told us, and I was like, "Well, that don't sound right." Because I was just there, because I have family in New York and we were just—I have pictures, and I was like, "Well, that don't sound right." I said, "Oh my gosh, hold on. That does not sound right." So we turned the news on, and we saw the second plane hit. And when that second plane hit, I was like, "We are at war. I may have to go to war, and my husband is still in." It was unbelievable. It was absolutely unbelievable.

TS: I'm going to ask you what your thoughts are on some of the major events that happened during the time that you were in and getting out. Do you have any thoughts on the First Gulf War or Desert Shield and Desert Storm?

[The First Gulf War, also referred to as the Persian Gulf War, occurred from 2 August 1990 to 29 February 1991. Codenamed Operation Desert Shield for operations leading to the buildup of troops and defense of Saudi Arabia, and Operation Desert Storm in its

combat phase, it was a war waged by coalition forces from 35 nations led by the US against Iraq in response to Iraq's invasion and annexation of Kuwait]

JM: No.

TS: No. And your husband didn't have to get deployed to these?

JM: No, we were not in; we were both still in high school, Desert Storm.

TS: It was '91.

JM: Yeah. Even when I joined, I never thought about war. That wasn't on my mind.

TS: So even what was going on in Somalia between '92 and '94, just wasn't?

JM: I was dumb to it all.

TS: How about Bosnia?

JM: Absolutely dumb. I pay attention now, but you will be surprised at how many people join the military without a clue.

TS: That's fair. Now, how about Kosovo? That was in '99, so you were in.

[The Kosovo War (28 February 1999 – 11 June 1999) was an armed conflict in Kosovo, fought by the forces of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia. The conflict ended when NATO intervened by beginning air strikes in March 1999, which resulted in Yugoslav forces withdrawing from Kosovo]

JM: I was in, and I don't think I cared. [chuckles] It takes maturity.

TS: Right.

JM: It's either you're going there and it matters, right? Or you're mature enough to pay attention to what's going on. If you're not, it's like, "If it's not happening in front of me, it's not happening."

TS: Right. What about Afghanistan, with Operation Enduring Freedom, from 2001 to—

[Operation Enduring Freedom is the official name given by the U.S. government for the Global War on Terrorism between 2001 and 2014]

JM: Now, I paid attention to that. I did pay attention to that because my unit went; the unit I had just left went. Some of my friends went. I know a lot of people. One of my best friends went over there. And yeah, I paid attention to that. I don't think we should have been over there. It was sad, and it's sad even still, even now. And that hits more close to home than the others.

TS: Right. What was your reaction to the Fort Hood shootings in 2009?

[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.]

JM: Yeah, that was at the gate, right? I was just pissed. Now, anytime something happens with the military, my heart's broken. But that's the maturity factor, and me noticing more things that surround me. A lot—Too much happens at Fort Hood. They need to sage that place.

[The ritual of sage burning has its roots in Native American tradition. Today, people burn sage to cleanse a space or environment of negative energy, to generate wisdom and clarity, and to promote healing]

TS: Now they have all those—What was it? Last year? —all those murders and the women being abducted.

[On 22 April 2020, Vanessa Guillen, a Fort Hood, Texas, soldier, disappeared. It is alleged she was murdered by a fellow soldier, who initially hid her body, and then attempted to dismember and burn her remains. The alleged soldier committed suicide a few days before charges were to be announced. After Guillen's murder, an investigation was ordered into Fort Hood's command culture after a years of violent deaths, suicides, and complaints of sexual harassment on the military base, which resulting in the finding of "major flaws" among army officials]

JM: Yeah.

TS: It's been terrible. It's been absolutely terrible. What are your thoughts on the repeal of "Don't Ask, Don't Tell?

["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 people from military service. "Don't Ask, Don't Tell" was repealed 20 September 2011]

JM: In the beginning, I was like, "Oh, look, if they're gay, I don't really want them living with me, because I don't want to see two women like that." But I'm like, "You know what? love who you love, honey. I don't care." I'm pretty sure I was stationed with people who were hiding it. And I want people to be their authentic selves. It hurts inside when you have to hide who you are. And I don't want that for my brothers and sisters. And if they are going to protect my back and have my back, what is the problem?

TS: All right. What are your thoughts about Secretary of Defense, Leon Panetta, removing restrictions for women in combat arms in 2013?

JM: More power to them. I wouldn't do the job but, I mean, I've been there. I tell people all the time, I was stationed with grunts, I know how they operate, I've done their training; I've done their training. I'm just not[?] trying to be in a hole with them. Although I would have been, being a Motor T driver; we're their transportation.

TS: What are your thoughts about women serving in infantry or special forces or on submarines?

JM: I think it is wonderful. There's a movie; my favorite movie. Oh gosh, I can't think of her name, but she—

TS: [unclear]?

JM: No, no, no, no. [unclear] It has Samuel L. Jackson [American actor]. *The Long Kiss Goodnight*. And she made me want to be a spy. Women, we can do it. If I was younger—I wanted to be a sniper. So yeah, I think if they want to, let them do it; if they can, let them do it.

TS: More recently, with [46th President of the United States] President [Joseph Robinette] Biden. How do you feel about his repeal of [45th President of the United States] President [Donald J.] Trump's repeal of President Obama allowing transgender to openly be in the military?

[In April 2021, President Joe Biden reversed former-President Donald Trump-era rules that effectively banned transgender people from serving in the military. The new regulations provide "access to the military's in one's self-identified gender provided all appropriate standards are met," the Defense Department said in a statement and "provide

a path for those in service for medical treatment, gender transition, and recognition in one's self-identified gender"]

JM: They need to just leave it alone; [chuckling] just leave it alone. The only thing I would say is, just make sure that the person that they have to room with is comfortable. If they're comfortable, that's fine. We live in too close of quarters for it to be, if I'm a woman and I look at you as being a male, but you look at yourself as being a woman, just make sure I'm comfortable living with you in that situation. But I don't care.

TS: That's fair. Now we're going to talk about after the military. At what point did you decide to leave the Marine Corps?

JM: [Comment redacted] [My husband] didn't like it, and I'm like, "Well, I want to go to drill school," [Comment redacted]

It was hard getting out. And I blame him all the time; I should've stayed in. They even asked several times for me to stay in, and I still got out. My body says, "Thank you." [chuckles]

TS: Right, for sure. Yeah.

JM: My body now, today, says thank you.

TS: How were you treated by family and friends and others when you left the service?

JM: Fine. There was no change.

TS: What did you do after you left the service?

JM: Oh gosh, I worked at an HVAC company [redacted]. I did that for like six to eight months, and then I went to an apartment investment management company—I was trying to find my way, I was trying to find my way—apartment management company; I think I stayed there a year. Then I went into mental health; I stayed there about three or four years.

I can tell you this, the military allowed me to transition to any industry that I chose to go to. Because people see that on your resume, and they know—well, at least for some of us, I can't speak for all veterans—but they know that we are able to conform and change and just go with it.

I've had so many. HVAC dispatcher, HVAC admin, office manager for apartment investment, mental health, and then I went to admin, executive secretary in a power company, then from there, I switched to HR [Human Resources] within that same company. I've done a lot.

TS: Can you describe your adjustment to civilian life?

JM: Oh gosh, that was hard. I don't see how people do it after twenty-something years of military, because that four years had me messed up. I was not prepared. I wasn't prepared

mentally. I definitely wasn't prepared for—as the money dropped and the benefits lost. That was a hard transition. I wasn't prepared for the backstabbing. The comradery is lost in civilian work life. It really is every man for themselves.

TS: Do you feel that the Marine Corps gave you the tools and help to successfully transition from military life to civilian life?

JM: Being in the Marine Corps definitely gave me the confidence that I can do anything. If I can go into the Marine Corps, I can do Marine Corps boot camp and excel in three years to be an E-5, when most people only make it to E-4, during that time? Oh yeah, it gave me the confidence. Definitely.

TS: That's good. Many consider women in the military to be trailblazers. Do you feel this way?

JM: Not really. I've heard it. [chuckles] I don't know, maybe we are.

TS: Have you ever used your veteran's benefits?

JM: Yes.

TS: Do you mind if I ask which ones?

JM: I've used the VA home loan, and my GI bill.

[The GI Bill provides educational assistance to servicemembers, veterans, and their dependents]

TS: Okay. How about healthcare?

JM: Yes, I'm in the healthcare system now, and they delivered my last two babies.

TS: Oh yeah, they delivered one of mine. They were very nice.

JM: Yes.

TS: Okay. Tell me about any experiences you've had with the veterans' administration. Were they good? Were they bad? Did you have to fight for anything?

JM: They are the worst when it comes to women veterans. Let me tell you, I have had to fight the VA. I've been out twenty, twenty-two years. I was Motor Transport, I was stationed attached to an infantry unit, I did more to my body than my husband probably did to his. Yet, when I got out, they rated me zero and I had all these pains and ailments, and he

pushed a pen. And he can go right now and file a claim, I can file the same claim, they can look at our records, and they would deny me and approve his.

TS: Have you recently tried to re-establish disability benefits?

JM: I did. And actually, I had to hire an attorney. Right now, I've been waiting three years.

TS: Oh, because they have like revamped the system. It's a lot easier now.

JM: I did do one in August, and I got rated in October. That's a new claim. So yeah, three years ago I was denied for stuff and then—listen to this—I was denied, but then with this new claim that they just awarded, they tell me that we looked at your records and we see that you have this in your records and you should claim. Well, guess what? That one's at the judge[?] right now that you denied me for. Not only that, but this is the same claim where they told me—mind you, I'm only forty-one; I think I'm forty-one. [chuckles] I don't know how old I am. They told me that I could not have possibly—No, no, no. They denied me for something that a forty-year-old would have. I was thirty-seven, I was not forty. They had my age wrong; they had details wrong. Whoever looked at my file, didn't do a very good job. I was heated. Oh, I was so upset; I was so upset. So I hired an attorney; it's waiting on a judge to get it. I don't know what else to do about it.

TS: And COVID's not making any of this easier.

JM: No, not at all.

TS: Due to the recent conflicts, the media has focused attention on PTSD [Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder] with service men and women. Have you had any personal experience with PTSD?

JM: If I did, I don't know about it. I have more anxiety.

TS: All right. How has your life been different because of your time in the military?

JM: I think it has helped me get into the position where I am now, definitely, because my job now, you can't be in this position without being in the military. So it has enhanced my life tremendously.

TS: Okay. And now, you have three children.

JM: I do.

TS: One of your children was born while you were on active duty. The other two were after you got out of the service. Would you encourage your children to join the military?

JM: Yes. As a matter of fact, I'm trying to get my middle child to go now. He's only a junior, but I have given him until June to decide and let me know what he wants to do. Yeah. At first, I said no, but the more I think about it, I'm like, "Yeah, I mean, it worked for me."

TS: True. All right, that's fair. Would you recommend military service in general to young men and women today?

JM: Yeah. I would.

TS: What does patriotism mean to you?

JM: Patriotism, to me, means the ability to accept all Americans, despite what they believe, what they lack in belief; that you stand up for your country in any form, whether it's domestic or non-domestic terrorists; it means that you just care about the overall wellbeing of people who live here.

TS: Very good. Is there anything in particular that you would want a civilian to know or understand about what it's like to serve in the military that they may not understand or appreciate?

JM: You're able to join the military at a very young age. You can join the military at eighteen, but there are so many things that you can't do until you're twenty-one, legally, within this country. A lot of our young people are giving up so much to protect the freedoms that we have, and yet we turn a blind eye to a lot of the things that they go through mentally. A lot of us grew up; like, I grew up in the military. I was only seventeen when I joined, eighteen when I finally graduated boot camp, but I was still maturing. There's still a maturity level that's lacking that people are going through. But it still—It's a gateway for a lot of people. I think a lot more poor and middle income kids go into the military, but it's still a respectable job, just like you're going to a four-year college. You're getting trained to do a job.

Like my son, he doesn't understand what military is. And he was afraid. He's like, "Well, I don't even know what it is to go." It's training. It's just like the job that I have now, except I don't have anyone fussing and yelling at me to go run.

But I think more business minded or—corporations should do mentorships to a lot of these younger military members, because if they do decide to get out, they'll have something to go to, because that's lacking. Where I work now, I've found that a lot of younger and younger military members are becoming homeless. Why? Why is that? Why is that? And a lot of them are lost. They're confused. They know they don't want to be in the military, but then they have nothing to come out to.

So if you're thinking about being in the military, have a plan. Get a plan in place, find a mentor. This is something that I wish I had done; found a mentor, had a plan in place for my transition and, doggone it, use the school benefits to your advantage while you're in and finished school while you're in. Not waiting till you get out, because I've noticed a lot of them wait until they get out, they do the 9/11 GI Bill, but then they stay a year or two and then they quit. And then they end up going back to the military, they're homeless, or they've taken a job somewhere.



If you're thinking about going into the military, have a plan. If you're going to stay just four years, find a mentor and start working on yourself, and for the career that you'll go into or want to go into once you're out.

TS: Now, my final question: Being a veteran, what was it like this past January to watch the storming of the Capitol? The insurrection, the coup d'état attempt. How was that for you?

[On 6 January 2021, the U.S. Capitol in Washington, D.C., was attacked by a mob of supporters of President Donald Trump. They sought to overturn his defeat in the 2020 U.S. Presidential Election by disrupting the joint session of Congress assembled to count electoral votes that would formalize President-elect Joe Biden's victory]

JM: That was heart breaking; that was absolutely heartbreaking. And it was more heartbreaking when I saw Marine Corps flags out there on the Capitol. And I know there are military veterans out there trying to overturn the government. We are supposed to protect and serve the constitution, not one person. And it confuses me how easily our people can be brainwashed and manipulated; for them not to think for themselves.

You talk about Russia—Being a military person, we talk about Russia, yet you are fighting for a dictator. And I could not understand that. And for you to have my flag, because that's not just your flag, that Marine Corps flag is my flag as well. You're saying my vote didn't count. I mean, you just took the whole Marine Corps flag and—"We're just going to overturn this government and make it do what we want it to do." It doesn't work like that. The Constitution, we signed the paper to protect the Constitution of the United States, not one person; not one person. You can't do that. It just hurts to see veterans out there doing that. It hurts.

TS: Oh yes. I agree. I cried. I don't even know why. I'm still I was devastated.

JM: I was devastated. And I'm like—I can understand civilians, they don't get it; they don't get it. But come on. And then when I go on the IG [Instagram] and I see the Marine Corps make a statement on Instagram, and I see these marines making these statements. "Well, you shouldn't have stole—" No, you have no proof that anything was stolen. You are fighting to be dictated. You want a dictator. Even thinking about it right now, I'm like, "Do they realize that they are fighting to have a dictator?"

TS: Right? I know. I was just like, "What has happened? What is going on? I cannot."

JM: And a lot of them were veterans out there. And I'm like, this man said he does not care about us. We have him on tape talking about veterans. Man, it broke my heart to hear him talk so ill of [U.S. Senator] John McCain [American politician, statesman, Navy officer, and Republican Presidential nominee]. I love me some John McCain.

[After the death of U.S. Senator John McCain on 25 August 2018, then-President Donald Trump reportedly rejected the White House's plans to release a statement praising

McCain's life. In March 2019—seven months after McCain's death—Trump issued a series of public statements that criticized McCain at least four times in five days]

TS: I know, me too.

JM: Oh my Gosh. He is a war hero.

TS: Yeah, I feel like the majority of veterans felt like you and I feel, in the ways in which president Trump talked about veterans, talked about how the people buried here, they're all losers—

JM: Yes.

TS: You know what I mean? As a veteran that really hurt. It really hurt to hear the commander-in-chief saying something like that. I know that the veterans that were supporting Trump and that were supporting an active—in the insurrection, and even some active members of the military was a very small portion of all of us, Right? But it's still like very difficult. Yeah.

JM: Yeah.

TS: Yeah. I always say he doesn't support veterans.

JM: He does not support you.

TS: He doesn't respect the veterans. He definitely doesn't respect active-duty military members.

JM: He said to himself, "If you go to put your life on the line for a country, you are stupid."

TS: Yeah.

JM: When you're fighting for him. Really? Really?

TS: Yeah. Well, thank you so much for doing the interview. I'm glad that we were able to do it. I wish I'd been able to meet you in person.

JM: I know.

[Extraneous conversation redacted]

TS: I really appreciate you doing the interview for us. I really appreciate your service in the Marine Corps. I'm a Marine Corps "brat" [child of a career soldier].

JM: Hey, thank you as well.

TS: Yes, but I went into the army. My husband was in the army, so it just made the most sense. If you talk to any other female veterans that might want to give their story, let me know, send me their names. And I think that would be awesome.

JM: Okay. I have a few, I'll ask them if they want to participate.

TS: Okay. Thank you so much. You can have a good rest of your day and have a great weekend.

JM: Tamara, thank you.

TS: Thank you.

[End of Interview]