

**PATRICIA SALAZAR DAVIS**

Our Neighbors, Our Heroes: Forest Park Veteran's Oral History Project

NC: OK, today is Aug 10, 2017 and I am Nancy Cavaretta, um, for the Forest Park Historical Society Oral History Project interviewing Patty Salazar. Hi Patty!

PS: Hi!

NC: Patty I'm just going to ask you some basic questions to start out, um. What is your date of birth?

PS: 5-5-83, so May 5th of 1983.

NC: '83 Good, and what is your current address?

PS: Forest Park, IL.

NC: Very Good. And what branch of the military service did you serve in?

PS: The U.S. Marine Reserves.

NC: And in what war did you serve in?

PS: Um, Operation Enduring Freedom, so that would be, what was that, 2003? Yes, 2003.

NC: So that's the 2<sup>nd</sup> phase of the Golf War?

PS: Yes, the 2<sup>nd</sup> phase.

NC: Very Good. And, um, what was your rank?

PS: At that time it was Lance Corporal, which was an E3.

NC: E3 Good, and where did you serve?

PS: What do you mean?

NC: Like where, in what physical location were you?

PS: When I got deployed, or when I joined the military?

NC: When you joined, and when you got deployed.

PS: OK. When I 1<sup>st</sup> joined I joined the reserves and I was stationed here in Great Lakes, IL. Next to the Naval base they have a small Marine Corps base that's just it's really small actually there wasn't that many people in there. And it's the 4<sup>th</sup> MAW. I don't remember what MAW stands for but it was part of the Air Wing.

NC: Oh, there you go.

PS: Marine Corps Air Wing.

NC: Marine Corp Air Wing. Great. And then when you were over seas what location was that?

PS: Al Jaber, Kuwait.

NC: Oh, Kuwait?

PS: Yes that is where we were stationed it was actually an Air Force Base. But of course, we didn't get to stay on the nice venues they had there. It was in the middle of the desert, there was absolutely nothing there, and we had to build from the ground up.

NC: So you were, you were in a start up situation then?

PS: Yes,

NC: Was there any security there when you first started?

PS: No, no. We got there right before the war kicked off. It was January of 2003 and the war kicked off in March.

NC: Wow, and what were your quarters like?

PS: There were no quarters. It was just..

NC: Did you have tents?

PS: It was just sand when we got there and we built our own tents and that's where we stayed with no air conditioning or anything, or bathrooms-that was the worst part!

NC: Wow. I know it's really hard on those start up types of things. At any time though did they, did they move into like bringing you like train cars or anything like that to live in or did you just stay in tents?

PS: I wish!

NC: You wish-oh!

PS: I wish. No, after we got there the Army got there and they set up their tents, and their tents had like these huge AC units and we did not have any of that.

NC: OH!

PS: None of that. It was just our little tents, and actually, they weren't that small, you could fit, I think, 12 women in there. But there was no air conditioner at all. It was really hot. The only trailers that they set up a little bit later was, um, for bathroom purposes. They set up just one shower and a couple of toilets, but that was I would say about 2 months into it.

NC: All right now I know I'm kind of jumping ahead here, but how long were you there?

PS: I was there from January 2003 until June of 2003.

NC: Same conditions all the way along?

PS: Um, pretty much. They got a little bit better where they let us start eating at the Air Force chow hall as opposed to eating MRE's at one point, but yeah, it did get a little better.

NC: OK, and M.R. E's just for those who don't understand are. Yes.

PS: Meals ready to eat, they're just pre-packaged, and they are good for about 8 years.

NC: Yes, there you go.

PS: Some of them are actually pretty tasty, you know! Yes, they've improved a lot.

NC: That's really good!

PS: When I first joined, there was some really disgusting ones, but now you have jambalaya, spaghetti..

NC: Wow, so they actually look like food then?

PS: Yes, and they actually taste a little bit better now too, so.

NC: Wow, that's really interesting. My last beginning question is: Do you have any other family members who have served in the military?

PS: No, I was actually the first one.

NC: Wow, well that's going to move us right into the next set of questions about your early training and how did you happen to join the military were you, well you wouldn't have been drafted because you are past that issue, but did you enlist, did you serve after an ROTC program ?

PS: None of that. I actually wanted to go to college and my parents were not going to pay for the cost of it, so I was looking for other options on how to pay for this myself. It's not common in my family for the women to be educated, so my father at first was reluctant about paying for the school. He said, "You know there is no point, I'm not going to waste my money. etc." So I had to find different ways of actually paying for it because I said this is what I'm going to do, this is where I'm going, and I started talking to a recruiter when I saw him during my lunch hour in high school. So he came in looking really sharp with his uniform and everything, and they set up a table basically like a little

job fair type thing and he said you know, “Hey, we can pay for your school.” He made it sound like it was such a glorious thing and he looked so sharp that I’m like, this is what I want! Then he said, “You know the Marine Corp. is the toughest when it comes to training.” And I was so upset at my dad that I’m just like, “Oh, I’m going to do this. I’m going into the hardest branch and I’m just going to do it and I’m going to pay for school.” So I was 16 when I started talking to him and I signed my contract at 17. So.

NC: Wow, so as soon as graduation came..?

PS: Yes, yes, my father refused to sign the contract and I couldn’t leave because they said you have to be 18 or have parental consent in order to sign.

NC: And you weren’t 18?

PS: I was not 18. I turned 18 a few days before graduation.

NC: In May, right?

PS: Yes, In May right before graduation, and I signed the contract myself.

NC: Oh, wow, wow.

PS: So, that’s how I came to join.

NC: That’s incredible. So where was your training?

PS: For the Marine Corps, it’s in Paris Island, SC for the females.

NC: Oh, Paris, OK. Paris Island.

PS: Yes, it's actually split up, I want to say West of the Mississippi if you are a male you go to in California. I'm not quite sure where the base is but it's in California. And if you are East of the Mississippi, you go to Paris Island. If you are a female, no matter where you are, you go to Paris Island.

NC: I see.

PS: 'Cuz we're one of the only branches that doesn't train together. Every other branch actually goes through boot camp and schools, males and females mixed, and the Marine Corps does not.

NC: What's the reason for that?

PS: Actually, I'm not sure.

NC: Is your training vastly different or are there similarities, or do you not know?

PS: As far as I know, everything is pretty much the same.

NC: That's interesting.

PS: My instructors just said it was so you won't be distracted, which I guess makes sense.

NC: Yes, keep you focused.

PS: It does.

NC: So what about your boot camp training? Did you receive like any specialized training at all?

PS: Yes, boot camp is actually 3 months long for the Marine Corps. I loved it! And if I could do it all over again, even now, as long as I didn't have to sign another contract, I would go in a heartbeat!

NC: Why? Many military personnel do not say that!

PS: They're paying you to work out! They're paying you to look awesome and so sharp in your uniform, and just you come out thinking you could fly like from how awesome they build you up! You know, they break you down, and they call you all kinds of names, and you get so stressed out over everything, you are constantly working out but when you finish that, that feeling I can honestly tell you I have never felt it again!

NC: That's powerful.

PS: It's just that you feel you are at the top of everything! And it's amazing, and then of course, if that was like the best shape I have ever been in too since I was one that would always get in trouble so the more you get in trouble, the more they work you out because they see it as a punishment so, I came out with some pretty big guns!

NC: Nice!

PS: I have to show you pictures. It was amazing.

NC: Well definitely, definitely we would want to see the pictures!



PS: Yeah, so, 3 months for the boot camp training, and then after that you have to go to weapons training. And for the Marine Corps it doesn't matter, actually I don't know how it is for all of the other branches, for the Marine Corps it doesn't matter if you are a cook, you're part of the band, or whatever your specialty is going to be, you have to be a marksman first, which means they will send you to weapons training.

NC: So everybody does that?

PS: Everybody, everybody within the Marine Corps. It doesn't matter if you're, like I said, you're a cook, the band, the whatever your job is going to be, you have to go through weapons training. And, that I believe, I can't remember how long it actually was, but I think it was maybe 2 weeks of special weapons training, and that was also fun. It was fun. You got to shoot a lot of things, you know, tanks that they had out in the field, you get to shoot, shoot stuff at it and throw grenades, and yeah, that was fun.

NC: How did that make you feel?

PS: Scary at times, but fun.

NC: Such preparation!

PS: And then once you are done with that, the next training is your specialty school so whatever it is your job is going to be within the Corps, you go. And each school is different as far as like the length and, I guess the amount of time that you spend there. Since, you know, some require longer times.

NC: So what was your specialty?

PS: I was a close air support operator 72/42, which is basically the middleman between the air and the ground. So any time that the ground troops needed help, or medical evacuations, food, or any type of coordinates they would call us and we would call the planes. Since we were next within the air wing, we would call in planes and let them know what type of ammunition, bombs, or anything that they needed or if they needed extra food to drop off for the troops or anything, anything that they needed. We would just let them know the coordinates of where they were so it was a little bit stressful simply because you give them one wrong coordinate and it can just be disastrous.

NC: Were there any problems like transporting food during heavy attack times or anything of an interfering nature?

PS: Not that I know of. I mean a lot of things were delayed simply because of what was going on, but as far as any of our planes having trouble getting there, no.

NC: Your job was critical but quite stressful.

PS: It was at times.

NC: How about your instructors? Do you remember anything in particular about any of your instructors for that specialty area?

PS: For boot camp, I definitely remember my instructors. I am actually still friends with one of them on Facebook. I found her, somebody created a group for the platoon that I graduated with, and it just so happens she found it as well, so all of our drill instructors are now in there and it's actually amazing to see that they are real people because in that

other role that they had, they were so tough on you and telling you that you could do certain things that you didn't think were possible. It's amazing to see that these are real people and they actually have families and they are all mothers. The one that I definitely remember was the toughest one that we had. She would not play. She would not smile. She was just like such a tough façade that you are just like, oh my Lord, I don't want to mess with her! She was my favorite. I don't know if it was just like the way she was because I just kept saying, "I want to be her!"

NC: You wanted to be like her!

PS: I want to be her. Out of all the ones that we had, I said, "That's the one I want to be!" She was just amazing! And she was the most physically fit one, and at the end of our training she says, "I'm about 3 or 4 months pregnant!"

NC: What a shock!

PS: And her body was amazing that I'm like "Are you sure?" She had a full 6 pack, I'm like, there is no way, no way this mean lady is pregnant. You know, it was just amazing, and she's the one that I remember the most. They all seem so tough, but then I was actually in boot camp when the towers fell and you got to see a completely, well I got to see, a completely different side of them. especially with one of the instructors because her father was in one of the towers when it fell. So she had no word whether he was in there, she had no idea what was going on because communication obviously was blocked, and the way she broke down. I was like, "Wow, this woman is one of the strongest ones that I've seen, how is this?"

NC: So it was a different side that you saw, a more human, softer side.

PS: A completely different side because I thought it was a joke. I did not know this was real because during boot camp they don't let you watch TV, you don't get newspapers, you don't get news from anywhere. And the Internet obviously was not what it is now. So, I thought it was a joke because I thought they're just trying to prepare us because at that time we were actually trying to qualify at the rifle range. This was one of the last things we were supposed to qualify in. And I thought oh, they're just trying to pump you up and tell you, OK ,you've got to do this because we're going to war and this is what's going on. I had no idea that the twin towers had actually fallen. We were in our own little world. So, but just to see HER break down like that, oh my God, this is real! This is real! My first thought was, "What did I just do?" In the last ten years we did not have a war, and we're about to have one when I decided to join this.

NC: How did that make you feel about your decision at that point?

PS: I was a bit scared. I was a bit scared but like I said before, they build you up so much that you were just full of energy saying like we have to do something, lets go do something! We have to figure out who this was, what's going on. I guess the feeling there is a little bit different because you're not within the general population and you don't get to see exactly what happened. You're just surrounded by other people who are also in the same mentality that you have where it's just like, let's go kick some butt! Let's go do, like what's going on here? So I didn't get to see any of the 911 stuff, and it took me 7 years to actually look at any footage or any newspapers from it just because everything that I heard about it like people jumping out of windows and how bad it was. I refused to

look at it. I didn't know how to view it because when I talked to my parents they said, 'cuz they give you a phone call so you can call your parents and let them know, hey, I'm OK, are you OK? You know because everybody's from different places within the country and when I called my parents my mom was saying, "You know we were watching the first tower in flames and then we started seeing people jump out of the windows because it was live." You know, and I just refused to watch any of that footage and like I said, it took me 7 years to actually watch it. And that was by accident because I was channel surfing one day and I'm like, oh, what's this, it's a movie? But it wasn't. It was actual raw footage from 911.

NC: The isolation certainly created a shock into the reality of what happened.

PS: So, yeah, I lost track-I don't know where we were! I actually don't even know what I was answering.

NC: We were talking about how you felt about your decision then. You didn't lose your train. It all went together. Yes, shock upon shock, right?

PS: Yes!

NC: From the reactions of your instructor, all the way down to, is this really happening, was overwhelming emotionally.

PS: Yes, so that's actually what I remember from my instructors, like how tough they were, and then how fast somebody who is that tough can easily crumple when something like this happens.

NC: It's amazing. The spectrum of human reactions to things is incredibly broad and subject to change easily.

PS: Right

NC: I want to ask you some questions about day-to-day military life. You referred to the one phone call that you were given when 9/11 occurred. How did you stay in touch with your family while you were over seas?

PS: Snail Mail!

NC: That means a long wait time!

PS: Yes, we were just writing letters and my parents would send me care packages for anything that I asked for.

NC: Not like it is now with the internet.

PS: The Internet obviously was not what it is now.

NC: That's right.

PS: There was no social media, there was maybe some e-mail, but my parents didn't even own a computer so I would just write them a letter and then 2 months later I would get a care package because it would take that long to get there.

NC: And you probably needed those packages because you were in a start-up situation.

PS: Oh yes, oh yes, especially as a female. When I was packing, I made sure to bring things that I was going to need as a female for up to three months because I didn't know what I was going into and let me tell you, that went by really fast because a lot of the females that packed did not even think about it. And there was absolutely nothing there that we could use because we weren't allowed to go off base to get anything since the situation was obviously not the best!

NC: I'm thinking about how you said your training was with women only, women instructors, and then now you're deployed, and there are men.

PS: Yes, Yes.

NC: I'm interested in hearing your impressions and experiences about the whole idea of women in combat, and how men look at that.

PS: I think each branch of the military sees it a little bit different, 'cuz I know if you ask my husband, he has trained with women and I see how awesome he interacts with everyone because he's still part of his unit and all of his friends, even females, are always together. The way they interact is amazing to me because I did not have that within the Marine Corps. Within the Marine Corps it seemed to be very sexist at times, always seen as the weaker sex, of course, you know with tough men there I was, all of the females in the Marine Corps are not considered Marines-they are considered Women Marines! I don't know, if they always call us WM, Women Marine, even though you've earned the same title as them, you were never just considered a Marine. It's always a Woman Marine. I don't know why we needed to specify, obviously you could see I'm a female,

but as far as women being in combat, I'm not opposed to it. There are no front lines, it's not like it used to be where everybody would stand in front of everybody and just charge whenever the horn would blow. The front lines no longer exist because I know where we were stationed, we were in Kuwait and we were trying to run into bunkers because of missiles that were coming in, and the thing is it doesn't matter if you were in, on the ground, or if you were in the air, the type of ammunition and the type of weapons that we now have can reach you at any location. There's absolutely nothing stopping a missile from hitting the location where you're at. I think women are just as strong as men when it comes to doing their jobs. I don't see anything wrong with women serving in different capacities as long as they are capable. My thing has always been if you're strong enough to actually do it, I do understand that there are some people that are weaker than others and not necessarily because of the sex. I think it's just your physical, the way you are built. So-I'm not opposed to it at all. If you can do it, if you can lift what you are required to lift, if you can drag somebody as long as you need to whether you are male or female, I don't think it will make a difference.

NC: When you were really pushed in this situation where there was direct combat and you had to drag someone or do something of that nature and it was men and women together on that battlefield, did the men just forget about the fact that you were a Woman Marine and just go with it?

PS: I was lucky enough to not have to drag anybody. But, within, within my unit I was always questioned, even when we were over seas, just with giving out coordinates or saying, incoming there's a missile coming in. They would always ask somebody else, a



male, “Oh is this really what’s happening?” And I said, you know, the day that I actually say ‘Incoming’ and I start running towards that bunker, “bye”, I said because you are over here questioning every single thing that I do. And everything I did was on point! Nothing was incorrect. I did rarely make mistakes if any, and yet on a day-to-day basis even before we went over seas, everything was always questioned. If I gave a direct order because I had more rank than somebody else, they would go and ask somebody above me if that was correct. They’d ask a male if that’s what they should do.

NC: Ask a male.

PS: That was my experience with my unit, but I know that there’s other units that didn’t have that problem at all. Because I do belong to a female Marine group and a lot of them love the units that they are in. But there’s a lot as well that just say, this is the most sexist branch ever.

NC: Yeah, it seems like there is probably a difference in the dynamics within each unit. I wonder if that has anything to do with the leadership of the unit?

PS: I believe it does to a certain extent especially for the unit that I was in because it’s a reserve unit, so you would think you work with women on a day to day basis because you are not there every single day. So if you’re not full duty, what do you do on your civilian side that makes you interact this way with women? Why is there absolutely no respect?

NC: That is a valid question.

PS: I just don't understand it. I mean everybody has a mother or they have some type of siblings, or you have a job where you have to interact with the opposite sex, so I just never understood why everybody within that unit seemed to be that way.

NC: Probably the camaraderie you developed with people within your unit was mostly directed toward other females then.

PS: I was the only one!

NC: You were the only female in your unit?

PS: ..In my unit, yes.

NC: Oh my goodness!

PS: ...well in my section. In the unit I think at the time we had three?-yeah, three.

NC: So was that kind of the common ratio, or was that uncommon?

PS: For a reserve unit, I think that was common. As far as the active duty side, I'm not sure. I know it's definitely way off. It's not like one to one. I don't know what the ratio is, but there's a lot less females than there are males, especially in the Marine Corps. I think other branches are a bit more equal.

NC: Any kind of harassment issues other than just the kind of subordinating your judgments?

PS: Well the, the first time I actually experienced something like that was during my specialty school where I learned my actual job. That was the first time that we actually were mixed both males and females training for the job that we were, that we were going to have. Right before graduation, one of the males in the class was trying to make passes at me and I was just so focused on what I was doing that I said, "You know, I'm young, I'm inexperienced, and no this is not what I want! So, I'm just focused on what I am doing." He took my rejection and turned it into something completely different. There were times where I would rent a hotel room to stay off base just to breathe basically, and believe it or not, all of the females used to do it because they had tubs in the hotel and in the barracks they did not, it was just the stand shower and throughout your whole training it's just a stand alone shower and nothing else. Everybody just wanted to relax and have a bath. There were three females um in the same little barracks and I was in including myself. Of course, we would all just take turns saying, OK, this weekend I'm going to go. So we would go and like I said, it was just for a bath. So one weekend I rented the hotel room and I was there and it just so happens that this guy, the same one that tried making a pass, was there in the same hotel, obviously a different room, but he was there. And I paid no attention to it, you know it was normal, I go into my room. By the time I made it back to class on Monday, I was the biggest whore according to my instructors because even one of them pulled me aside saying, "You know we don't need this kind of behavior!" and it just went from nothing to almost getting kicked out of the program because they thought that I did something at this place. I just wanted to go get a bath, you know? So I don't know why he did that, but me being the person that I am, I was so upset that I told the instructors that I want to know who told you this because this is

obviously not true, and it's unfair that he's dragging my name. They actually told me who it was and they brought him into the room. Somebody had to hold me because I was so upset that I was like, "You liar, why would you say something like this?" He just turned red, didn't know what to say. I don't know if he didn't realize that I was going to confront him or that they were going to tell me who it was. He just turned so red and said absolutely nothing else after that-not an apology, nothing. So that was the first time that I've ever experienced something like that and like I said, it left a bad taste in my mouth because it's just unfair 'cuz it seemed like I don't know and now these instructors see me in a completely different light thinking that this is the type of person that I am because he said something!

NC: Do you think that his reaction cleared you?

PS: I don't know.

NC: In their minds?

PS: I don't know. We graduated like a week after that. I never asked, I just kept to myself. I stopped going to the hotel and I just stuck around with the females that I had in my room and that was it. Didn't want to be hanging around with anybody else. I mean it just totally ruined the experience because I thought it was something pretty awesome actually because after going through all that training, now you get to go to something that's just classroom and you get to learn certain things. That was a nice break. Yeah.

NC: Yes. That's so unfortunate because the energy spent on that is really so counterproductive and sidetracks you from your purpose.

PS: Right.

NC: But by the same token, it was good for these men to see that you could not be victimized-they underestimated you! They didn't realize your strength and it wouldn't have been expected for you to confront them.

PS: Right. Especially, I clearly remember his face and I know I'm pretty short. I'm only 5'2" or 5'1 ½" but my license says 5'2". He was a little bit over 6' tall. I guess I could just picture it in my head, like it probably looked so funny, this little person going up to him and saying like "What is your problem?"

NC: To bring this forward really raises awareness for people who are civilians to think about. We hear things on the news on stories of how women are treated in the military and it's really important for people to hear these stories. Let's get over to your experiences in wartime. You served in the 2nd phase of the Persian Gulf, and you were in Kuwait. You also told me a lot about what it was like when you arrived at this was totally a start up .

PS: Yes.

NC: Was there any direct combat as soon as you arrived, or was it mostly before in the first phase?

PS: It was before everything kicked off. When we got there it was January of 2003, and like I said, the war did not kick off until March. We were there for a few months just setting up and our carpenters were building our tents. We were just doing practice runs

on some of our missions while we were there and just basically building and setting up our equipment. But knew what was coming.

NC: How soon after you arrived did the combat actually start?

PS: In March. In March so maybe about 2 ½ months after we got there because I think I don't actually remember the date that we got there but it was maybe mid January and this kicked off, I want to say actually I have it in the diary somewhere but I think it was mid March as well where it started.

NC: So, you did keep a journal?

PS: Yes

NC: When did that start?

PS: Right when we got there. I just started writing. It was driving me insane, you know, like I said my unit was slightly sexist with certain things and every time that I tried to hang out with somebody or to talk to somebody, my superiors would come up to me and pull me aside and say, "You cannot do this! You cannot be talking to that person! That person, you know, is not the nicest person ever!" And I constantly had to tell my superiors, "You're not my father, I'm a big girl, and I know what I'm doing. It's not like I'm here to date somebody I'm just trying to have a conversation with somebody!"  
'Specially since I was out of the 12 females that were in my tent, I was the only one that was working the night shift. So everybody else had somebody to talk to, somebody to mingle with. I was the only one in my tent.

NC: Very isolating.

PS: During the day, it got kind of lonely so I started writing my journal. I started writing letters home, writing letters to my sorority sisters. I was pulled away from college after one semester, so I started writing to them and it just started to get a little lonely. So, I started to keep a journal. And it just took so long for letters from home and packages to make it there. There was so much security. For your packages to get there, they would have to make sure they scanned them to make sure there isn't something crazy. So by the time you got something, it might have already been spoiled by the time it got there, so it was a bit different. I don't know. I guess that's probably the biggest reason why I did start writing in a journal.

NC: Do you still have the journals?

PS: I'm sure I do. Where, I don't know. I still have some stuff in my mother's basement that I still have to go through, but I'm not sure where it would be. But I'm sure it's still there, my mother doesn't throw anything away.

NC: So during the combat time, did you have any casualties in your unit?

PS: Not a casualty, but somebody was badly injured. One of our officers did a convoy up into Iraq. My unit for some reason, I actually don't know what the reason was, used to take volunteers to go in these convoys with troops going up just either to drop off food, or for anything if they wanted that experience. One of the officers decided to do that and they hit a roadside bomb. He lost an eye and he was badly injured. I know one of his limbs I don't know if it got amputated or not, but he was really injured. They flew him

out of there and then at that time our commanding officer he had an anxiety attack. We all thought it was a heart attack because he was just panicking, sweating, and I don't know if it was just him stressing out about what happened to one of the officers which is also one of his best friends. You know I, I don't know. But as far as casualties within my own unit, no! None. And he was the only one that was badly injured.

NC: How was the general feeling in your unit about when the attacks would come? When it was quiet time and there was kind of a calm? Was there always this kind of anticipation that the next round is just around the corner?

PS: I think it was very stressful because it did come in rounds or in waves. We had computers up and talking to the planes and just listening to everything that's going on. You could hear what the pilots were going through. You could hear the troops calling for medivacs. You could see everything coming through the computer. You knew this is what's happening even though we weren't visually seeing it, you can picture it because of how gruesome all of the descriptions were for everything. I don't even know how to express myself with this, it was just, it was just horrible .. I'm glad a lot of these details don't come out to the public. They just don't play fair-that's what I'm going to say since we have to abide by the Geneva Convention, and they don't. It's a, a bit crazy to say that you can't shoot at somebody that's shooting at you because they're in a temple, or they're in a school, or they're in a hospital and yet your troops are getting ambushed from these locations. It's just, crazy. I've tried explaining this to my parents as well because when I first came back, they started asking like "Oh, how was this, what happened? Would you like to talk?" And it's just so difficult for me to talk about that stuff even though I wasn't



in the middle of it, just listening to the pilots, listening to the troops, listening to everything that was going on around me and knowing how this happens and who was there, and how many people were there, and how many people we lost. It's just-it's crazy!

NC: I'm sure there were a lot of attempts at firing from temples and other places there.

PS: Oh, of course. They don't play fair!

NC: Yes that certainly is. There is a whole area of information that the American public does not ever hear.

PS: And sometimes it's better.

NC: Yes, sometimes it's better, yes, definitely! In terms of like the war time experiences, when your tour was up, how far into the end, if there really even was an end, at that point were you when you left? Where was the status of the war?

PS: Unfortunately, it was still part of the beginning because it kicked off in March and we left 3 months later and we only left because we were relieved by a different unit and since we're the reserve side, they have certain time frames that they can keep you there. At the most, I think at the most, that they can keep you there is 2 years at a time. And our unit was relieved by another one-that's the only reason why they pulled us out of there.

NC: Thank you for that clarification on your length of time and the timeframes for the reservists.

PS: Now they told us we were going to be on a 2 yr. rotation because they didn't see this war ending as soon as it did. So when we left, everything was still going on. I think the day before we left, we had motors hit the front gate of the base that we were staying, so it definitely was not over, or close to being over when I left. Yeah. That was also scary too though, like there was always an alarm that would sound off alerting you and letting you know that there's an imminent threat so you would have to run in your full gear with your gas mask and everything into a bunker for shelter. And, still to this day, when the alarm goes off for the tornados here.....

NC: Yeah, or the Tuesday alarms, yes.

PS: The Tuesday alarms, oh my God, it freaks me out if I'm not, like if I don't remember it's Tuesday, it freaks me out! And this is funny too, like the first day I came back, I came back on a Monday and of course Tuesdays alarms, start right at 9 A.M. First of all, I slept, I was sleeping because I was so used to working at night and sleeping in the morning, so my clock was off-way off! So, when I came in, I couldn't sleep on my bed, I don't know why, I just didn't feel comfortable so I was sleeping on the floor of my bedroom, and I'd hear this alarm go off. I don't remember how or why, but I just stopped breathing, and I started running looking for my gas mask. But for some reason I didn't realize I was at home. And, you know, it was to the point where I was turning purple and my mom's shaking me saying, "Hey, hey, what's wrong with you?" And at the instant, I don't know, I opened my eyes and I realized, "Oh, I'm home!" And I just took the deepest breath I could because you're supposed to hold your breath, put your mask on, clear it, and start running for the bunker, right, as you are getting dressed. So, I was

looking desperately for my mask and I could not find it! That alarm sounds exactly like the scud missile alarm. The only difference is that at the end of the alarm, you hear “Doo, da, doo!” And that’s the only difference from that alarm and it will tell you at the end like what type of level it is. That was actually funny now but then at that time it wasn’t funny at all.

NC: Did you have dreams or anything after you returned?

PS: Not really. Not really any dreams it’s just I find myself even now, I tend to hold my breath a lot more. I don’t know if it’s because of it, but there are times where I’m like, OK I’ve got to remember I’ve got to take a deep breath. Yes, got to take a deep breath especially when I hear those alarms. I’m telling you, even to this day, it’s kind of like, wait, where am I?

NC: So now you are home and we come into the next group of questions about returning to civilian life. You said your family would ask you a lot of questions. How were your interactions with them after you came back?

PS: Awkward! That’s like the best word I can think of.

NC: How so?

PS: I felt like I couldn’t relate to anybody, you know. I went from a college kid, with no worries, walking around campus, doing whatever I felt like doing and feeling totally safe, to a war zone where I had to watch out not only for my own unit, but watch out for the actual war that was going on and always being vigilant. Then having to revert back to

civilian life, it just felt so awkward like I came back and just watched everybody walking around with no worries at all. It was just so weird to me 'cuz I was like, you're not worried about that? Don't you have to prepare for this? Don't you want to do this? Don't you want to take an extra bag? Certain things that on a day-to-day life that you take for granted were not; they didn't come as easy for me. I went straight back to college.

NC: Oh you returned to school almost immediately?

PS: Yes, I did. The very next semester is when I actually came back.

NC: Could you adjust to the demands of school? Were there sensory things that bothered or distracted you?

PS: When I got back it was June so I started school in August. I just couldn't adjust. My sorority sisters were just always having so much fun, going to parties, having events, and I just did not feel safe at all. Like, I got in trouble so many different times because there's a lot of bars within the college scene and they always have like little scanner wands making sure that you didn't have any metal and, of course, I would always get in trouble because I always carried a knife. I did not feel safe at all, so I always had a knife in my bra, always! Always! I think it took me maybe 6 yrs. to stop carrying it. Yeah! And I only stopped carrying it because it started tearing up my bras in the middle, but I did not feel safe at all. I actually went to campus security and I said, "OK, what's the biggest knife that I could carry?" And they're like, "Wait a minute, what's wrong with you? Like, what do you mean?" So, I actually had in writing how long of a blade I could actually carry with me because they said it can't be any longer than, I don't know if it

was like 2 or 3” and, I don’t know, it was just so detailed and it was just crazy to my sorority sisters watching all of this unfold, right? At that time they had no idea what PTSD was. They had no idea where I was coming from, or why I was acting so weird. They had no idea why I was so upset with them. I guess I could tell you about that a little bit, you know how I told you I was really lonely sometimes there? Well, I kept writing letters to them, and the whole time I was there I received one card from them in response saying, “Hey, hope you’re doing good!” That’s it! No care packages, no “Hey how are you? Hey would you like?” Nothing! So I was so upset coming back saying like, “What’s wrong with you?” You know, but I didn’t realize that their level of the place they were in which was the place that a regular college kid is in. And my mentality was completely different. Like to me, when I first came back, they seemed like children! And I felt like I lost something because I never had that experience. I went from boot camp, to one semester in college, and then off to war at 19 years old. So, having that experience made me grow up really quick! So, coming back and just seeing the childish and foolish certain things going on within the campus with everybody in college, it just seemed so childish and stupid to me! I could not adapt. I think I spoke, more to my professors than I did any other student that was there.

NC: Where you living on campus or were you at home?

PS: I was on campus, yes. But, I just could not relate! I could not relate, I was not having fun, and I’m just like this obviously that’s not what college is supposed to be. It’s supposed to be fun; your first time away, but there wasn’t that many people, especially females, that had gone through what I had gone through. So, it was so tough for me to

just relate to them! And just watching the way my sorority sisters were, I'm just like, this is stupid. How can you be so silly, like, do you not realize that this person could kill you? In my mentality, I was just not where they were and not feeling safe, always carrying some type of weapon with me. They saw it as like, "What is wrong with you?" One of them actually gave me the nickname, "Big Angry"! She kept saying "She's big angry!" Right? But now, years later, she's a Chicago Police Officer, so she completely understands now where I was coming from because of everything that she's experienced.

NC: So you've had discussions about those days with your friends?

PS: Oh yes, definitely.

NC: ..about those past perceptions?

PS: Definitely. One of my sorority sisters is now a kindergarten teacher and we've had so many different conversations, and she was just like, "You know, I never realized that what you were going through was part of PTSD. It was part of you just withdrawing from society because you could not relate with everything that was going on." And she's like, "I did not realize that that's what was going on." And the same thing with my sorority sister who is a Chicago cop. She's like, "You know, I see so much stuff, you know on the street, so much death, so much violence, all this", and she's like, "How did you deal with this?" You know, to me, it was so frustrating that it took these many years for somebody to understand what I was going through when I thought they were my peers, but they couldn't be. You know, because the experiences obviously, were completely different.

It's been interesting conversations now with everybody all grown up and they finally understand where I was coming from.

NC: It's amazing that the friendships endured. I know that sororities are always a binding thing, like it or not, but it is! And it's really, really wonderful that those friendships endured so that you could all see the growth in others and in themselves and look back with some perspective and understanding of each other's experiences in life.

PS: Right, and actually completely understand, and completely understand. Yeah, she actually said like, "I can't believe I called you "Big Angry", I didn't realize that this is what was going on!"

NC: Yes. That is a healing experience.

PS: But, it's interesting, and like I said, it was for me, really tough to actually come back and fall back into place where I was at.

NC: Absolutely. Very tough.

PS: And it took a long time. It took a long time. I was not having fun in school and then at that time since my unit said that we were on 2 yr. rotations, I decided I'm going to finish my 4 years in 2 years or I'm not finishing at all! Because I figured if you pull me out of school one more time, I'm not coming back!

NC: So how many hours did you take each semester?

PS: So, I was taking 21 credit hours, yeah, 21!

NC: You were trying to finish on your own schedule!

PS: Oh, definitely, because I said I did not go through all of that with my dad and arguing over wanting this education, and then just dropping it in the middle of it because I just couldn't handle everything that was going on. So, and not only that, it actually helped me get back into the groove of things because I was so busy with all of my classes, all of the credit hours that I was taking, all of the homework, all of the tests, everything, then yeah, I was so busy that it didn't give me as much time to think about the crazy stuff that had just had happened a few months before that.

NC: So that saved you in a lot of ways.

PS: I think so. I think so.

NC: What was your major in college?

PS: I had a double major. It was Law Enforcement.

NC: What was the program title?

PS: It's LEJA. So it's Law Enforcement Justice Administration and then the second major was in Spanish.

NC: Amazing! 21 hours at a time.

PS: 21 credit hours a semester just to finish in 2 years.

NC: No small order! Did you go back to Kuwait then?



PS: No. No I was fortunate enough that my unit did not get activated again.

NC: So back to the unit....the, the few women who were in the unit, do you have any contact with them?

PS: Within my unit?

NC: Yes.

PS: No. No, not within the unit. I have contact with the women that I graduated boot camp with and that's only because they started a group on Face book.

NC: Sorry, you mentioned that.

PS: But as far as my unit, no, never. It was only, like I said, there was only like a few of us.

NC: Lonely road for a woman in the Marines at that time.

PS: And, I was the only one in my section. Right.

NC: Do you think it's still the same mindset in the Marines? Are women trained separately and referred to as "Women Marines?"

PS: Yes, it's still the same.

NC: Well, Patty, you've given me so much information here and it's priceless for us to know about. Being so young to learn those kinds of lessons, if you were going to tell

somebody who might be thinking about joining the military, what would you say to them? What piece of advice would you say to them?

PS: I would say definitely research the branch that you want to go into, and read the fine print so you know what you are getting yourself into, what the contract is actually about, not just blindly sign it and say, yes, this is where I want to go, and this is what I want to do. And, the reason why I say that is because I got into the Marine Corps, or I joined the Marine Corps to pay for school. However, after my first semester, I couldn't afford it any more. I didn't realize that the fine print said you either have to be have one full year of active duty, or be a veteran of foreign wars before they pay for your school.

NC: Oh.

PS: Right. So, I didn't know this. I just believed what my recruiter said and I said OK, I'm going to pay for school, and I'm going to sign this, and I'm going to go! My first semester had to come out of my own pocket. So, if it wasn't for my unit getting activated, I would have not been able to afford school.

NC: You would not have been able to afford school.

PS: Yeah, I would not have been able to afford school.

NC: Where did you go?

PS: Western Illinois.

NC: OK.

PS: At the time I think they were second in the nation for their Criminal Justice program and that's what I wanted to do.

NC: That ranking is impressive.

PS: Yeah, so I would say definitely look into what you are signing and just make sure it's something that you are willing to do because just like every other job, it comes with pros and cons. It all depends on what you want to get out of it. I would never deter somebody from joining the military because I think that experience made me who I am. And, I think, like I said before, if I could go back into boot camp without having to sign a contract, I would do it in a heartbeat!

NC: Wow.

PS: So I think that experience was awesome! Like you just get to learn so much, you grow up, you know, because at that time almost everybody is 17 or 18 years old, so you grow up, you become yourself! And you start figuring out, I can do certain things. I don't need my parents to do these things for me. I am an adult and this is how I can continue on the flight, but I think, just like everything else, it does come with different cons depending on which branch you join, and, I guess you just have to be careful as to where you go and make sure that you're not perceived as something that you're not, especially when it comes to like the Marine Corps. Like I said, since you don't train with males, once you do actually mingle with the males, you're seen in a different light depending on how you do things.

NC: Well, when all is said and done, and you look back, do you feel that you really made a contribution to the country through your service?

PS: I think so. I'm very proud of myself, I think definitely, anybody who's ever served, whether they went to war or not, I think they've made a huge contribution because these contracts, I don't know if you are aware of it, they're not what they used to be. It's not just 2 years. Every single contract that you sign is for at least 8 years of your life. My contract was a 5 by 3 it's just considered 5 by 3 because even though it was part of the reserve side, 5 years I am required to go to drill and to training for those 5 years. The last 3 years you're not required to do training, you're in the ready reserves which basically means even though you're not going to training every single year and every month, you are still eligible to be called out for war if something were to kick off. So, all of these contracts, like I said, are at least 8 years of your life. Except after your initial contract, then I think they give you options as to 2 years, 1 year for re-enlistment, but the initial contract is always 8 years. And usually for active duty it will be 4 full years and then 4 years in the Ready Reserve.

NC: Thank you for that clarification.

PS: Yeah.

NC: And now you're long past that time?

PS: Oh yes! I got out Oct. of 2008, and I couldn't wait!

NC: Yes. So, with your service, how do you think this impacted your feelings about war and military in general?

PS: I think I respect the military a lot more. I had no idea what they actually did when I was 16 and 17 years old trying to get into the military. Can you repeat your question one more time so that I make sure I am actually answering it?

NC: How did your military service impact your feelings about war and the military in general?

PS: OK, so as far as war, having been on the civilian side, and I mean I was very young when Desert Storm kicked off, so I didn't really know anything about the military, I just knew OK troops are over seas, didn't know what was going on. But, it's totally changed the way I view certain things because I think everybody whose here as a civilian, you get to see what the news gives you, presents to you, but not necessarily what's really going on. The pain that people are going through, whether it's like missing loved ones, or if they're hurt, I just have a lot more respect for the leaders of our country. I guess because now they have to make that decision whether we go to war or not and it's a bit scary to think that, another war could kick off because I've already been there, and I know it's not something nice and it's not something that I would like to go back to. Till this day, I think I don't quite understand why there has to be so much violence to obtain something else? But I have much more respect for the people who do go to war, the people who serve within the military, and I see them in a different light now because before it seemed like even now for some civilians, it's just like, "Oh, you know, the military always gets

free stuff.” “Oh, yeah, if he’s in the military you get to go to the museums for free.” “Oh, I can’t believe it’s this!” You know, there’s a lot of people who see it as...

NC: Entitlement packages!

PS: Yes, then, as an entitlement. Thank you, I couldn’t think of the word, but yes they see it as that, but, you know, most of us don’t take advantage of any of the perks. Like I injured my back and I was so afraid to, to even file or say, “Hey. my back is injured.” Because I’m just saying, I came back whole. There’s somebody else who's missing a limb, it’s just why would I take this from that? It’s just like there’s a lot of us that don’t take advantage of everything that is offered. I think it’s changed my way of viewing things, but I have a lot more respect for both war and the people in it.

NC: Yes- for the people who go! Do you feel you were well received in general when you came back? I know you talked about your sorority sisters, but how about other people’s responses to you, did they ask you questions?

PS: My family had questions and they were very happy to see me. My high school was actually not happy to see me!

NC: Why is that?

PS: I was just not well received. I went to visit some of my teachers from high school and I was in full uniform, actually very proud and just walking in to say hello to everybody, and the principal escorted me out! This was at Morton East. They did not want anybody that was in the military in uniform at that location.

NC: Did they have an ROTC unit on campus?

PS: No they did not, and I actually didn't understand why they were kicking me out, but one of the teachers there said they just don't want kids to be joining the military especially at wartime. Like what's going on? M school beat Roberto Clement for pregnancy rates and had a huge problem with gangs, but yet they kick out the person who's actually making a difference because I'm in uniform.

NC: That is shocking and that must have taken you by complete surprise.

PC: I never understood that. I was well received within my family, but within the rest of the civilian life, the community, sometimes it was good, sometimes it was bad-it all depended on where I was. At the airport, it was actually pretty awesome! At the airport if you're in uniform at that time, they were clapping for you, and it just felt awesome! You know, because they knew what you were doing, where you were coming from. Other places just had absolutely no respect for it and did not like you.

NC: This had to be confusing and infuriating. Civilians often respond to veterans according to their political beliefs about war.

PS: Yes, definitely.

NC: Two, two quick questions, quick but deep: What would you say were, was your major life lesson that you learned from your service, just about life in general?

PS: The 2 major life lessons?

NC: Or 1, 1 or 2.

PS: I would say always believe in yourself. Because, like I said, I think especially during, um, boot camp, and wartime, I did a lot of things that I did not feel I was capable of at the time. And just see in my self succeed in all of that, it definitely made me believe in myself a lot more knowing that I am capable and I am better than what I thought. Let me see, the second life lesson: be careful who you trust... I have had always had trust issues and more now after having gone through the military. I guess it's a huge life lesson because you can be having a conversation with somebody not knowing that that person has ill intentions towards you. And I think if you can apply that to both military and civilian anywhere you are at. I was a kid when I first joined, so I was very trustworthy, like I trusted everybody and I learned really quick that you shouldn't be that way! You need to watch who you are with.

NC: Yes, Both lessons very different, but long lasting lessons.

PS: Definitely.

NC: Well, last question. What message would you like to leave for future generations who are going to hear your interview? Times will change and people will listen to this and what will be your message to them?

PS: I think, joining the military is always a great experience. I guess just believe in yourself and stand up for what you believe and don't lose yourself because of anything else that's going on in life, in war, in different locations. It doesn't mean that because you've had certain type of training that you are above the law or that you're invincible



because that this part of life, so at one point certain things are going to end. But, have fun as you do everything and learn as you go, take it for what it is, and, I don't know, just don't take life for granted.

NC: Yes. Well, and you certainly don't! And, I'm really honored that I've had a chance to be face to face with you and listening to your wonderful contributions and the very deep life lessons and experiences brought to you from such an early age and carried through your life now. So thank you for that! Of course, thank you for your service. I have a son in the military and I think that it's very important that we acknowledge the sacrifices that you've made and contributions to so that we could sit here and have our coffee in peace in the morning.

PS: OK. Thank you!