Mary C. Mina oral history interview

Lieutenant Colonel, United States Army
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Abstract: Mary Card Mina, a female career Army JAG Corps veteran and mother, who served 1997–2020 recounts how her love of adventure led her to enlist following a summer-abroad internship. In her 23 years of service as a JAG attorney and Staff Judge Advocate, Card Mina served in Germany, South Korea, Fort Hood, Texas; Fort Sill, Oklahoma; and FOB Kalsu near Musaib, Iraq. She discusses how witnessing 9/11 in D.C. reinforced her desire to serve, as well as her experiences presiding over the 9/11 terrorism trials at Guantanamo Bay, getting married, starting a family, and raising a child during her Army service.

Transcript Notes:

Transcriber:	TEMI
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Additional Notes:	
	MM: Mary Mina
	HS: Heidi Sheldon

Interview Transcript:

[0:05] HS: Alright hello, Mary, I'm just gonna note that today is October 13, and it is 3:30. And can I get you to say and spell your name for us?

[0:17] MM: Sure, my name is Mary Card Mina. M-A-R-Y and then C-A-R-D and next name M-I-N-A.

[0:24] HS: OK, and can you tell me a little bit about where you grew up?

[0:30] MM: Sure, I grew up in North Haven, Connecticut. A small town, it's a suburb of New Haven. And I stayed there pretty much until I went to college.

[0:40] HS: And what led you to join the military?

[0:45] MM: So, it was the recruiters, actually, that came on campus at our law school. I saw a poster, and I still remember it very distinctly, that advertised for summer internships abroad with the Army. And so, I applied for one between my second and third year of law school. And the recruiter that interviewed me was phenomenal, and we stayed in touch pretty much my entire career. She was an amazing female officer-leader. She became a mentor. So, I was accepted into that, and I spent a summer between my second and third year of law school in Germany, working for the Army [inaudible]. And so, while others were toiling away, working in the law school, law firm, libraries, I was spending the weekend in Paris for the Fourth of July (laughs)

[1:43] HS: (Laughs)

[1:44] MM: and all other great opportunities. So, that internship is what led me to want to apply for active duty. The people that I met—and it's funny, it was three distinct groups, or three people that I became friends with that summer—an enlisted soldier, who was a paralegal, and I learned lot about the Army through his eyes; the senior officer, so the Colonel, the Staff Judge Advocate, he really welcomed me, took me in, and I saw the Army through his perspective; and then I became really good friends with our translator that worked in the office, a German national. And I saw again the Army, the U.S. Army, through her eyes. So, I really wanted to join alongside people like that for the future.

[2:33] HS: All right, so then you joined, I'm guessing, upon completion of law school. Is that correct?

[2:37] MM: Yes, yep.

[2:38] HS: OK, and what was your first assignment? What did you do first?

[2:42] MM: So, my first assignment was at Camp Humphreys, Korea. (Laughs) my assignment officer, we had a list of—a preference sheet—and they were somewhat surprised that I picked Korea because it was sometimes hard to fill, but again, I'd had such a great experience with the Army abroad that I wanted to continue that. And so, I asked for Korea for my first choice, and I went to Korea. It was supposed to be a year assignment, but I loved it so much, I extended for a second year. In that role, I was a Legal Assistance Attorney my first year, and so I helped soldiers

with their personal legal matters and also some retirees that had retired in the local area. And then, my second year there, I was a trial counsel, or a prosecutor.

[3:35] HS: So, it sounds like you have a pretty good sense of adventure (laughs).

[3:40] MM: Yes (laughs).

[3:44] HS: So, what did you do after Korea?

[3:45] MM: So, after Korea I went back to Germany. So, I was again given my first choice back to Europe. I spent two years in Germany. Part of that time, a couple months, I was deployed to Kosovo, but for the most part I was stationed in Bad Kreuznach, Germany, before it closed with the First Armored Division. Again, great experiences: I was able to reconnect with the legal office that I interned at, and that was fun. And yeah, so I loved it. I loved being in Germany for two years. So, it was four years total time. My first four years in the Army, I was overseas: Korea, Germany, and then Kosovo. And it was, yep, a great adventure.

[4:36] HS: And so after Germany, did you then come back to the United States.

[4:39] MM: I did, yes. I had the opportunity the opportunity to extend in Europe, but at that point it was four years away from home, and I did want to come back for a little bit. So um, I was lucky enough to then return to the U.S. and get posted in the D.C. area, which is where I went to law school. So, it was nice to come home.

[5:02] HS: And how did your job change from being overseas and then being back in the United States?

[5:10] MM: Um, I don't know that there were many differences in terms of sort of overseas vs. U.S. I guess, when I was in Korea, I was a trial observer, so that was a thing that would be unique to an overseas assignment. So, any time an American was being tried in a Korean court, I went in an official capacity to observe the trial, to make sure that it was fair in accordance with the laws of that jurisdiction. And we relied a lot on our legal counterparts to help us with that role. But yeah, there weren't that many differences in terms of being stationed overseas in a non-deployment situation and being stationed stateside. I think it was more the jobs. Almost every assignment I had a different job. So, in Germany I was an administrative law attorney. Then I did go back to client services. I was the chief, so I had a leadership role there. And when I returned to the U.S. I was an appellate defense counsel, which is completely different from anything that I had done before. So, I think my experience with the Army, especially up until that point, it was constant change. I had a new job almost every year, but I enjoyed that.

[6:30] HS: And how long were you in Washington, D.C.?

[6:33] MM: For that assignment, I was there for two years—or no, I'm sorry, three years. And then it was time for me to go to our Advanced Course, which is in Charlottesville, Virginia, at UVA—the JAG School.

[6:52] HS: And once you completed your Advanced Course, then where did you go?

[6:59] MM: So after that, I was sent to Fort Hood, Texas. I had requested that assignment. The brigades were becoming sort of a great job, or the job that everyone was pursuing at that point—being with the Brigade Combat Team. So, I was lucky enough to get one of the six brigades that were offered for my grad course. And the Judge Advocate General at the time, General Black, actually met with us, and he did this purposefully. He chose three women and three men to take those assignments. And so, I knew basically when I was in Charlottesville that I would be going to Texas and then deploying from there. So, that was something that I sought, and that I really wanted to do. Especially at that point, I was still single, no children. I still had sort of that sense of adventure. I was ready to go sort of back overseas in a different way, in a deployed environment.

[8:08] HS: So, what year was that? When were you in Texas?

[8:12] MM: I was in Texas from 2005 to 2008, with one of those years being deployed to Iraq.

[8:21] HS: OK, so then you would have joined the military prior to 9/11, correct?

[8:26] MM: Yes, yep, I joined in January 1997.

[8:30] HS: OK, so did 9/11 change how you felt about being in the Army, or?

[8:37] MM: I think if anything, it reinforced my commitment to want to serve. I was stationed in D.C. at the time of September 11th, and actually it's sort of one of the more defining memories of my career, I think. So, my father passed away suddenly on September 1st of 2001, and I actually flew back from his funeral on September 10th.

[9:09] HS: Oh, my.

[9:10] MM: My first day back in the office was on September 11, and I remember going into the office, sort of feeling just that, you know, uneasy feeling of after a loss, you go back to work; you know people are gonna be coming up to you, expressing sympathy—very well-meaning, well-intended, but I was sort of bracing for that return. I was very close with my colleagues; it was a wonderful office, so I knew that I would be well-received on return. And I remember, I sort of had just gotten in, had gotten settled. I had a client call right away, so I had closed my door. And then all of a sudden, there was a lot of commotion, I remember, in the hallway, and we were all brought into the conference room. And then, we had found out what had happened, and the first reaction was everyone was sort of pulled into the conference room, huddled as a group, and then the guidance sort of shifted, and they told us we all needed to go home. And so yeah, that was my first day back on the job. And so yeah, it definitely reinforced my commitment that that was what I wanted to do and where I wanted to be.

[10:29] HS: You mentioned when you were in Texas that you sought out a deployment. So, where did you deploy, and what job were you doing while you were deployed?

[10:42] MM: Yes, so I was with the Brigade Combat Team, Second Brigade Combat Team, Fourth Infantry Division. And I was the Brigade Judge Advocate. So, in that role, I was in charge of the legal office that was sort of this insular group. There were about eight of us, and so I had one other attorney that joined me in the beginning, and then another one joined us midway through, and then the rest were paralegals. We also had an Iraqi national, who was our translator; we had multiple

translators, but one in particular that we worked with. So, my job was basically to work for the brigade commander and for the staff and for all of the battalion commanders and to provide the full array of legal services. So, we did, you know, legal assistance, especially prior to deployment, helping soldiers with their wills, powers of attorney. When we were deployed, unfortunately we helped with a lot of separation agreements, counseling for divorce. But then we also were involved with rules of engagement, and we did a lot. In that time period, during that time period, there was a lot of activity in Iraq, so we were very involved with rules of engagement. We paid claims, and we advised on administrative law: so basically, any legal issue comes to my office and to my team.

[12:13] HS: And where in Iraq were you?

[12:15] So, we were at FOB Kalsu—Forward Operating Base Kalsu—near Musaib. It was south of Baghdad, and our geographic footprint for the brigade, it was the equivalent—I believe it was the size of South Carolina. Like it was *very large*. We had multiple other forward operating bases. So, we had to drive or fly to provide legal services to others in our brigade that were not co-located.

[12:49] HS: Can you speak a little bit about your experience as a woman being in a combat zone?

[12:55] MM: Yeah, absolutely. So, I was very fortunate because my brigade commander, his mother was in the Women's Army Corps. And leadership definitely flows from the top. And so, I think for him, from his perspective—again, his mother was in the Army, and there were even fewer women at the time that his mother was in the Army—so for him, I was not a novelty. I was an officer, and again, I think I was very fortunate because he really set the tone for the brigade. There weren't many of us, but we did hold key positions: the S4 at the time was female; the Public Affairs Officer was female. So, there were several of us that were there. In terms of the soldier population, there were not a lot of women at all.

[13:53] HS: Right.

[13:54] MM: So, I mean overall, I had a great experience. One opportunity in particular that really came up because I was a woman, and I was with an infantry brigade: One of the battalions wanted to do a project in an all-girls school, but they were having trouble communicating with the leadership of the school, again, because of sort of the cultural barriers between male and female [in Iraq]. So, they basically needed women to go in and sort of advance their proposal and sort of, you know, bring that forward. And that was a wonderful opportunity. We went into the school. There were several of us that were female went to the school. The women were very excited about the project to help the school, and then in turn, they invited us back—the females that were there—back to sort of do a career day. And that was one of the best experiences that I had, deployed. While the soldiers were outside pulling security and also doing some of the repairs that they had an eye on doing, we were inside talking to the girls about what they wanted to be sort of when they grew up—that career question—and then talking about our jobs. And we had a female mechanic that was with us. I was there. We had a nurse, Public Affairs. So, it was just a great experience. And for the most part, the girls wanted to be either doctors or lawyers. So, it was just a wonderful experience, and they really enjoyed hearing from the mechanic and sort of acknowledged how hard her life must be cause there really were no other female mechanics; she was it.

[15:44] HS: That's a really unique opportunity!

[15:47] MM: Mhmm, it was. It was great. It really, it was great, and I remember the ask. I remember, they sent an infantry lieutenant up to me to ask me to do it, and he was just stumbling and fumbling, and I couldn't figure out where he was going (laughs). And he said, "Hello, I need to talk to you because you're a woman, and I don't know how to say this."

[16:08] HS: (Laughs)

[16:10] MM: And it was funny because I really was like, "Where is this going?" (laughs). And then he kind of put it out there, and I think he thought maybe I was gonna be upset, but I truly appreciated the opportunity—or that situation—that the pretty much male infantry unit wanted to go help the women, help the girls' school. But they couldn't even get started because of that [gender] barrier. And not only were we able to go in and sort of make that happen for them and help them achieve one of their enumerated missions [but also] we then turned it into a career day opportunity and were able to go back. So yeah, I love that whole [inaudible].

[16:59] HS: That's lovely! So, while you were deployed, what did you do during your down time, if you had any?

[17:08] MM: (Laughs) Oh, so yeah, there was not a lot of down time. But you know, we did do normal things. And this is funny (laughs), so before deploying, I had always gone to a salon to get my hair done. And so, one of the other women in the unit showed me how to color my hair (laughs).

[17:34] HS: (Laughs)

[17:35] MM: So, that was, like, a fun thing to do in a shower trailer of course.

[17:40] HS: (Laughs)

[17:41] MM: Trying to, you know, color your hair. But I remember that distinctly because she had colored her own for years and really wasn't into fancy salons. I was much more into that, and so it was nice to keep that normalcy while deployed. Though, I do remember one time we were doing that, there was a knock on the trailer door. A soldier had come for us; the commander needed to see both of us (laughs).

[18:05] HS: (Laughs)

[18:06] MM: And needed to talk, so (laughs) we kind of quickly got ourselves together, ran in, and of course there were a couple of comments like, "Wow, you guys smell really clean" (laughs).

[18:18] HS: (Laughs)

[18:20] MM: Yeah, so definitely some hair coloring. We did our nails, like all the, you know, stuff. I did read a lot too. I remember trying to read, but usually by the time I would go to bed at night, I would read a page or two, and then I would drift off to sleep. Same thing with journaling. I tried to keep a journal, but so many of the journal writings, like I literally sort of fell asleep, and the writing kind of goes downhill, but.

[18:46] HS: (Laughs)

[18:49] MM: But I'm glad to have some of those.

[18:52] HS: What was communication like with your friends and family back home?

[18:57] MM: Yeah, so it was totally different than what it is now. Um, we didn't have cell phones. We did not have Zoom or anything virtual. The only thing we had, really, were snail mail—letters—and then phone calls. So, I was still single at that time—no children—but my mom was alive, and I was an only child, super-close with her. So, I would call her once a week, and it was a really complicated system: You had to call for like the overseas operator, then use this, like, 50-digit phone card number, and the connection wasn't great. But I knew it helped her to hear my voice. And for me as well. And so every week, I called her. One of the funny stories, we had a mortar attack during a phone call (laughs), and I remember trying to disguise the noise to the point that my mom was like, "What's that noise?" I'm like, "Oh, someone just threw something into the garbage can, into the dumpster. It's really loud. But I do think I need to go now, so I'll call you back (laughs)."

[20:19] HS: (Laughs).

[20:21] MM: (Laughs) as I was crawling under the desk to take cover and then running to the bunker. So yes, communication was definitely a challenge. The other piece of communication that I saved: My best friend was a teacher, and she taught third grade, and she had her class write to me, and I saved all those letters because they were just priceless.

[20:47] HS: Yeah.

[20:48] MM: I did answer every one also, every letter, and then I was able to meet her class afterwards. So, that was a great memory also from deployment, sending communication.

[21:02] HS: So, what did you do when that deployment was over? Where were you assigned afterwards?

[21:08] MM: So, the good and bad: So, I went back to Fort Hood. I still had another year there, but I went to a different unit. I went to 3 Corps. And it was hard because it was very comforting to be with the brigade, especially we had all gotten very close. We returned for a very short time; everyone sort of took their block leave. And then as we were returning and reconstituting, everyone started leaving, and some people were leaving the installation; like for me, I just went across the street to 3 Corps. But it felt like a loss in a way, and it was sort of hard to get used to another unit, and especially a unit that wasn't going to be deploying together. So, even though I was still in Texas—still at Fort Hood—it was an odd transition that next year. And I really just needed a job for a year at that point because I was eligible for Advanced Education at that point—CGSC. So, it was kind of a blessing and a curse to sort of stay there: I didn't have to uproot, didn't have to move. I still could see some of the friends that I had deployed with. But it was hard. It was hard leaving the unit. And I remember my first day, I actually went back to the brigade at the end of the day, and I bumped into the brigade commander and just kind of said, you know, "It's OK, I just wanna come back sometimes."

[22:37] HS: Yeah.

[22:38] MM: You know? And he of course was like, "You're welcome any time. I know it's hard to go to another unit." It was good.

[22:46] HS: So, after your time at Fort Hood, then you did CGSC?

[22:51] MM: Yes, that was a year, and that was another great opportunity. I love school. I love education. That's definitely one of the benefits that the JAG Corps provides, and the Army in general.

[23:06] HS: And what did you do upon completion of that?

[23:09] MM: So after CGSC, oh my goodness, it all becomes a blur (laughs).

[23:14] HS: (Laughs)

[23:15] MM: I went back to D.C. (laughs). I went back to D.C., to the D.C. area, and I took on a great job. One of my best jobs. Actually, I've loved all of my jobs, but I was the Chief of Recruiting for the Army JAG Corps. So, it was definitely a non-legal job.

[23:35] HS: Mhmm.

[23:36] MM: And my role was to recruit and help retain judge advocates. I had judge advocates that augmented my team and did interviews. We interviewed at all of the 288 accredited law schools. So, it was a lot of travel. My particular role, too, was a focus on diversity and ensuring that women and minorities were represented in our corps, and also that we went to them. So, we went to a lot of the Diversity BAR Associations and met with lots of student groups, like Women's Law Caucus. And so, that was again a very rewarding job and something I loved. Especially rewinding back to my experience with my recruiter, and what an impact that person had made on me. I knew I was having an impact in that role. So, I did that for two years, and then I was sort of at that point of again needing that one-year job before the next adventure. And I was an assistant executive officer for a couple of our general officers.

[24:51] HS: And then what did you do after that?

[24:55] MM: Then after that, I was—and actually you know, I flipped it. I was the XO first, then I went to Recruiting. *Then*, I left D.C., and I went to Fort Sill, Oklahoma, and became the Staff Judge Advocate there.

[25:16] HS: And what did you like best about that job in Oklahoma?

[25:22] MM: So, that was my most challenging job (laughs).

[25:26] HS: Okay.

[25:27] MM: Um, but what I liked about it was the true opportunities to lead. It was a large office. We had about 80 personnel: civilian, military. Fort Sill, Oklahoma's kind of remote, middle-of-nowhere Oklahoma, so not a lot to do. So, there was a lot of need and opportunity to create sort of social activities. It was a very social office. But I do remember about that assignment, and I think it just comes with having lots of people in your office. You have to deal with a lot of things, like substance abuse; I had a family that had a miscarriage; we had a soldier self-refer for mental health

issues. So, just a lot of sort of grief and loss, but then the flip side, we had over 20 babies that were born—so, lots of baby showers. So, I think that was just a great challenge of leadership to really be involved in soldiers' and civilians' lives [inaudible].

[26:41] HS: And where did you go next after Oklahoma?

[26:44] MM: After Oklahoma, I went to Aberdeen Proving Ground in Maryland, and there I was the Staff Judge Advocate, which was always my career aspiration. So again, I was able to lead and mentor soldiers. I had great civilians with me. I worked for a couple of general officers and again was responsible for coordinating and providing all of their legal services. So, that was a great job too.

[27:13] HS: Did you do anything after that?

[27:17] MM: After that, I went to my final job in the Army, which was with the Office of Military Commissions, and I was an assistant legal advisor. And the military commissions worked with the detainees that are at Guantanamo Bay, Cuba. So, convening authority, our role was neutral; it was more assisting with resourcing and funding the trials, as well as advising the convening authority on expert witnesses and that sort of thing. My job took me to Guantanamo Bay, Cuba office; I was able to observe some of the 9/11 proceedings, which was a great opportunity—very sobering, especially as family members also were there, observing the trials. And I remembered, you know, being in D.C. during that time. There were also other cases: the USS *Cole* bombing, the alleged mastermind behind that was there. So, yeah, it was a great opportunity—a good way to end. It's difficult to sort of leave[?] the Army, but I think that helped me to transition well.

[28:32] HS: So, when you left the Army, what were your feelings about that?

[28:41] MM: So, I think, I mean for me personally, I wish I could have been a Staff Judge Advocate again. I retired as a lieutenant colonel. I wish I had gotten to the rank of colonel. There were some things that happened at Fort Sill that didn't allow that progression in my mind. So, that was hard. It was sort of hard to accept that there was a ceiling, and I couldn't get any farther. *But*, the flip side is it was time for me personally. When I was stationed in D.C. the second time, I got married. When I was at Fort Sill, I had my first and only child. And it also was time. So you know that adage, "everything happens for a reason." But I had wanted more. I had wanted to be a Staff Judge Advocate again. I certainly appreciate the opportunity because not everyone gets to that role. Not everyone can be a Staff Judge Advocate, and so I'm grateful for what I had—and especially now. I retired in 2019. I think it was a lot harder at that point, even, walking away and processing everything, and thinking what could've been. But now, I think it's a very clear rear-view-mirror picture, and everything sort of happened as it should.

[30:16] HS: Well, what would you tell a group of high school students who were considering joining the military?

[30:24] MM: Hmm, yeah. We did a lot of "pipeline recruiting," as we called it, when I was at JRO, and I think it would sort of be those same messages: The Army is such a great way to see the world, to get an education, to get additional education, to give back to your country, to serve, to be part of something larger than yourself. And whatever your career field, most likely you can find

that in the military. And, you know, just my experience being a part of the military has continued, and I know will continue to open a lot of doors. People either have tremendous respect for the military, I've found, or are former military and want to help. So, there are just—the military gives you so much back. It gives so much to *you*, and by the same token you can give in return. So, it was difficult in a lot of those assignments, there definitely are sacrifices that everyone has to make in the military, but overall, I think for the most part it's so worth it. Also, I think I would tell a high schooler, especially, "You know, you don't have to choose the military for 20 years, for a 20-year career. You could choose it for an assignment or two." And that was always my goal. I mean, I was voted "most likely to leave after three years,"

[31:55] HS: (Laughs).

[31:56] MM: after the initial commitment (laughs). And I stayed for 23. And I just decided to stay as long as I felt like I was still being useful, doing meaningful work. And I really stayed because of the people. I think, more than anything, I would emphasize to a group of high schoolers, especially—where relationships and friendships are super-important at that age—that the friends you make in the Army are lifelong friends. You know, my battle buddy from Iraq, like, I would do anything for her. I would drop everything if she called. And people from that brigade, just former officers that I've worked for or have worked with—it's such an inspiring group of people. So yeah, I think I would tell them all of that (laughs).

[32:53] HS: So, I'm going to ask you a question that you don't have to answer if you don't want to.

[32:59] MM: Mhmm.

[33:00] HS: So, part of our goal with this Oral History Project has been to increase the diversity of the voices that are represented in our archives. Because right now it is mostly men—like overwhelmingly men, and overwhelmingly really from the World War II era. So, I'd like to ask you about your experience as a mom

[33:22] MM: Sure.

[33:23] HS: in the military. And I know this is kind of, like, touchy because we don't usually ask men, like, "What's your experience as a dad?"

[33:30] MM: Mhmm.

[33:34] HS: because, of course, as humans we're all capable of being parents and professionals at the same time. But just because this is, um, you know, having more women in more active roles in the military, we want to make sure that we capture some of these things. So, if you're comfortable speaking about your experience as a mom in the military, we'd love to hear about it.

[33:54] MM: Oh sure, absolutely! Yeah, and I think—so, a couple of things that come to mind: So, I had my child much later in life. I was a first-time mom at 41, and I was a lieutenant colonel. And when I was in, you know, the Army waiting room at the hospital for my check-ups—my appointments—I mean, the people on my left and right were 18–19 years old (laughs). So, I could have *been* their mom. My experience was very different, and with rank does come some privileges.

And what I mean by that was, I had deployed. I had done my overseas time; like, I was established. I had proven myself, and then I had a child. So, it was a little bit different for me, but I tried to never take shortcuts; I went to the PT formation up until my eighth-and-a-half month.

[34:53] HS: Oh my gosh!

[34:54] MM: Because female soldiers had to do the same thing. And so, that was important for me, to be there and to do what they were doing. You know, I think about—so again, Fort Sill was a very difficult assignment in a lot of ways. I had a lot of toxic leadership that I was dealing with, and it was rough because I was pregnant my first year and had the child—had James—my second year. And the toxic leadership was from a male who clearly was not comfortable with women, especially not pregnant women. So, it was a challenge on all ways. But one of the things that I remember: I was pregnant. My husband was also traveling for work at the time. So, I was really nervous that I was gonna go into labor and be there by myself and have to, you know, go and give birth. Thankfully, I had wonderful friends, and that didn't happen. My husband was home when I ended up having James, but one of my soldiers—a [inaudible] soldier—had gotten very ill, and the senior female NCO leadership wasn't available. So, I went to check on her, and she was young and very scared. Her family couldn't be there for her, and so I asked her, you know, "Is it okay if I stay?" And she hesitated, and I feel like she hesitated because I was an officer, and she was an enlisted member. And I said, "Nope, let me rephrase. I'm just gonna stay here with you tonight, if that's okay." And she just looked so relieved. And I was pregnant at that point with James, and I remember thinking, "I want to tell James about this story: that he spent the night in the hospital with a soldier because they were scared. They were away from home, and they needed somebody to be with them." And so, I thought a lot about James just when I was pregnant. When I would go to the PT formation, you know, now I will tell him: "Right, you don't take shortcuts just because you're in a leadership role. If anything, you make sure that you're there. You enforce the standard." I was doing PT, again, up until my eighth-and-a-half month, and he was with me!

[37:25] HS: (Laughs)

[37:27] MM: So, I really thought a lot about him when I was pregnant. I think, once he was born, my husband continued to travel for work. So, a lot of the times when I would have to go back into the office, I had James in his car seat, and I put James on my desk. So, he was in his car. Seat on one side, and I had my computer screen on the other side, and I was typing and working and making sure he knew I was still there. So, he was definitely a part of the office, and I felt that was important too—for people to see him there. As he got older, again, he was always part of the office; I brought him in on weekends. At Aberdeen we had reservists that would come in and work in our office and help us on the weekend, and so I would always bring him by, and he was their little morale helper (laughs) for the weekend. And again, reinforcing in him, "OK, we have people; their unit was in Pennsylvania, and they were away from home. And we have people visiting us and helping us in our office who are away from home. Let's go visit them!" And we would bring brownies or just do something to visit. The final thing, and I'm happy to answer any other specific question, but. James still remembers—and I think there's part of him that will always remember this—at my retirement ceremony, I'm sure that he received the Military Child Medal, which is something that you just buy; you can buy it through a commercial site. You get the medal, and I

had it engraved with his name on it. And that was the most important part of my retirement ceremony for me. I wanted that to happen. I still remember him receiving the medal, and he still talks about it. So, just the sense of pride that he had, and I really wanted my ceremony to be about thanking my family: my husband but, especially, my son because he had done a lot. He had moved—and this is nothing compared to what some military children go through, but—he was born at Fort Sill, Oklahoma. He moved to Aberdeen Proving Ground, Maryland, then he moved to Virginia, our final place, all by the time he was five. And, like, we started with, I didn't leave until I was 18. He had moved three times by the time he was five. So, um, I really commend him, and his resiliency, and all military children. But yeah, it's hard to be a mom on active duty. I feel like, especially if you are younger in your career, you still have a lot to prove; you want to take on the tough jobs and leadership roles. It is *so* challenging. Your bosses make a huge difference. Again, I did not have great support at Fort Sill. When I got to Aberdeen, though, it was like night and day, and I had great support.

[40:35] HS: Is there anything else about your military experience that you'd like to share?

[40:42] MM: Oh my goodness, there's so much! (Laughs)

[40:45] HS: I know, it's one question for 23 years, right? (Laughs)

[40:50] MM: You know, I think the most visual thing that I can talk about with the military—and I mentioned this during my retirement ceremony—so, when I joined the Army, I couldn't do a push-up. I couldn't run, like, I was *not* into, like, being physically fit.

[41:10] HS: Mhmm.

[41:11] MM: I was worried about that, and, you know, the JAG School, they get you where you need to be—definitely get you to be able to pass your PT test. But I remember, we had a diagnostic PT test. And I still remember this, and this is back in 1997, mind you. And I remember, there were three of us left on the track. It was diagnostic; it wasn't the actual thing, but the three of us were struggling. Everybody else had finished, and it's that even grade-school thing: Nobody likes to be last. No one wants to be the last one out there; you feel like you don't know what [is] going through people's minds. And I just remember being so discouraged and then thinking, reevaluating the whole thing even in that moment: like, "What am I doing here? This is not me. I can't do this." All of the negative sort of "can'ts." And then, like, out of nowhere, three guys—and they were men—came out, one on each side of me and one slightly in front of me. And they just offered encouragement—not, like, in a yelling, screaming way because that would not have motivated me—but very gentle, like, "OK, we're gonna do this. We're gonna run with you. You've only got another," like, I think it was two laps at that point. I just remember being so grateful to them because I wasn't alone; I was now literally, like, surrounded.

[42:40] HS: Mhmm.

[42:41] MM: And I felt like "I can finish," and I did. And then I was able to pass the PT test. And I really credit them, and that's sort of been my experience in the military. Like, there have been a lot of "I can't do this" moments; "what am I thinking?" And I kind of look around, and there's somebody that's there. There's somebody that's inspiring. There's somebody that's encouraging.

And then along the way, like, I've been that person too because while the physical fitness is hard for me, there's other things that are easier for me. So, I guess that story, that sort of finishing the PT test, the leadership that the three of them had that day—and there were also the other two runners that, like, people joined them as well—and just that camaraderie: "We're in this together. We're gonna finish together." It's just such a great summary of my experience in the military. I've never felt alone, or if I have it's just been for a brief moment, and then you kind of look around, and you see someone that's doing what you feel like you can't do, and they encourage you.

[43:56] HS: That's such a kind story. That's so nice.

[44:01] MM: Yeah.

[44:02] HS: I want to thank you so much for your time today and taking the time out to share these experiences. And I'm very grateful that you've spoken with me today

[44:11] MM: Oh, thank you, and I'm so glad that you're seeking out female voices because that's something that—that is my understanding that women as a group don't acknowledge as veterans. I've read a couple of things about that, and all different reasons why women don't say that they're a veteran. And so, I think things like this really help and are necessary. So yeah, thank you for, thank you for seeking out the female voices.

[44:41] HS: Well, thank you for your service and your support. I'm very, very grateful.

[44:46] MM: Thank you.