

**Michelle Renee Lindsay**  
**Narrator**

**Michael Russert**  
**Interviewer**

**Wayne Clarke**  
**Videographer**

**Interviewed on March 8, 2007**  
**Latham, New York**

**MR:** This is an interview at Division Military Naval Affairs Headquarters, Latham, NY. It is the 8<sup>th</sup> of March 2007, approximately 3PM. Interviewers are Mike Russert and Wayne Clark. Could you give me your full name, date of birth and place of birth, please?

**MRL:** Sergeant First Class Michelle Renee Lindsay, November 29, 1970, Danville, Illinois.

**MR:** What was your educational background prior to entering service?

**MRL:** A high school graduate. Then a year later, after high school, I entered into the military on active duty.

**MR:** So, you enlisted into the army?

**MRL:** I did.

**MR:** Why?

**MRL:** After high school, I worked two jobs and discovered that it wasn't fulfilling. There wasn't much potential to go beyond just working job to job, and I always liked the discipline in the military. I kind of grew up that way with a stepfather who was a former service member and knew that it was something that I enjoyed and thought it was something I would like to try to do. So, after a year of trying my luck in the private sector, I decided to join the military. It was a quick thought and I followed through with it, and I was quite pleased that I joined. I was in the delayed entry program for three months before shipping out in September of 1990.

**MR:** Where did you go to basic training?

**MRL:** I went to Fort Jackson, South Carolina, as well as doing my advanced individual training there for an administrative specialist 71.

**MR:** What was that school like?

**MRL:** Basic training—I'll start with that. One of my first memories was that I was with a whole bunch of women which I found not to my liking and I just kept remembering that I couldn't wait for training to start so that they would suffer. I was okay with suffering as long as they would suffer because I discovered several women together—really teenagers is what they were, eighteen, nineteen, twenty—that's not the best group to be in the middle of. Therefore, I was just pleased to get on with the training and I knew everyone would become more a more disciplined group. And once that did begin, I found it not too much of a challenge. I discovered that what I didn't like about my stepfather gave me an advantage. I knew not to speak out of turn; I knew that the next day would come so whatever your failures were that day, it didn't mean much—you had to just think about what you were going to do the next time and you would more than likely come out successful. I learned very early on to work as a team, to believe in myself—that I wasn't the only one going through the pains of the training, that everyone else was, so I would kind of assess myself and say, "Is that person stronger than me?" I would always come up the answer, "No, they're not." That kind of helped me to get through the training. My discipline—that was influenced by my father. Eventually, it actually began to be something that the drill sergeants noticed. They selected their leadership based on education so the platoon guide was someone who held a degree—she was a specialist—and the assistant platoon guide, she held an Associate's Degree so she was a PFC. The two of them together, we quickly learned, was not the best leadership for the group. The platoon guide, she was replaced for a lack of ability to perform in front of others—she just wasn't a leader—so the assistant moved up. At that time, I was the company guidon. I don't know if it was because I had a big mouth or what it was, but I was the guidon and enjoyed it. I would put on a show running around with the guidon making everyone yell while I was running around the formation waiting to place the guidon into the sand at Fort Jackson. Soon what happened was when a replacement of leadership happened, they did it one more time, they moved a squad leader as the assistant and that didn't work out. The senior platoon sergeant, he selected me to be the assistant and after that it was apparent to them that I was the right fit to be the platoon guide. And so that change happened, and then I was smart. I didn't want to be the bad cop, so when he said I could select my assistant—which was the first time they felt that I had the ability to get the right soldier to work with me—I picked what I called the bad cop so I didn't have to be the mean person all the time. So, I got the meanest, toughest squad leader that was already assigned to move up and work with me, and the combination worked well. I discovered quickly that being a leader is about common sense and about putting others before yourself, and what I learned back then applies today. I learned a great deal in basic training but was glad to move on to AIT which was, unfortunately for me, just down the road. It was a two-minute ride down the road for administrative training. That wasn't a bad thing at all. You had more freedoms and the training was boring so it wasn't too difficult and I got through it with no problem. At the end of that training I

was headed in one direction and my entire class was headed to the Gulf War. That was kind of emotional actually because at that point you bonded with people—many of them you went through basic training with and then you went on to AIT with them and so you want to be with those that you know, especially when you go to war. Even those that I didn't really like so much, they were my brothers and sisters so to speak, so that I wanted to be with them. I was headed, unfortunately in my mind at that time, to airborne school, so as my class shipped out, I went in the other direction to complete some additional training. I went to Fort Benning, Georgia to do that.

**MR:** So, you went to jump school?

**MRL:** I did, I did.

**MR:** Three weeks?

**MRL:** Three weeks. I got to jump school at the end of zero week. And I'm glad that that happened. The reason that I was a bit delayed was because I had a stomach virus before departing Fort Jackson. I claimed it was the food, they claimed it might have been something else, but at any rate when I arrived there, training was about to begin. It was the most intense, most professional training I have been to today, and I have been in for more than fifteen years now. My experience at jump school with the black hats sticks out in my mind as it somewhat defined me as a leader. One of the things I remember about jump school is that they didn't mess with your time—they treated you as a professional, they wanted you to get into the training, do it well, and then they'd release you to kind of relax in your evening. I remember the first evening there that I looked up at the Georgia skies and thought it was the most gorgeous sunset I have ever seen. Today I have to say, I don't think that I ever had one of those moments. So, I don't know if it was because I had my first taste of freedom in the military or actually the skies were more beautiful than any other place in the world, but that was one of those stand-out moments, and I was prepared for training and I thought, no fear. I felt safe with the black hats. They were professional; they were tough; they would encourage you daily to quit because they were trying to weed out those who really weren't meant to be paratroopers.

**MR:** Who were the black hats?

**MRL:** They were the instructors. They were the cadre there and one of our favorites, or at least mine—I won't speak for everyone—was the guy who would become the milk and cookies man. He would come out every morning to try to figure out who couldn't quite make it that day. He would offer us milk and cookies, hot coffee and doughnuts, and he would only go ring the bell that they had in front of the formation. Why go through this tough training when you could be in the warmth of the office and not have to deal with the black hats and the rigorous training they were going to put you through. I got a kick out of that, and you know that really motivated me to say, "It won't be me. I won't be the one

going up there.” And throughout the whole training with the black hats, you wouldn’t know one from the other. Many times, in the ranks of leaders, you have your favorites and you have those that you don’t like, but I don’t remember anyone that I thought lacked professionalism or the ability to do what they were supposed to do for us and so I enjoyed that training.

**MR:** How many people dropped out?

**MRL:** Oh, boy, I don’t remember now. It was quite a few. What’s most unique in the particular company that I was in, Delta Company, Delta Rock, they were doing an experiment. They were doing a test to see if women could train alongside men, so the standards were still as the army dictated them to be, but doing the training as far as the physical runs in the morning and whatever else that entailed, the physical training that day, I believe they probably slowed down the pace some, but it was just a bit more than what was expected for women or what had taken place up to that point for women. In the end, I wish I remembered the number but it was a large number. I want to say sixty, but I think that’s because my number was sixty– that’s how I was identified– I never had a name. Of the women that were there, only seven, I believe, graduated and I was among those seven and we’re talking quite a few–there were, I think there were six platoons of personnel there. There were quite a few women that began, certainly a small percentage compared to the men, but not many of us made it through, so I was pretty proud of making it through that system. It’s apparent, because I still remember my number, six-zero. It wasn’t an offensive thing–it was almost like a thing of pride; your number being called whether it was for good or bad. It was your identity and you became proud of it. Six zero making the cross, the threshold of the entrance into the aircraft, making it out on that first jump. That’s a pretty big thing, when they come to you and say, “Six-zero you made it.” They might as well just have said my given name. I couldn’t have been any prouder than that.

**MR:** How did you feel on your first jump?

**MRL:** I was terrified. I was scared. If no one else in the world would admit it, every jump since, I was terrified, but what I remember is that–because it was the unknown. I felt confident that what those black hats said would happen, very well would, so it wasn’t faith in what I had learned and what should have happened, it was truly the unknown and my ability to react like I should. But, because everything else went in sequence, everywhere from how they trained us, the countdown and letting us know there’s one minute, thirty seconds and standby and you know what’s coming next and, because it came, it got easier as I got closer and closer to the door. Green light, go. You don’t have time to think. They’re just moving you, pushing you out. That stick pusher. The person who’s last in the back of the aircraft–they’re pushing you because they want to get out before that green light turns red. I remember leaping out and even though it was daytime, it was probably night for me. I probably had my eyes closed. I

remember in my mind counting one thousand, two thousand, three thousand. I felt the jerk before I got to four and I relaxed. I said, "Okay, everything's going as it should have gone." As I came down, 14:46 it was a pretty perfect day, in that for jumpers, no winds in the skies, you know you're going to have a soft landing. Although that's not what I knew, we were so high on that first jump that all I remember is how peaceful it was. How I was descending and it was kind of graceful and peaceful and I had time to look around and I kind of lost myself in that moment, not thinking about the danger that waited beneath me so it's not until... You know the black hats—they bring you back to reality because you can hear them and they're just a speck on the ground and they're yelling out all the steps that you're supposed to be taking. As you got to a certain point, they would be yelling out what you're supposed to be doing next. For those who got too caught up in the moment, and I don't recall that I got too caught up, but perhaps, and then I went through the rest of my sequence of what you're supposed to do upon descension. I remember my landing just being as soft as could be as if they created it that way for us, that first time out, you know, doing the little crawl and making sure we couldn't be hurt. That's what it felt like—that every jump was going to be that way. I remember the black hat—one of them on the ground with the megaphone yelling to a guy, "Fall down, fall down." Do a PLF, a parachute landing fall because not every landing is soft. That particular day, you could stand up, but I would soon find out on my second jump that that's not the way it goes. The second jump—I hope no one else has ever done this—but I got the wind knocked out of me. I don't recall if it was windy, but the way that I came down into the... Me not hitting any of the proper points of contact, balls of the feet maybe I hit, my calves perhaps, but after that I landed with my chest right on my reserve and I was spread eagle—arms out, legs out. I'm not quite sure what I did, but it was wrong and got the wind knocked out of me. Fortunately, I was alive there and collected myself and realized I was okay, got on up and was able to return to training, but in that jump, I injured my foot and perhaps that's what went wrong and I don't know how I got turned around, but after that jump, my foot was injured and I had to seek medical attention. That was the first time someone in the military discovered how poor my feet were. They're flat by birth and don't have a lot of padding on the balls of the feet, so I had to be recycled to another company soon after, because I couldn't jump again. Just with the profile, just making sure I was okay, there was a day delay and I had to go to Alpha Company which I didn't take too kindly to. Delta kind of made us feel like we were the elite; we were the best and I think so. We weren't located with anyone else, any of the other three companies. We were up on a hill about a mile away from the training site. And we ran every day to training, to chow, so we were running often. So not only did they make them unique in integrating women into their physical training sessions, but they did so in a way that made us appear that we were set apart from everyone else. But, I did get through the training. I did three jumps, two in one day and the next I did one jump and I was dismissed. No one really noticed me, I went off on my own. They gave me my wings, they were

going to pin them, but I declined the offer and walked and found my original black hat in the middle of conducting training for a new cycle that went through. It was kind of neat because he didn't expect it. Some of the other black hats thought that I wasn't going to make it. He had faith in me. He said, "Oh, she'll make it and she'll be back." And that's what happened. So, they did a little ceremony for me. It was kind of cool. Not that we were supposed to do it, but the traditional ceremony is to give blood wings so they did their version of that and they were kind. One black hat stood behind me and held his hands up at my shoulder to brace me and then my black hat, he took the backings off of the pin on airborne wings and he made the gesture as if he was going to really jam them in there. He did he gave me a little tug, a little push there, but certainly not the norm that we normally hear about those type of rituals. For a while I had a couple of dents in my chest but I tell you it didn't seem like it was any type of a hazing ritual or anything like that. It was a proud moment. So, I guess I can see where the infantrymen, when they do things that we see as unnecessary or barbaric, I can see where they're coming from, you know, when something is a norm or a tradition. So, in that moment when I got my wings, I thought I accomplished something big. You couldn't tell me anything. You could have told me how to shine boots because I didn't know how. I remember going back after my little ceremony and getting packed up and ready to go, and had made my arrangements to get myself to an airport an hour away. I remember trying to shine my boots and one of the black hats from Alpha Company came in and she said, "Those things look like a chocolate bar," and I had just gotten done. I thought, "Oh, this is great." She said, "You need to do something about that, soldier. Alright, airborne, work on those boots." I thought, "What am I going to do?" I stayed up all night to work on those boots. They didn't look any better than when she saw me. But fortunately, as I departed to get into the cab, no one really saw me, so I thought, "Okay, I'm in the clear there," but it was a lasting impression. Her words, you know, about shining the boots and that's what airborne personnel wear—highly shined boots. I ended up finding one of those shoe shine booths in the airport and he did a great job. After that I was all set. I was looking good.

**MR:** Where did you go from there?

**MRL:** I went home on leave. I had my class A uniform on. My parents picked me up at the airport. They hadn't seen me for a while. I had been away for about six months because of basic, AIT. There always seemed to be breaks in between. I think we had a Christmas exodus and I don't really recall if I went home. I didn't. I'm not sure what happened there, so they hadn't seen me in a while. So, I went home. They're very proud, of course. Even though I had one ribbon on my uniform and then the shiny airborne wings of course, so you know, I thought I looked sharp. I thought everybody was looking at me. And they might have, but I don't think that they saw me the way I felt that day or the way I thought they should have been looking at me. My parents were pretty proud and that was the

first time that it was truly evident to them that they thought I did something unique, something that no one else had really done in the family. I had a cousin who did it, but in our immediate family since my father, I was the first to really do something we thought was special and they could actually see the results of that.

**MR:** What happened when you went back to work?

**MRL:** After I finished my time at home, I went to Fort Bragg and that didn't alarm me initially. I thought, "Okay, there's a lot of things going on at Fort Bragg, I'm sure." I didn't really know anything. I remember going to 18 airborne corps, the replacement company, and there was a day that a sergeant came out and he said, "All right," we're in formation. He said, "The following names that I call, they will be getting on this truck and they're going to be shipping out to the 2<sup>nd</sup> airborne division." I'm thinking, "Wow, let's see who's going." Well, he called off some names, and then he got to Lindsay and I said, "Oh, excuse me Sergeant, I'm a female. Lindsay's a female." He said, "I know, get on the truck." And my mouth dropped because what I was told by my recruiter was that women don't do airborne duty, so when I was in the recruiting station figuring out what job I was going to do and what other training was available, he showed me an airborne tape and I thought, "Oh, that looks pretty neat." Well, first of all the tape was outdated, so all that fun stuff I thought I was going to be doing, I didn't do any of that. And then he said, "Because women aren't in combat units; they're not in airborne units." I thought, "Oh wow, they let you just do this cool training and then you get to go on and do other stuff." And then, I said, "All right, I can do that." Well, I found out the hard way that recruiters sometimes either—I won't necessarily say they lie, but maybe they're not up on what's happening out in the field sometimes. Actually, for this one, I would say it was probably a lie. So, I got on the truck and the whole way to 18 airborne corps I was in shock. I was scared and I thought, "Well, I didn't think I'd be doing this for a living." But soon I discovered, well, it's too late now. You've done the training. You're qualified. You've got to get through this thing. I figured it was a great experience in training so it couldn't be all that bad, so I soon accepted my fate, so to speak, and went on to the 82<sup>nd</sup> airborne division replacement company. Once I was there, everything was pretty uneventful, more freedom than any of us really needed to have. You do what taskings they have you do that day and then they release you and then people, young folks, they sometimes have a tendency to party a little more than they needed to. Fortunately, I was somewhat grounded, I wasn't a big partier, but I went out a bit and kind of checked the scene out, but I wasn't really a drinker in that way so I had the appearance of being with the crowd without participating in everything that they do. Soon people who drink a lot—they don't realize that you're not drinking either. They get oblivious to that and they stop asking you, "Do you want another drink, do you want another drink?" especially when I'm milking a Sprite all night. They don't realize it. But what happened while I was in the 82<sup>nd</sup> airborne divisional replacement center, I was called one day with, I believe it was three other privates, and we were told that we had to go

through an interview for a position in the Inspector General's Office. Well, I didn't know what that was. So, basically because they were specifically looking for 71 Limas and we were the four who were in the replacement center at that time. So, I did my interview and I'm not getting an indication of anything one way or the other because I don't want this job. Not that I didn't want it, but I was indifferent to it, but through the interview I thought, "Gee, if you're getting interviewed for this thing it must be a pretty special job," so I put my best foot forward, of course, and then wanted it, not realizing what it was still. So, in the matter of a half an hour or so that I was interviewed, I went from, "Okay, so I'm doing this," to not really caring one way or another about the job, to the end of it getting excited, thinking this must be something special. A day later, I was called in the office and was told that I was selected for the position. So, I was pretty excited and that experience in the Inspector General's office defined me completely. That's where I learned how to be a true soldier, a leader, how to balance a lot of things, and how to accept disappointment, how to bounce back from that disappointment, how to set goals, how to accept that you don't know everything, how to accept that one day someone's going to be better than you, someone's going to tell you what to do that perhaps you're brighter than. Those guys taught me a lot. The office was made up of primarily men. My immediate supervisor who interviewed me, she was the only other woman and she was a sergeant E-5. The inspection team themselves, it was seven positions, rounding out the main areas of the specialty MOS in the army—the logistics, medical, maintenance, admin and food service. I'm sure I'm leaving out something. But, pretty much, they were the best of the best with the ability to look at the programs of others around the 82<sup>nd</sup> airborne division and tell them how their crew...What they had in existence. There was a sergeant major and I'll never forget, Sergeant Major Malolo, he was mean, he was old school and he terrified me on a regular basis. I was the only person in our company who would get room inspections, and I remember my first—I scrubbed it from head to toe the whole weekend. I cleaned in areas that I knew he would look and in areas I wouldn't think anybody would look, like the springs of my bed. I mean everything; I cleaned it. The only place I did not clean was the place that he looked. That was the vent system on the ceiling, and I couldn't reach it and it wasn't safe for me to try to bring something up to reach it. So, he had white gloves, literally, and went around the room and thought I did a good job but, he said, "I know where you didn't get it," and, of course, then I didn't reach perfection for the sergeant major so there was disappointment that set in. But one thing that Sergeant Major Malolo did show me that he did care, because no one was allowed to talk to his private; no one was allowed to discipline her, except for him, so anyone outside of our office he protected to make sure that they did not bother me. If they needed to know something about me, he wanted to be the person that they asked. That showed me that deep down that he did care. But he made up for it. No one needed to mess with me. He did plenty; so, I didn't need any outside assistance at all. One of the lessons he taught me early on, and I just think this is funny, and



I tell this to soldiers junior to me today. I tell the story of how the Division IG Sergeant Major took me on a walk to look at his division as he called it. He would routinely take walks just to see if everything was okay. He'd go, you know, through company areas, a lot of the training areas, just to see if anything was out of place and one day when he took me with him. I was on the wrong side, I was to his right and he grabbed my shoulders. I don't know how he did it, but somehow, he moved me to the back of him and said, "This is where you should be, on this side of me," and then he gave me a little bit of a history lesson to explain why soldiers render that position of respect that those seniors should not have to... Those juniors should know and after that lesson, to this day I will nearly run into a wall to make sure that I walk on the proper side of someone who's senior to me. Now in the National Guard, they don't hold those traditions in high regard maybe because that's not some of the things that we were brought up with. I drive some people nuts around here as we're on the opposite side and I'm making a big deal to get in the proper place that I should be. I told junior soldiers that story about my sergeant major at that time, and they get it, and they just kind of gradually move over to the proper side. I'm hoping that what he shared with me affects others too, because in his words, "Traditions are important, it's what defines us, makes us elite as an organization, and once you lose your traditions, you just become like any other place in the world to work." And that's not the case in the military—we are special and traditions help us to remember that, I think. One of the other things in the IG office, I have to say, the influence of those men in that office—there were also two majors, there was a warrant officer, Chief Simmons. I'll never forget that guy—he was squared away. I just thought the guy was perfect in everything he did, meticulous to an end. The IG at the time, Colonel Pensin, he taught me some things in a subtle way. I didn't talk to the Colonel a lot, not because I couldn't, but everybody was busy. I had my chain of command, but one of the things he said to me when he was leaving the office, retiring, he said that soldiers need to remember that if they don't speak up, then no one will hear them, and you can give your opinion and it's important that you do so, as long as you remember when to cut it off. You had your say and let those who need to make the decisions hear that information and then you have to let it go and allow them to make decisions whether you agree with them or not. So, I kept that throughout my career, that it's important that I say something, there's some value; I have something to offer if I feel compelled to say something. But in the end, if it's not my decision to make, I have to accept and recognize when to surrender myself to whatever that person in authority has to say. To this day I remember his words so that it kind of keeps you out of trouble. Keeps you humble. Probably one of the most influential sergeants in the office was my immediate supervisor. When the sergeant left that actually did the interview process, she moved on and then I was in that position. The sergeant major moved on, and one of the admin inspectors, he came up the ranks and into the sergeant major role as [unclear] of the office. Sergeant Rhodes—I remember as I began doing work, he looked at me and he said, "I had no idea that you could do

this. I did not know you had the ability to perform.” When you have a [unclear] over a supervisor, sometimes they don’t know what you can do. But I remember feeling pretty proud that sometimes it doesn’t matter if people recognize you all the time, but in those few moments when they do, it feels pretty special, it motivates you to keep going and doing what you’re supposed to do. Another guy, Master Sergeant Parker, Vernon Parker, that guy was like a big brother in the truest sense. He would take me to the side and explain certain things about the army, and what I would expect one day, and just his example, leading by example, that was one of those things that kind of was embedded in my mind that if I don’t do, I can’t tell others to do. So, everything he’s ever told me to do, I saw him do first. The influences of the men in that office—and I could go on. Sergeant Raez, that guy, a comedy, the diversity in that office helped me to understand that you can be many people as a leader; you just don’t have to be one thing for everybody to see. Being exposed to that and seeing those many different personalities and still knowing that all of them were special in their field, they were the top in their field, but they were all different, helped me to realize that there is no one way to do it, especially if the end result is still exceptional.

**MR:** How long were you with the IG’s office?

**MRL:** I was there for two and a half years and at the time I didn’t think I needed to move, but my supervisor at that time, Sergeant Rhodes, he felt that it was time for me to move on and do some other things. So, he sent me out into the field. He sent me to the 313<sup>th</sup> in my battalion and I always have to tell this joke. I probably shouldn’t. I heard it from a supply sergeant, Sergeant Ferguson. He would explain to everyone that they had to fill out these forms for supplies, and because he was an MI in my battalion, and where it says MI, don’t say yes, meaning that the military intelligence personnel—they were book smart but sometimes common sense didn’t apply. Last name, first name and where it says MI, don’t put yes. I can relate to that because—good guys don’t get me wrong—but working with them sometimes folks, they put what’s on paper in front of what you have to execute in the moment, and sometimes a book doesn’t tell you that. But that was a good experience. That experience helped me strongly in my admin background and to this day even in the National Guard as I’ve gone to active duty training it was my time in Battalion S-1 that has been implanted in my head and has helped me to survive once I was away from active duty and went back to it. The S-1, it’s a busy place; there were a lot of people. I probably bonded with those personnel more than any other because we were peers for the most part. I was the only 71 Lima in the office at the time.

**MR:** Now what do you mean by that?

**MRL:** 75 Bravos was the MOS of choice and that was personnel specialist. They were the people who were trained to fill out the many, many documents that the army has to do various personnel actions. As a Lima, I was really trained to just be a typist, and actually I discovered 71 Limas are the backbone of the army along

with NCOs, but you're talking about an MOS, and they're diverse. I still say this today because I quickly did the same exact work as the school-trained 75 Bravos, so I got on-the-job training and that's not unique to my experience, but very soon I learned a little bit of everything and I discovered, and I didn't realize it at the time, that's who I was. I wouldn't have found that out staying in the private sector. I wouldn't have known that I am eager to learn more to help the organization. I saw a need when others were out that there was no back-up, so I would insert myself as far as finding out what a person needed. Once delivering the message to the person that was supposed to handle the problem, asking them, "Well how do you fix it? If you're out again, I want to be able to tell them what to do." So, very soon I learned all the positions in the office that were at my level of assignment of what I could do and that's where I got my first award. I didn't get it in the IG office; I'm a little torn on that because I saw the award written on me, but whatever the reasons were, I didn't get it, so I left and I was a little hurt by that because I thought I worked pretty hard. But not too long after being in the 313<sup>th</sup> in my battalion, the adjutant at the time recommended me for an award and the reason that happened is that the whole S1 shop went out into the field to do some training. I'm not quite sure why I was left behind, but I was, and for the two weeks that they were out in the field doing training, I ran the shop. Now of course, not to the level of expertise that a staff of about ten, I think we had, of course I couldn't have run it like they did, but I didn't let things fall. I was very good about taking good notes, making a list and making sure that certain things were taken care of that needed to be timely. I would come in early; I would stay late. I didn't do PT so at that time I thought that was pretty good. But I was there from dawn to dusk and the adjutant noticed that, and when my supervisor returned, he said, "This is remarkable work that she's done," and so I was awarded an AAM for that. The adjutant gave me a coin and to this day, it's still in the same card. He taped it inside a card and wrote a note, and to this day that's where it stayed. So, it's those things when you are recognized and you're not looking for it, but that someone takes the time to say, "Thank you, you did a good job", that motivates you and it sticks with you and it compels you to do it again. Not for the recognition and the awards, but because it made a difference. The words of someone saying, "Hey, you helped me. You made a difference in this organization." I think that's what spurred me on to want to do more and want to help because I helped the whole office by contributing in my own way of trying to make sure that we didn't fall down and that they didn't come back to a ton of work they didn't understand what to do next with it. So, that was one of those defining moments early in my career that I think has helped me to be who I am today as a senior non-commissioned officer.

**MR:** How long did you stay in the regular army?

**MRL:** I stayed in just shy of eight years. I used to remember and I could cite it down to the last day and hour. But it was so close that they gave me credit for completing my service obligation, my eight-year service obligation. After the

313<sup>th</sup> M1 battalion—at the time I thought that I was going to get out, and Battalion Commander, Lt. Colonel Victor Roselle, standout personality, great battalion commander, who actually listened to me. It was unique. He trusted that I would tell him the truth. I think that when you are in the S1 or S3, one of those shops, those soldiers, they can get closer to command. I was the promotions clerk, and so I worked monthly with all the first sergeants, all the commanders, as well as the battalion command sergeant major and not so much the BC, but somehow, I was able to see him regularly. He, for some reason, would listen to me when I said I thought something was wrong, and he would allow me to come sit in his office and I'd tell him and he would give things a chance, and that was that other lesson—that it doesn't matter where it comes from, good leaders, they listen to all of their staff. They listen to everyone because the more information they have to assess, the better decision they can make, so I appreciated that from him. I remember when I was going to ETS, I was married at the time, I had a little one, my little Adam, who is fifteen so I need to stop calling him that. I was going to get out and my husband at that time, he was already out, and we were going to move back to Massachusetts, his home. Then things didn't work out that way, and we parted ways as is typical of many soldiers. It's unfortunate. I didn't know what to do, but I thought I probably should get out. Well, Colonel Roselle, he was so funny that no matter where he saw me, he would say, "Extension, re-up, re-up." He would just all the time, not pressure me into it, but just say, "You're a value to the army and it would be a shame if you left." And it made me, after a while, thinking on his words, reflecting, it made me think that perhaps there was something more I could do, maybe I had more potential than I realized, only because I admired this man so much, as we all did. He was well loved in the battalion. I thought perhaps I needed to see what else I can do, based on his encouragement and I did. I spoke to the retention NCO and said, "Okay, I am ready." When the retention NCO first tried to get me to re-enlist and I declined, a job that I thought would be great was open and that was as a paralegal clerk or whatever it was called—I think it was 27 Delta. But anyway, that wasn't open when I decided that, "Yes, now I do want to go ahead and re-enlist, but what came up was something else that I thought was kind of cool but never thought I would be eligible to do, and that was working as a photojournalist. So, it ended up that because my first supervisor, Sergeant Sallee was her name, Holly Sallee—she got married and it changed to McKenna. I'm amazed that I remember this stuff. Because she sent me to what they called, I think it was FAST, and I don't remember what it stands for now, my GT score was low—109—okay to get in but not to do anything you'd want in the army and she sent me to what I think was a two week program and it was to prepare you in the areas of mathematics and language arts, and once you complete the course, it somehow helps you better prepare to take the ASVAB test. At any rate, upon completion, my score drastically went up to 122. When I first took it, I wasn't really taking it too seriously. I'm not sure if there were distractions or what was going on, but that's what I scored. I didn't know it wasn't the best score and my recruiter said, "Oh,

it's fine." So, I didn't take it over. Well once I joined the Army, I realized that it probably could be better. You need a 110 GT score or higher. You kind of have your wish list of things, so with that 122 I was guaranteed to pick... I had a broader selection of things, so public affairs was on that list. You were supposed to have some type of proof of ability to write. Well, I really didn't have anything, but through my time in S1—because I had no college—I had rewritten some awards for Personnel so they could be approved. It was just on my own, I'm not quite sure how I fell into it. There was a sergeant from one of the subordinate companies who was recommended for MSM and it was downgraded. Well, once I started talking to him and I looked at the recommendation I rewrote it, and it was just then I discovered the officer who wrote it just wasn't a strong writer, and it was approved, so I used that as an example of demonstrated ability to write. They bought off on it and I was able to go. So, I left Fort Bragg, my beloved home. I loved Fayetteville, I loved Fort Bragg, I enjoyed North Carolina a great deal and was sad to go, but at the same time knew I had to move on to something else, so I reclassified as a photojournalist at Fort Meade, Maryland. It was tough, that was tough training. I thought I was pretty bright. I thought, "I speak fairly well." I know sentence structure and I did pretty well in English and I took that initial examination because not only did you have to prove you could get in and you had to have certain line scores, but once you got there they screened you again and you had to take a test. Well, I recall that I barely passed that test. There were not many points between failing and passing and that humbled me quickly and I thought I knew everything. I was comfortable with these answers and so I learned the hard way there's a lot more to writing than I learned in high school, so the journalism portion in the beginning was pretty rough. The gift that I had, however, was telling the story, so what I lacked in mechanics, and when I mean mechanics they were minor things that no one else would catch, like where to put that comma or not using one transition vs. another, which at that time to me seemed minor but it's pretty big when you're trying to tell a story. I thought, "I'll never figure this stuff out." I had to backtrack because my battalion commander was so good, and his staff and my NCOs, they were so good to me, that they allowed me to do an on-the-job training in the 82<sup>nd</sup> airborne division public affairs office. I think I was there for maybe 30 days, but those, they were bright—the soldiers assigned there. I thought, "I'm not going to be able to do this." I think she's a sergeant major now, Costello, wonderful lady, she'd pick my stuff apart and I just thought, "I'm in trouble now." I remember doing a story that years later someone recalled, and it was because of my ability to try to paint a picture and tell a story. Anyway, in school that's what I relied on; that I didn't want it to be boring, I wanted people to read it. So, I relied on my imagination to make my lead-ins, which is the key to a writer's story to pull you into the story and keep you throughout. So, that's where I found my niche. News writing, that's another story. It's a formula, you would think it'd be easier, but for me, because it lacked imagination, I'd get through it but I struggled a bit getting through that course. The photojournalism—I thought doing the photography

portion would be a breeze. It's not. They would give you ten rolls of film and you had to use it all within a certain period of time and you had to capture certain elements of frames. You had to have the long view, the short, close-ups, medium range. It seems very simple until you have to do it and come up with something focused and good and of interest, but I made it through and that was the most fun. It was enjoyable and I use the skills I learned there today and I actually did better in the photo portion than I did the journalism. I finally got the journalism towards the end, but that was a little too late, but I got through it, and I enjoyed that experience. So, after school I was fortunate enough—towards the end of my time in school—I met Sergeant Gina Gaskin who became a close friend. She was going through an advanced course at Fort Meade. We talked. I was helping her move in because we were both prior service and so we lived separately from the AIT students. Anyway, we began to talk and she was telling me how she was at West Point and boy, they were looking for somebody, did I have an assignment? And I did; I was supposed to go to Colorado. Something happened and I wasn't going to be assigned to Fort Carson anymore. I was informed of it, and so we didn't know where I was going to go. Well, I went back to Gina Gaskin and said, "Hey, I don't have a place to go," and fortunately there was an instructor, a civilian, who jumped in and helped me to be reassigned to West Point and that was pretty good in that my soon to be former in-laws lived in Rotterdam, NY, near Schenectady and that was only an hour and half or so away from West Point, so I thought, "This is great." So, I worked for the Pointer View—the West Point paper—and I did that for about a year and a half, and then I realized that I am no Lois Lane. I just didn't enjoy it. I thought my stories were solid, but I didn't have the desire of what a journalist should have to do that kind of work. So, I got through the cycle of working there and there was an opportunity that came up to work in the company and we had an extra journalist on staff, so I asked permission to move and it was granted and it was a wonderful fit. I used my skills from the 313<sup>th</sup> in my battalion to work as the operations NCO in that office—so running the admin side of the house for the company—and enjoyed that greatly. At the end of the year my ETS was up and then I debated on whether or not I would stay or try something else. I decided that because I hadn't done an overseas tour and I might need to go to Korea, and I was a single parent—I loved the army so much that I thought it was unfair to use my child to try to get out of any type of assignment and I wasn't ready to allow my three year old to be without me—so I decided to ETS and try my luck in the private sector because I didn't have anything to compare it to, and I always thought I could go back in the army if it doesn't work out. So, I did that, with no great plan, no education beyond high school and believing that somebody's going to want me because, boy, I've done some pretty good things in the military so it shouldn't be that hard. Well, I found out that's not true. People won't even look at you or give you a chance sometimes if you don't have a degree; you may have the skills but you don't have a paper that says that I can do the work. So, it was a little rough, but fortunately for me, because I had humble beginnings growing up, I had a little bit of a savings

knowing that I was going to get out of the military, so I relied on that time on terminal leave and whatever savings I had to get me through the rough spots of trying to find employment. That was pretty rough. What I did, I thought, “Okay, I have some skill sets from the army, so I did my resume. I went through ACAP first, so they kind of let you know what’s out there, what you need to expect when you’re going to transition from military life to civilian life, so I had my books in hand, all of that training, my military experience, and what I thought was common sense, so I figured I’ve got a plan and I’m going to be able to tackle this beast of trying to find employment after my time in the military. I did my resume, got the nice paper, did all the things I was supposed to do and nobody’s calling me, and I thought, “Gee, what’s going on?” I sent out tons, and eventually I started getting a bit of nibbles and I had a few interviews and then I discovered for the first time in one of them, that I thought, “This is the right job, this is going to be the right fit.” I didn’t have the skills that I thought I had in computer literacy. I didn’t know as much as I thought. I discovered that what I thought I knew in the military was not exactly what the private sector wants. In the military I realized that when you use applications such as Excel, you only have a limited need to understand it because there are set things that they want you to do and accomplish, and that’s all you know. But I thought, “I know Excel, because I used it before.” But once I did some testing, I realized, “No, I don’t,” because some of the things they were asking me, I didn’t even have a clue what that meant to do the thing that the question was asking me to do. So, at that point, I realized that I wasn’t quite prepared for the private sector as I thought, so I relied on just wanting a job and just getting one and I ended up going to the VA rep that’s available to all prior service members at the unemployment office. I didn’t know it at the time, I got in line and thought, “Okay, this is going to be forever,” and then looked through some of my literature from ACAP and realized, “Wait a minute, there might be someone here for me,” and discovered there was. That helped me along to see what was out there, and I realized there just wasn’t a lot, so I didn’t feel too bad about my efforts on my own. Eventually I actually got a job through my former in-laws—someone in their family. There was a guy, Mike Crowley, he’s a CPA. I interviewed with him and he gave me a chance. It was in accounting. It was doing physician billing and I had no experience, no knowledge at all about any of it, but I thought, Well, I need a job and he’s willing to give me one and he’s willing to be flexible so that I could be home to get my son off the bus,” so I decided not to interview for a position at Sysco – it was offering \$14.00 an hour and this guy was offering \$7.00 an hour, but for some reason I didn’t feel compelled to accept the job at Sysco. I think I had one interview, and was offered a second and I declined it. For many that would seem foolish, but there was something else that I thought was more valuable, and I thought it was being available to family and trying to learn something that may eventually turn into something else. So, I worked for Mr. Crowley for about a year, and my writing skills—the little bit that I learned from the army and had—they were helpful at times working for him. I think that that helped him to think I had the potential

to do some other things. And at the time, when he knew that more than likely he would not be able to retain me because he was going in different directions, he actually contracted me out to a skilled nursing facility and I did some work for them. It was just one project, and through that project and working there, the personnel there, they were satisfied with my work and there happened to be another position that opened. It was full time and it was working in the business office of one of the skilled nursing facilities. So, I interviewed for it and it didn't take them long to say, "Oh, yeah we'll give you a chance." So, I did that and learned the job pretty well. It wasn't too difficult. I was really in-processing personnel into the facility on the billing side and handling the patient accounts and I just thought, "They're trusting me with these people's money." I just never really handled anyone's money but my own. That was a little intimidating at first. Soon my co-worker, who really was an accountant by trade, he left to do some other things and so I was thrust into doing two roles in an area that I was not comfortable at all. So, I learned the harshness of accounting. It's not really about adding and subtracting, but different concepts. It took me about forever to come to the same conclusion as a trained accountant so I had much respect for doing that work. I stayed at that facility, but realized I wasn't really happy. I was out of my league in that I wasn't properly trained to do the work, and the atmosphere of the new ownership was such that I didn't think that I would stay there very long. It wasn't a happy place to work anymore. Things weren't as forgiving for those who weren't properly trained and even though everybody thought my work was great, I just didn't feel like I was contributing to the best of my ability, so I decided that if another opportunity came up, I would take it. Well, one did. So, I stuck around and did the best I could and everything was okay on the surface. In the meantime, there was someone else who was hired to work in my old position and her work wasn't too good, so when the new ownership came, I found myself alone again. Then I just thought for the money that I was making—I think it was \$23,000 a year, not even quite that, it was \$22,500—that's tough to make it as single parent on that salary. I just thought, "I'm working way too hard for the amount of money that they want to compensate me with." And I really realized that upon learning that a new hire for a facility that had less responsibility—the skilled nursing facility that I worked for, you had to do private insurance, Medicaid, Medicare—and the facility that this new person was working for, they only had to do Medicare and Medicaid, which was a lot easier. So, anyway she made about \$10,000 more than me, so I was a little bit upset by that. Well, I had to still do the work, but I really needed to look somewhere else. But before I looked somewhere else, I thought, I was making a move and it was strange that I got a part-time job because ends were not being met very well. They were, but it wasn't comfortable and I wanted my son to have some of his wants, and not just his needs. I rarely could him a want, so I got a part-time job and my first night I was speaking to one of the people training me, and we started talking about the military. She was in the military and she was telling me her story. And I said, "Oh, I was in the military for nearly eight years." She said, "Wow." So, we had



that conversation and then I was moving things into storage and my father-in-law was helping me, and he took a different route than we normally had taken to move these items into storage and we passed a recruiting station. He said, "Hey, Michelle, look at that—a recruiting station." I said, "Oh, yeah." I dismissed that as well. I got home, and then for the next day and a half I kept seeing advertisements for the National Guard. Now the whole time I had been out, which was nearly a year and a half, I didn't see any of that. I never really saw commercials about joining the guard or anything like that, hadn't run across any recruiting stations, anything that linked me back to the military. The last straw was later, I think it was the second night of these weird occurrences happening, in my mind. They weren't weird up until the last one. I went into Walmart. I went into that Walmart many, many times. That night I happened to be wearing an airborne sweatshirt. Rarely wore it, but it was cool that night. It was the first thing I grabbed and put it on and went into Walmart, and there was a recruiting booth set up. The recruiter stated yelling, "Hey airborne," and I was thinking, "Well, he's not talking to me," and then I happened to realize what sweatshirt I was wearing and I thought, "Oh, he is talking to me." So then instantly I thought, "Something's going on here. A message is being delivered to me and I better listen." So, when I went up to him, I said, "What document do you have for me to complete so that we can start the application process?" and his mouth dropped. I said, "You don't have to say anything." I said, "I'm prior service. You probably know that." I said, "There's something that tells me that I need to join again." And I did. Six months later after joining the 56 PSB here in Latham, I was offered an opportunity to interview for a full-time position doing exactly what I did at West Point—running the admin section in my company. I interviewed and it was my active duty time that gave me the edge. I was an outsider; I hadn't been in the National Guard very long and there were quite a few vying for the position. I think it was around twelve maybe, I'm told, that wanted that position in the 56 and by the point system, thank goodness, I just edged out some other folks. What was interesting to me is that I kind of knew the people who were interviewing me. One of my mentors who has since left us, Sergeant Major LaGrange—I get so emotional because he was a true Sergeant Major—and he mentored me coming into the guard, and he was tough but he was endless with knowledge and was somewhat of a father figure to me.

**MR:** When did you go back in?

**MRL:** I went back in in December 1999. I knew Sergeant Major LaGrange briefly. You know you don't really talk to the battalion sergeant major so much. I knew the battalion XO, Major Van Court, but I rarely even spoke to these people, and they were on the board along with Sergeant First Class Farrell, and I didn't really know him at all. When I walked in that interview, it was like they never saw me before, and so I thought, "Boy, this is a fair process." I just delivered myself as I should, in the most honest way possible and I was fortunate enough that my active duty experience, I believe, is what set me apart, just slightly, from

the other candidates. So that was a good thing. That was the end of my misery in the private sector. I'll make sure when I leave the next time from the army that I'm a little better prepared than I was the last. All told, a year and a half, just about, in the private sector before I rejoined the active status. I was six months [unclear] soldier, and during that time I was trying to run the office. That's what I was supposed to do part-time and I would take the initiative and try to do certain things because I knew how to do it. I think that's why the offer, "Hey this position's opening. You should at least apply for it," and I was discouraged by others, "Don't apply for that, you're not in, you're not in the Guard, you're not part of the buddy system." But, I said, "Hey, I'm no worse off if don't get it, but I'll at least try." Prior to that year and half lapse, or I should say prior to December 1999, right when I got out actually, I did try to join the National Guard even though it was against my grain to do it. But I thought, "Eight years, I shouldn't waste that, I should continue service." I didn't have the best experience with the recruiter at the time, so it kind of left a bad taste in my mouth, and I thought, "It's either all or nothing—either I rejoin the active force or I don't do it at all." So that's why when all the signs in my mind, that's why I think it was the good Lord telling me, "You've been suffering now. This is your chance to come out of that slump that you're in in the private sector." I read that as signs to do that and the timing was just perfect. Ever since then my life has certainly resumed in a way that it should, in the way that I left from active duty and I've grown as a person, and I've been able to reach, not my full potential yet, but I'm certainly getting close to that level of excellence that I saw in those non-commissioned officers so long ago back in 1991 when I joined the Inspector General's Office in the 87<sup>th</sup> Airborne Division. I admired those guys throughout my whole career and if I could see them today, I think I might make them a little bit proud. After my time in the 56 PSB—I was the personnel services NCO at the battalion level—I learned a great deal, mentored by Sergeant Major LaGrange, wealth of knowledge, just endless. He would make you wait for it for a while. I used to say he was processing data. I'd ask him a question and he would just flicker his eyes, and I'm waiting, "Is he going to answer me or not?" I didn't know what to do and he was coming up with whatever I needed to know. He never sent me the wrong way and I've never met anyone who has been so on and so exact in guiding you to where you need to find answers to anything that you could come up with. I imagine that's because he had quite a few years in service and that experience leads you to that ability. Major Van Court at the time, she's a Lieutenant Colonel now, she was wonderful, she was a good boss, caring, disciplined, she's what got me organized, but if she saw my desk today she'd be a little disappointed. She's the one that got me in the habit of looking at a task that's overwhelming, taking a deep breath and dissecting it into smaller tasks so that you could get it done. That's how I learned to enjoy my work. No matter how big the task is, it doesn't faze me, it doesn't discourage me, and I truly learned that from her example. So that will stick with me for the rest of my days whether I'm in uniform or not. After 56 PSB, I was fortunate enough to be

selected for Sergeant First Class. I came in as a Sergeant and was promoted to Staff Sergeant upon getting a full-time position, and then further advanced into the readiness NCO position as Sergeant First Class. There was my challenge, if I didn't have one before. That was the first time that I had to take everything I had learned to date and apply it. You don't know what you're made of until you're forced to perform. And to my delight—not so much my surprise that I did it well, I knew I would try, I knew I'd give it effort—but to my delight, I was doing good things. I was doing more than I imagined I could do. That meant some extra time, before and after work. It was not easy, but it was important because there were forty-four soldiers looking to me to be ready for training. I needed to be ready for them so that they could do something productive that day as they came in to drill. And I grew. The mentorship that I was able to get from others—it showed in me. And then I discovered that it was not just what I learned from those senior to me but those junior to me that helped me grow. So, that experience as a squad leader and then as platoon sergeant and full-time readiness NCO, that prepared me for the deployment that was not too far off after taking that position. A couple of years, but going to war you can't have enough training, you just cannot have enough. So during that time what happened was our unit was identified to fill some vacant positions in the 42<sup>nd</sup> infantry division in their G1 shop. Well, they identified they wanted six. They had different numbers. I think they came up with thirteen and I looked at their [unclear] and determined they didn't need that many. You know the [unclear] chief of staff agreed. And the number was agreed upon—six. Of course, I didn't want them to take all of our folks, because our sister unit was identified to deploy at some point as well. So anyway, six personnel were slated to go and I also knew the 29<sup>th</sup> deployment was coming up and I felt that if soldiers went with them, they would be protected, because we knew each other to a degree and I knew their readiness NCO, Sergeant Scott. And then I had to make a decision. I wasn't slated to go. Nobody was looking for me. I was a Sergeant First Class, they wanted sergeants and specialists and then I made a decision that I needed to go. I had trained, trained these soldiers from the time they entered the unit to the point where we were going to ask them to put their lives in jeopardy and I just didn't think it was right that someone in their senior leadership wouldn't be there to lead them along that way, and so I started to make my campaign to go to the troop division. I won, I got what I asked for and sometimes I thought, "Why did I do this?" It only took me looking at, not just the soldiers who came over with me, but the other ones to say, "That's why you do it." Not that I thought I was better than anyone, but I knew I was balanced. I knew I was compassionate. I knew I could cry one moment for a soldier's well-being, alone of course, but I knew I could be hard as nails to make sure they performed and got up to standard because that's the only way they're going to survive. You have to train as you're going to fight, to accept less would put their lives in jeopardy. Working with the division and working towards the deployment certainly has made me grow and those experiences will be lasting as well, and of course I'm better today than I was prior to the

deployment. And all of those things that just make you better happened during that deployment. Whether they were good or bad, we're not always pleased with the circumstances but you take what you can from them and make something beneficial out of it. And that's what I did and I hope that, in part, that I influenced some of the soldiers that were in my charge to do the same in their career. I was the platoon sergeant eventually for the G1 and boy, that was forty-three soldiers, forty-three young people, all these different personalities and a lack of discipline that unfortunately the Guard doesn't always provide because we only see soldiers once a month. But we figured it out, we got it together and with the other leadership of course, we all came back, thank goodness, intact, and hopefully just a little better off than when we left. I don't regret going. The one thing that I do regret is that sometimes we are soldiers, and we are so focused on the mission that you can forget about family. My son was with his grandparents, my former in-laws, who loved him. He loved them and I thought that's enough, and I guess as a soldier I was so focused on making sure those junior to me got back that I forgot that perhaps my son wouldn't have fared as well in my absence. And that was the case. It was a time period where you miss a lot. Your kids, they're growing and you're not there to see it. To do it all over again, knowing what I know now, I would because I know the whole story and I know my value to the soldiers that I served with, but I think I would have, while in garrison, I would've taken a little more time to not put work in front of me. Because when war comes, you have to go, you have to, but do I need to get that one more report in, in garrison? Yes, it's important, but is it more important than my family? Not so much. Trying to make sure someone's life is intact—that is not more important than family, but it is important if you have a role in doing that. So, given the opportunity to make that choice again, if I knew I was the person who had to go, I would go, but I would be awfully careful to make sure that my son is ready too. It is true that we get ready, we prepare, we train. I didn't do that for my son and that's regrettable on my part. Today, in retrospect, I make sure that there's certain things that we talk about, there are certain things he understands, there's another way he can express himself so that he doesn't feel like he's without me. When you take a parent out of a child's life, it doesn't matter who it is, they're going to have ill effects of that, so I know my time may come around again. Like my thoughts when I left West Point, I'll never use my child, my family as a way to get out of a mission. I need to do my part to be prepared. Some family members think that's callous of me to put my job in front of family, but I'm not. I'm not just a mother and I am not just a soldier. So, I'm obligated, because I have chosen this field, to make it work, and if I can't make it work, I need to hang up the uniform. We're not GE and we're not anyone else in corporate America and if we don't put that in the forefront of our minds, that we need to love our family, care for them and take care of them, but we do this so they will stay safe. And that means that I can't ... Keeping my son safe means that I sometimes have to take up arms and, not literally go out on the battlefield because we're in trouble if an admin sergeant is out on the battlefield being in charge, but what it does mean

is that I have to be out there too. I have to do my part in the whole operation of the Army. My piece is just as important as that infantryman, I have to support him so that his focus is not on anything that I should have taken care of, but on his mission. I want to be there for them to do my part to ensure that my family is safe at home and our nation as a whole.

**MR:** Now you went to Iraq. When were you there?

**MRL:** I was there—I was on the advance party. We were in Kuwait from end of October through the middle of January. Then our happiness and our little small world in Kuwait, because we became family, that small advance party, and the rest of the main body came over and the fun really began. While we were in Kuwait, Camp Buehring, not the most pretty place, but I guess it's not supposed to be. We set up operations, getting prepared for the main body to come over, establishing certain procedures and I was part of that as the [unclear] in the G1. That was a good time. I learned a lot. We worked hard. And we boo-hoed at Christmas time, for a big holiday, away from the family. And we learned to rely on each and we got through it, we laughed, we were upset with each other, but basically, we lived. We figured it out and we were okay. And the army was so good to us that I didn't imagine that we'd have as much support as we did. Free mail, mailings for regular postage, something that would be a regular stamp. You could reach out to your family. If you didn't have the internet you could always write. The art of writing is lost. It's a beautiful thing. People keep those forever, and I had email so I got a little lazy and I would email my family, and you could call and we had DSN numbers and they'd connect us here from Latham which was very kind of them to do so—connect us to our families at any given time of the day, so we didn't suffer. We weren't ... We'd become almost like a garrison environment, if you were one of those admin types or combat service support, so I didn't have a rough time. I kept it in perspective. Other people thought it was horrible. I thought, "Gee, I'm in a covered building." I thought it was going to be like MASH. That's what I thought going to war looked like and it didn't resemble that at all. So, after we moved from Kuwait into Iraq, that was the same thing. I just thought the way that the Army took care of us, as far trying to make things as comfortable and as familiar as possible of what we were used to anywhere we served—I was impressed with it. Was everything perfect? Of course not, if you looked hard enough. No, its not. I didn't even expect close to perfection, so for me my personal opinion—it wasn't a tough time at all. The toughest thing was just being away from family. And if you can somehow figure out how to adjust to that—and the army gave you the opportunity once again, email was available, phones were available—you could survive, you could do it. I was able to concentrate on mission accomplishment with no problem and taking care of those soldiers, and we did that on the best shift that's out there. We did that on the night shift. That's the shift no one wanted until we eventually made them realize that's the shift you want to be on. The day walkers, as we called them, they had to contend with the heat, they had to contend with the command

personalities, with each other—there’s more people walking around during the day and there’s more fuss going on. On the night shift that team of people—they were remarkable. Now we may not have started off as a well-oiled machine at first, but that was my job. That was my job to figure out how to pull out the best of all of us and we did that. Sergeant Major LaGrange, who emailed me on a regular basis, as well another soldier who had grown close to him, Stacy Graham, his words rang out. He said, “Treat your soldiers well.” He said, “In return they will more than surprise you; they will more than surpass your expectations.” He was right. He was right on the money with that. I treated the soldiers well. I tried to be the leader I was supposed to be and in return they worked hard. They delivered. They did things that I wouldn’t have imagined we would have been able to accomplish. You let a soldier pull out their talents. You don’t pull them down. Whether they knew something that I didn’t know and they could perform better, great, that’s your mission now, that’s your task and you’ll get us all squared away so that we can perform to the same level that you were able to on that particular task. And that’s how we worked. We worked as a team. One was not more important than the other and I explained to them, “Yes, I’m a sergeant first class, you’re the specialists. I don’t know everything, but I’m expected to make sure that everything gets done. There is a difference. I’m not better than you as a person. I just have different responsibilities as an NCO vs. your level of responsibilities as a sergeant E-5 or a specialist.” I shared that philosophy with them that they are an equal part of any army team and they should never let anyone tell them different and if they do they shouldn’t feel that way. That’s the shortcoming of that leader. That’s the way we worked. We all supported each other. I got food for them and they got food for me when we couldn’t make it to chow. We made sure people had things at the PX if one couldn’t go and we soon became a little family. We would have... Once a week, I’d say, “Hey, we should eat together,” and we did and we talked and laughed and to this day we still share stories of those experiences. I’ve been able to keep in touch with all those soldiers and the most hardheaded of those soldiers, he’s deployed again, and one of the biggest compliments that I think I got from a soldier was from him. He emailed me. He said, “Sergeant Lindsay, boy, I remember how tough you were and I just thought, “That woman!”” I’m sure he said some choice words. He said, “You know what, I wish you were here with me today. They have no clue. The leaders, they are failing at every turn. I’m scared to go with them.” I wrote him back and I said, “But you know what to do. Be humble as you introduce some different possibilities for them as far as what their next plan is on accomplishing something.” He had a problem with a bit of humility, but I said, “You lived it, let them know that you lived it and that you have some resources that might be helpful to them,” and I said, “Soon they’ll start to listen to you,” and so he seems to be doing fine. He emailed me two weeks ago, which reminds me I have to send him Kool-Aid. He wants me to send him Kool-Aid so I have to do that. But anyway, essentially, I guess from that whole deployment experience, it taught me that you don’t know what’s going to happen from day to day. You have to give

your very best in the day that you have. In that moment. You can plan for tomorrow and in that planning it shouldn't be mine alone. It's got to be with the involvement of those junior soldiers. Those who were left in my charge, I had a responsibility that if I wasn't there, they needed to know what to do. They shouldn't rely on me to come up with the answer and towards the end of the deployment, they didn't need me. I could have left and no one would have spotted me again and they wouldn't have known a difference in operation. I think that's the biggest accomplishment a leader should want to have, is that your soldiers don't need you anymore and that did happen. I did leave to go run another mission at another fort operating base and at that site, unfortunately, those soldiers had to adhere to my method. At first it may seem a little harsh until the rationale comes out. The team that I left—they were phenomenal. I heard nothing but praises. I'd still check their work at the end, just out of curiosity, but they never missed a beat. They were on and I was truly proud of them that they did perform as they did. The new team—we weren't with each other for too long—they soon learned that Sergeant Lindsay was okay, but Sergeant Lindsay, she's old school and I can attribute some of that to, once again, my time in the IG. Those guys, they were hard, they molded me and they're still with me today. Coming off the deployment, near the end, I was surprised by an email and it shocked me, and to this day I'm still in shock that I received it. It was from Colonel McDonough, the primary Inspector General for the New York Army National Guard, offering me a position in the IG office. Now, prior to deployment and just understanding the Guard, I knew I would never be an IG. It has always been my dream job. As a PFC, I said, "One day, I'm going to be like these guys. I'm going to be an IG." Well, in the National Guard system it seemed like there were only two master sergeants and the position, everyone was always vying for it, and you know what, I had given up and said, "That won't be me." So, you just work hard and do what you're supposed to do and try to figure out what your other dream job is. When I got that email offering me that position, I closed it; I sat back in my chair; then I opened it again, read it again and thought, "This is not real." So, I replied right away and said I was elated by the offer and I would certainly love the opportunity to become an IG. So, a couple of months prior to leaving theatre I knew where my next assignment was going to be. When I came back to Fort Drum, and by the way, when I went to that other site to run an operation, I left slightly earlier than I was supposed to, a few weeks early, but my son needed me in such a way that I was allowed to leave early. That was the first time in my career that I asked to quit. I say quit in that I didn't finish my task. I had trained others to do so, and I stayed a couple of extra days than I needed to, to make sure everything was all right because that's the nature of when you're responsible for something. It was important that I get back home to my son. That was pretty big for me to say, "I quit, I can't do it, somebody else needs to. I need to be somewhere else." Fortunately, they bought off on my reasons and I came home to be with my son. He's okay, he's all right. So much so, that I think he wants me to go back somewhere because the rules are back in place. As I

finished my emergency leave situation, I reported back to Fort Drum, lovely Fort Drum. I like it. It's cold; I don't like that part. But, I didn't have a problem. A lot of people don't like Fort Drum. I ended up joining the team that was going to out-process the entire division that would demob out of Fort Drum. Now I was supposed to just report back and then out-process. But my nature—I saw that one of my favorite people ever, he was my boss, my direct supervisor for a while at Fort Drum before we deployed. His name was Master Sergeant Kevin Ivory. Wonderful guy, just full of energy, great, could fix anything, fix those problems. He didn't really have a staff. He had two people from the band working for him. They weren't necessarily admin people. There just weren't enough people. As well as the warrant officer—I admired this guy; he was just amazing. He was an active duty warrant officer who came to save the National Guard. And he did, he did. He helped the G1 out immensely. But what happened was I found myself not out-processing, but helping with operations; helping everyone else out-process. So, I ended up staying maybe a little over a month more than it was planned, but I felt, I was home; my son was okay; he was accepting that I'm not deployed; I'm not in harm's way, so he got through that. But in that process, I wasn't taking care of myself again as is typical of leaders—you're taking care of other folks and you're an after-thought, not a big sacrifice, but trying to get ready for IG duty and giving them all the things they need. That was somewhat of a conflict, trying to do two things at once. But soon after I completed my time up at Fort Drum, I took a little time off and went away for training, maybe a week after I reported back. I had a week in the office, went to VA to go the IG school, a wonderful school. I think every leader should go through it. I returned to my dream job, where I am today. And I tell you there's no shortage of work in the IG world. I love it. I take a deep breath every day because it's challenging at times; it's exhausting always, but it's what I want to do. Now that I have done my dream job, I'm not quite sure what I'm going to do next, so I'll have to figure that out.

**MR:** Thank you very much for your interview. A very good interview.

**MRL:** You're welcome.