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Ursula Pritham, interviewed by Hillary Jackson, Part 3

Ursula A. Bobst Pritham

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Interviewer: Hillary Jackson

Transcriber: Kathrin Warren

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[Begin Tape C 2346, Side A. Begin Session NA 3238]

Hillary Jackson: We will basically just start out with some simple questions: when and where you were born?

Ursula Pritham: I was born in New York City in 1955.

Hillary: Your parent's names, occupations, educational backgrounds?

Ursula: Okay, my father is Joseph (?) and my mother is Elizabeth (?) and they both immigrated from Switzerland to the United States in 1952 I believe and came to the United States because my father spent three previous years in New York City working and was sensing that he would have an opportunity to have a better living and a better life and so he went back to Switzerland and married my mother and then they settled in New York City.

Hillary: What kind of work did he do?

Ursula: He was a machinist, so he did that which was mainly the defense industry. Which was in dire need of that type of worker, during the period just after World War Two. So he did very well.

Hillary: When and where did you serve? And what brand of military were you in?

Ursula: I was in the Army. Specifically the Army nurse core. I actually joined as a student and in the Army Reserves. So primarily my tourism duty were related to reserve and active duty initially I was just pretty much state side. Once I went on active duty I went to Europe for a three years to Germany and then I came back to the states for a three year tour and then I went to Korea to two years and at that time I resigned my active commission and in resign I moved into the reserves and I have completed my military service as a reserve student.

Hillary: Was there any particular place? Did you like being here, Germany, Korea?

Preference?

Ursula: I had a preference for Germany only because of my family of origin. Many of my relatives were still in Switzerland and so I had an opportunity to connect with my long distant relatives I knew some of the language and felt like I could suddenly easily relate to the culture there.

Hillary: How did your.. oops wait.. ha-ha. What were the sentiments in your community and family toward the war?

Ursula: Which war would that be specifically?

Hillary: Which ever one you want to talk about. It doesn't. Its up to you.

Ursula: Well at the time when I joined, it was the later part of the seventies we where just you know coming out of Vietnam. Many of us certainly had siblings that we where you know, specifically brothers that we where very concern for but that was coming to an end. So for me personally it was an opportunity to advance my education. Cause the Army at that time had a number of scholarships for nurses, although they were very competitive and you typically needed a political connection of knowing a congressmen or statesman who could advocate for you or a family member who has perhaps has had military service and that would allow you to have the extra you know plout I think to be selected for those kinds of positions. So initially I applied for the Army four year scholarship program for nurses. Where the only one who paid where your education at the University of Maryland

Hillary: That's good.

Ursula: And the nurses would have graduated and then would have been on active duty in the Army without having to pay back for anything related to those education expenses. Plus it

was very much like the ROTC programs that we have now where those students receive (?) extra funding for books and personal expenses so it's a very attractive thing but I was not selected for that but I had a very good recruiter who had the time when I was in college and in need of additional funds said well why don't you consider joining the Army Reserves? And so I did consider that, my parents I think supported that because they were not in the position of helping me financially so it was just another means of getting getting my (?) in to reimbursing.

Hillary: That's good. That's always helpful. So you said you family was pretty acceptable of you enlisting just because you know they couldn't help you?

Ursula: Right.

Hillary: What about friends, neighbors? Did they have any other reaction outside from what your family had?

Ursula: I think that all and many of them had not considered the military as a career option. Of the friends that I had spent time with in high school and at college they didn't see that as an option but I felt that it was a great opportunity to advance my career and become independent, more independent than I was and to travel and to explore different means of career advancement basically. I think the military for many people is an opportunity to learn and explore different things that were not necessarily awarded to the general population so I was one of the few and only individuals whenever I return to my high school graduations I think a lot of people are in awe and envy that I had considered that an option because they realized the many doors that were open to me you know in travel and so forth.

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Hillary: As far as training, you know what kind of training did you have? What did you do?

Ursula: My initial training was when I joined the reserves the only reserves I was enlisted and they recognized that I was a college student so they allowed me to do my two weeks of basic training at Fort McClellan in Alabama during my winter break so I flew down there for two weeks and it was quite quite an alarming sort of experience because here I was going from a college campus to boot camp literally crash boot camp you know where we had to wear our hair above our shoulders, we had uniforms, we had protocols to follow, to be to to be familiar with and we were set up in these barracks living with many other women that we didn't know. We went into survival mode so it was very different, but it was a modified two weeks and then after I graduated from college I was commissioned as an officer and then you go to six weeks of what they call the Army nurse core and the medical core they go to Fort Sam Houston in Texas in San Antonio Texas for six weeks of basic officers training. And that's my basic military training.

Hillary: Did your training prepare you adequately for the job that you were supposed to do?

Ursula: Well yes I think it was you know they did all require that we cover a lot material in short abbreviated formats. Our days were very very long, but that's the military style is that they try to make sure that the taxpayers (?) supply all the funds for these particular courses are getting their money's worth and so many of us who go there are you know required to get a lot accomplished in a very short period of time and I do feel I was prepared sufficiently for the mission that I was asked to partake in, which was to preserve the fighting strength.

Hillary: Its, you know been noted that the rules and regulations for men and women seem to be different. How were they different for you?

Ursula: well I joined in the late seventies I think that was a time when for me in the military most of my experience was working with other individuals in the medical field. I was not with the front line troops. I know that there were some significant differences for women and men but because I worked with a number of professionals health care professionals we were all treated quite equally and actually I think in the late seventies we still saw some class structure related to physicians and nurses. Where as that wasn't as evident in the military nurses were officers you know, and that put us in the same line as the medical doctors and other officers. So I think the rank structure if you were an officer certainly helped women considerably.

Hillary: That's good

Ursula: Yeah

Hillary: Who would buy the books and stuff for the class (?) Its amazing to see you know I mean, the women were always the lower end of the rank and the men were always. And even movies they still depict we've had to watch a few movies, and even in the movies they still depict you know women as being below the men you know. Now did you take part in anything in the Gulf War?

Ursula: No I was fortunate in a sense I was in the reserves at the time and my husband and I, I had actually met my husband at Fort Bragg in North Carolina He was a family practice resident initiating some of his training at Fort Bragg. So we met there. So we were both on active duty for a number of years together and then after leaving Korea I went in to the reserves and he completed his active duty training but that we stayed in the reserves together when we moved to Maine, and our unit actually was mobilized. At the time I was pregnant with my second child and so because I was pregnant I was not able to go with my unit but they were mobilized and my husband did go to the Gulf War he actually was stationed in Iraq.

Hillary: Really.

Ursula: and that was a very stressful period in our lives and for many others too. So actually never was mobilized with the unit but if the conflict had continued for a longer period of time and I had been medically cleared six weeks after having my baby, I could have indeed been required to go. Cause that was the policy at the time and if your medically cleared six weeks after your delivery you then join your unit again.

Hillary: Wow.

Ursula: To complete the mission.

Hillary: Typical day in the military, what was it like for you?

Ursula: Well again because I was in the nursing field you know, our care related to the patients in the hospital setting I was unlike some of the other military units who you would see in the early morning hours doing their physical training, running, and so forth. I ended up going to the hospital, working, working very long hours, because many of the military nurses covered all the shifts. We had a number of civilian nurses that worked along side us but if they called in sick or we had shortages they military nurse without a question would work the extra shift and cover. So most of my hours were spent in the patient related areas and administrative related areas.

Hillary: Do you think it took a toll on your family, and how it affected them?

Ursula: Oh yes, I believe so I mean it was for many of us it was you know my husband and I would be clearly twelve hour working days you know going in at six in the morning and not leaving till six and seven at night especially when your overseas and there's a little more shortage of support staff, and I admire those women who also had families to care for.

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At that time I hadn't started my family so it wasn't a problem but I knew clearly that was not what I wanted to continue doing, if I were to have a family. And that was one of the reasons why I decided to leave the active Army.

Hillary: Did you change your ideas or attitudes about the military or the government while you were in the service?

Ursula: Yes, I realize with each administration you know there is a change in attitude and view as to the importance of a strong military force and so there are administrative administrators presidents that would feel that perhaps defense spending was not as valued as we would see changes in our funding we wouldn't have as much funding for training activities support equipment during the Regan years you know we've had a (?) of funds to fight the Cold war and I think having a strong military presence (?) as those sort of events those were all the events and with other administrators we saw a decrease in the defense spending and that new change the way we decided how we would train our troops and to maintain our proficiency.

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Hillary: What administrators were around when there was a decrease in funding?

Ursula: I think sometimes we felt like for instance the Clinton administration I think in you know being fiscally responsible and having a balanced budget they certainly changed I think a lot of the funding that was available wasn't certainly the president alone, congress of course I think it was just an attitude that was conveyed throughout that they wanted to reevaluate how that was done. I think you know it takes many years, lots of hours of training to maintain a strong military force and so that I think that is something that the public isn't always aware of that you have to maintain a certain level of funding to maintain a kind of fighting force that you

want and nowadays, its an educated fighting force because of technology and all the other facets that you have to take into consideration when you have an integrated operation when you are working with the army, air force, navy, you have to have an educated army. All the services have to be well trained to do that together.

Hillary: Do you feel that administrators who had a background and you know the military experience, where they more inclined to you know give you guys more support?

Ursula: I think it has to do with the time, what is going on in the world you know, clearly the cold war was no longer an issue at that certain point in time and so we there was a different approach being taken we had more a smaller abiding structures the military medical support, which is what I was involved with was beginning to realize that we had to take a of more combat support readiness mode rather than having a lot of these fixed (?) medical institutions to support the casualties we'd have to be in support of a rapid fighting force. So that required more of us to go out in to the field to train on the battlefield also to become comfortable with the language that combat units were using and managing whatever the tasks were. So for us in the medical field, we had to maintain not just our medical proficiency, our nursing proficiency, we had to maintain our military proficiency as well and sort of master a whole other body of knowledge which often was which often is done by sending military officers to like the war college, command and general staff where we are with other officers of other branches.

Hillary: Did you have to learn any or you know get basic knowledge of any other language like while you were over in Korea, Germany? I mean you already had some German I guess.

Ursula: Right, exactly. It's not required, but it is certainly encouraged. If you have an interest or special talent in that area they would often send you to a language school. You could

apply and go to a particular language school like the one (?) in the (?) area of California. There is a whole sort of special language school there that you could go to, and there were some officers that pretty much were doing that. Depending on where they were going with their military career. It wasn't required though, but it was certainly encouraged. Many of us who went to Korea did learn some of the basic words that would allow us to go out into the community and convey our needs or express our gratitude.

Hillary: The response to the peace movement while you were at home during the Vietnam War, Not really sure, what that is, but?

Ursula: Well for me, I had actually you know I was already graduating from high school you know some of that I was in college you know I don't think I fully appreciated that whole peace movement but in how you to study the different operations, the different conflicts through the various military courses that I have taken over the years. You know, I realize that we didn't show a lot of gratitude towards those Vietnam War vets. They given a cold shoulder for having gone over and you know fought in the jungle for us and sacrificed. So for me, its wonderful that we have people who really want to promote peace, but when you have a government that asks their military to support them and their views. By giving, you know for these soldiers to give up their lives, I think we need to have more public support over sons and daughters who were then ones then sent over to fight. And I think we have done a better job by having the reserves become part of these operations because now people can recognize that its not just these active duty military units that people cannot really truly relate to, unless you have a family member actively involved in the military. I think as a whole, the public can relate to the fact that here it is, their elementary school teacher whose in the reserves is now going over seas. Or that local EMS person or bank or whoever is now being asked to leave their family and their home to go support

whatever it is that our government is asking them to do. And I think the public as a whole has a better appreciation for those that do make those sacrifices, and that wasn't really the case for those Vietnam War Veterans.

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Hillary: That is how, I remember when in the Gulf War, you know I mean you watch it on TV everything but you never really took into consideration you know what they were going through and how it would be when they got home. And now I've taken this class, its amazing like you know, it makes like think about these things and we've all talked about it and most of us just you know, you don't even, you know, you appreciate to a point what their doing, but it doesn't even really you know make sense to you. What's going on until you actually start to learn about it. So.

Ursula: (?) an example, unfortunately he's not in private practice as a family practice physician, but some of his colleagues were, and to have to close out their private practice in rural communities to go, was very devastating, not only for their practice, but for the population that they served in communities. Because many of them have no other place to go, for care, so you know, I think it is something we have to all really take into consideration on the impact that it has, and for my husband luckily he was working at a large group practice, he's a hospital employee. So there were many others in the group that were able to absorb his work load, and so he was not then, his job was not in jeopardy. That can be the case for many people, cause those people have to be replaced, you know in some situations. And so it does have ramifications for many, many others.

Hillary: You (?) about the politics of the time, I guess we kind of already went over that, you know. Who gave support, who you know. If there were any profound changes, you

know, what you know, were there any between the sixties and seventies, you know that probably wouldn't pertain to you. Eighties and nineties you know, where there, did you see and specific you know huge changes? How the military was treated you know how women were treated?

Ursula: For me, a lot of those decades are sort of blurry with one another. I think, I think many of us realized after the Gulf War, that we as Americans have a certain life style that we want to maintain and preserve that lifestyle and in order to do that, you have to have a certain level of security. And that is accomplished by having a strong military force. You know, so we've sort of taken that for granted but in order for that to happen, there has to be a lot of public support for that. Whether it be through tax payers, expenses, sending your own sons and daughters, and luckily we have been able to do that through a volunteer army, and that to me is very incredible. So that says a lot, that over the years, I think we haven't had to rely on a conscription I think. Is that it? Term that you want to look for where your actually drafting individuals for one or two years of service; because we've had a lot of support. The people are not using the military as a mechanism to advance their own personal and professional lives and I think that is a good example of some of the changes that we have seen. Cause that as a whole, our country I think it does value and appreciate what the armed forces has done for us and they're very supportive of us.

Hillary: It is, its is incredible that, I mean people all around volunteer you know to go, and actually when I first came up here I was premed, and that didn't last long but you know my parents they couldn't, you know, it was hard for them to you know between the rest of the family and then me to you know, give me money to go to school. So they kept saying you know, why don't you look into you know, you know going into the army or going into you know. I had thought about it, but once I realized that it just wasn't, like premed was not for me. I you know I

didn't kind of give up on that idea. But you know I did, I thought about it and I probably would have really considered it if I had kept going. So, it's good for advancement. I have you know family members and I have a cousin who just joined the army, and I mean, he love it. You know, all the opportunities that are open to him, you know it's incredible. I mean, a lot of them aren't open to you know just anyone else. It's you, you know, so much more you can do if you have military background. So it's good for him. It makes it more easier for people you know, you know, more of an incentive to join if you know, its going to help them out, and also help their country.

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Ursula: well when you think of the populations, the populations that I think about is the inner-city, the African American, the Hispanic, who perhaps would not have had these opportunities. And the military for them has offered them the opportunity to have a career, to get the education that perhaps they would never have been able to pursue, and for many of those individuals they have, they have pulled themselves out of poverty. They also have often been given the opportunity to promote their self-esteem, and they take great pride in their accomplishments, and I think that the military has offered them the opportunity to do that. So I've seen a lot of growth, especially for the young enlisted individual who may have not had good role models in their own community, and here now their asked to you know, look neat and sharp in their uniform, take pride, be proud of yourself, you know have these attitudes and behaviors that are, that are groomed because of this organization that the members are now part of. So I think it's a very, very useful.

Hillary: What about funniest moment in the service? Do you have any? If so, was there one particular one?

Ursula: Funniest? Ohhh well you know the thing about the military is that you also have opportunities to do some nice traveling, sightseeing, and so forth. And there was one particular event when I went skiing. We had these red eye specials, where from the hospital; they would have a bus leave Frankford. On Friday evening we would drive down to Switzerland into the (?) in the winter, to go skiing. And then we'd ski all day Saturday. There was one particular Saturday; we went to the top of a mountain. I think it was Switzerland and there was a group of anesthesiologists, myself, and a group of other nurses, who were all skiing together. It got very foggy and very cloudy on the top of mountain and we all lost our way down. We ended up skiing down the wrong side of the mountain. So we ended up skiing into this small Swiss village, luckily again I had enough knowledge of the language so I was able to talk to a local person, in one of the restaurants there. And they had a van. And we paid that individual to drive us around, to the other side of the mountain, where the bus had been waiting for us. To take us back into Germany you know. So those were some of the lighter moments. And i am sure there were many more, at this time I really can't think of any others that were, were necessarily related to military events. There were just so many different moments. I can't think of any others at the moment.

Hillary: Its good to know, I mean, you think of a lot of people in the military you know it's everything is you know so you know serious and strict, which I know a lot of it is, but you know you don't. It's hard to imagine you know one minute you know, doing your job and then the next minute you're out having a good time. So it's good, it's good to know that, you actually can go out and have a good time in the mist of everything that is going on.

Ursula: and all of us have gone through like math, reading compass cord, you know, survive some basic survival courses, so if you are out in the woods or whatever, you can pretty

much figure your way home you know. But those aren't things that you typically think about. Its sort of a subconscious level that you start applying those strategies in your own personal life.

Hillary: Coming home, what was it like? Do you, you know, with the reception, you know were you welcomed back? There was an article that we read actually that said that these men and women came back from I don't know which war it was and they saw more support in the people that they worked with than the people that they came home you know who they had served their country for. It just, there was no you know, like welcome, you know what so ever.

Ursula: I think that is very true for the Vietnam War. We had individual soldiers that would fly home, not in the company of a unit, so there wouldn't like a band or an audience at the airport welcoming them. They would just be walking off the plane perhaps if they were wearing the uniform, they may even have been booed, by some of those antiwar protesters. And then there was a big turn around I think with the gulf war. Major communities I mean, Bangor Airport was a good example of how a community mobilizes itself to welcome those soldiers, as they either transition through or were welcomed back home. And it was a really nice change to see that. I personally didn't come home in that way. I mean, whenever I came home it was on leave or in transit between unit assignments. I was never welcomed home because of a conflict or an operation as a unit. So I didn't really have that experience., but I was at the airport when my husband came back from Saudi Arabia, and it was just a matter of him having to stop to refuel, and then he had to fly on to I think it was Fort (?) in Georgia; to be debriefed, and before the unit was allowed to be released. So I was at the airport where these service members were quickly given little snuggly bears by community members. So they had something to give family members, as they saw their children, and that was very meaningful for those service members to have that kind of support. Cause my husband picked up two snuggly bears, and those

were given to my children as he hugged them and kissed them for maybe an hour. And then they were boarded again, to back on before coming home officially. So I think was very (?)

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Hillary: Why do you feel that there was a difference between how people were welcomed back, or not welcomed back during the Vietnam War? And then how they were received when they got back from the Gulf War, was there, you know, do you there was any reason for that?

Ursula: Well you know, how people felt, you mean for those Vets, no one said thank you for giving, giving so much of yourself up, for having gone to a foreign land and being perhaps exposed to some of the harshest things that we can imagine. Seeing death, misery, pain, suffering, losing all your friends having to cope with a lot of that alone. And then to come home and have people say you were wrong you were bad for having gone there. You know that was very devastating and I think that is why we see very high rates of suicide among those Vietnam War vets. We see very high rates of drug use, alcoholism, tobacco use, because we haven't given them the means of being able to cope or adapt in a very healthy way. So now we have a subset of our vets who came back very disabled mentally and physically. We are never able to assimilate back our (?)

Hillary: If you were, looking back on your experience, if you were to do it again, would you? You weren't really in combat, but I mean, would you make the decision, you know to go back to the nursing program?

Ursula: Yes, knowing now, I mean when I initially joined, we don't ever really think of those, times when you are going to be asked to go to combat. You know, as a nurse, I always thought that I would be healthy, that I wouldn't be hurting others. Having to launch a missile or having you know, use chemical weapons. We were certainly taught how to use a weapon but that

was always in defense. It was never intended to use as an assault on some one else. I think I would do it again as a nurse, for sure, because I would be there to comfort those individuals who needed that time and comforting at a time of need, and I think I would do it again. My military skills I think have benefited me in many ways and I think as a nurse, I am a better nurse for the kinds of things I've had to experience. So yes, I would do it again, but I am hopeful that we don't have to ever resort to conflict to resolve world issue, that we could do it in a more peaceful way. But I think to do that, we need to have a strong military force, and that we always have to be prepared for the worst possible scenario. But yes, I have actually encouraged my children. My husband hasn't, we just you know I mean. My husband is very turned off by the military, because of his experience.

Hillary: His experience is obviously gonna be a lot different than yours was.

Ursula: Exactly, he was on the front line in Iraq, he may have been exposed to some of those gases that were released. He does have a very different image. I would like to see my children consider ROTC, it builds character, it builds a bunch of strength, to be able to be skilled in so many different ways, that to me is very exciting, very challenging. My husband takes a very different view on that, so he's not one that would encourage my children to consider the military, as a career option.

Hillary: Its understandable, I mean to a point you know.

Ursula: Yes, Yes!

Hillary: If it were me, I can't say, because I obviously you know, haven't had to go through it, but it would be hard for me, you know, seeing what he had seen you know to then encourage my children to go, but where as you were actually, you helped everyone. So I mean, its two completely different things, definitely. You said a minute ago that you know your you

know experience and everything; it benefited you, aside from your nursing as making you a better nurse. How else did it benefit you? I mean in you know, everyday life?

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Ursula: Well I think, leadership I think as an officer, your required to develop those leadership skills very early on, at a much younger age than most individuals would be asked to take on those leadership positions. So I think that for me has been very beneficial. I think it build a lot of self confidence. Your asked to take on some really challenging things, your asked to do some things that you may have never been asked to do before. Throw a grenade, fire a rifle, clean out your weapon, because if you don't do it right, its not going to work for you. You know things that require you to become very self sufficient, and I am, I am very self sufficient. So I never allow myself to get into a situation where you know I am dependant on someone else. And I think the military has sort of instilled that in me. If I don't have my gear and its not working properly, I am the one who is going to be suffering.

Hillary: True! Aside from skiing, how did you spend your leisure time, in the military?

Ursula: I traveled extensively with other officers, so that was wonderful. We would get euro passes, we would have lots of time where we could you know take leave. We had thirty days of paid vacation, depending on your unit and the staffing of your unit. Sometimes there were some restraints as to when you could take that vacation time, but for many of us, we would you know, take two weeks. We worked hard played hard, was our motto. I had an opportunity to go to Berlin at a time when Berlin was closed to many of us you know. And to go to some other places that I probably would not have had a chance to really tour.

Hillary: Was there anywhere in Europe that you enjoyed more than the other places?

Ursula: I think that you know, some of the historical sites, Rome, you know seeing the Vatican, seeing the old ruins in Greece and Athens. We had an opportunity as you know maybe to back flights, where you could be standby to take some military transport flights on the sea one forty (?) planes and that would not cost you anything other than some time waiting in line, to be on standby. So you would hop on like a sea one forty (?) I would do that, and fly to Madrid, fly to Athens, at no cost.

Hillary: Well that's fun; I would love to do that. Just cause I want to go over there, but I mean it's a matter of money.

Ursula: Yes, and sometimes of course, there is waiting I did wait for about three days once to get out on a flight, because some of the flights would be cancelled or their schedules would be changed, or they would limit the number of extra passengers that they would be able to transport. So sometimes there is a little bit of loss of time but generally you are able to utilize those types of services. And there are other fringe benefits for military personnel, different hotels and facilities that are government run that people can utilize at minimal cost.

Hillary: In general terms, how would you describe the relationships between the men and women in the military? I mean, did you have much contact? Were there many men nurses back then?

Ursula: Well again in the hospital setting, I didn't have much of a problem working with my colleagues, physicians, and the other male nurses, and professionals. I never felt you know harassed or uncomfortable at all. I must say though, in field training exercises where you are out on the field with enlisted personnel, officers, there are times when I do think that women feel threatened for their safety and their wellbeing. Because often you are having to deal with individuals, giving them our orders as an officer. They may be from a different branch; they may

not truly understand your background, your experience, they may not appreciate why it is that you are asking them to do certain things out in the field, so you didn't always get the response that you were hoping for. So you had to be cautious, about that at times, but I never feared for my safety in regards to anyone that was working with me on these field training exercises.

Hillary: How about the relationships among the women? How were you all? Did you all get along for the most part?

Ursula: well actually that a very good question because in the active duty military, you know we, there's a hierarchy, meaning you are competing against. For instance when I was a First Lieutenant, I was competing with all of these other First Lieutenants for the promotion to captain. Likewise as your going up the career ladder, there's fewer numbers of spots. So therefore in essence, you are competing with your fellow army nurse for officer promotion. So many of us were working vigorously to get our masters degrees, you know excelling, excelling in our nursing career, taking correspondence courses for our military education. You know, touch all the right buttons. You get what we call OER, officer evaluation reports, having to do a lot of things, above and beyond your job duties. To be able to get selected promotions, so there was a lot of competition. So some of us did get along beautifully, we encouraged each other, we were supported of one another. But there were some individuals who would rather step on you to get ahead.

Hillary: There are always a few of those. Ha-ha. Wherever you go.

Ursula: So you know, I mean with any, any organization that has that type hierarchy it's only natural that you see that kind of behavior.

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Hillary: How did society view women in the military? I know, there I mean I kind of already mentioned, you know, that there were a lot of people who you know that didn't, feel that you know women should be in the military. That it was you know a place for a man to be.

Ursula: Well in the time that I have been in the military, I have seen amazing feats by women. It used to be for instance an army nurse core officer could never be a commander of a hospital. Now we have army nurses who are officers that are actually eligible for command positions. And that was totally unheard of when I first joined the military. And now as im coming, I have actually completed my twenty years. That is actually indeed happening. So for a number of years, women struggled. They struggled for those command positions. They fought very hard to achieve some of the positions that were only granted to men. So its been an ongoing struggle for women and I think that more and more people are beginning to recognized that women can do very well in those positions. And we bring other traits to those positions, that allow us to be very effective leaders, good managers, and that we can do a job very well. So I don't know if I have answered your question or not.

Hillary: Yeah, yeah you did. Just the fact that women you what I mean, have these opportunities is an obvious sign of how people you know view the jobs their doing.

Ursula: Yeah, but you know, it's been a struggle. Those initial frontier women you know were the ones that really had to endure a lot of pain, emotional pain because many of them I think were (?) for those opportunities. And it was done in very heinous ways. And many times, it would totally destroy the person's moral. So its been a nice, I think we see more female officers at high ranking positions that actually have come forward about their own personal experiences being harassed, discriminated against, and those public displays have helped, helped

us to appreciate that, that is not going to be tolerated and we will report those that are discriminatory.

Hillary: Do you feel that when there are reports made that the military does handle them, effectively? Because I mean I think there are a lot of you know, you know stereotyping in the fact

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Hillary: Okay, I'll ask the question again, just that it is on the same side of the tape. Do you feel that the military does handle reports of you know harassment you know effectively, you know, cause a lot of things do portray that they just you know kind of push it under the rug, you know, don't really pay much attention to it. Especially if it has to do with men, it seems. I've heard stories more about women, maybe they're you know lifestyles, you know, all those kinds of things, but there isn't much that I have every heard about men.

Ursula: I think after those major public displays, I think the Navy and other branches have had some major incidences that were I think highlighted by the media. And since then, all branches of the service require yearly training sessions on equal opportunity. Where we specifically talk about not discriminating against anyone for their sex, their race, their age, you know their whatever religious preferences. And I actually was one of those individuals in my unit that was responsible in the reserve unit here locally to update people about the stand the military has that this won't be tolerated. And I think for the most part with our younger amnesties, it's not a problem. What I've found is with some of our older more seasoned and less (?) officers, you know enlisted members, and senior officers that it was harder for them to change old habits. It would not be uncommon for them to say "oh honey" to a female. Rather

than using her rank and her name as they would have done for a male soldier. So they needed constant reminding, some of them needed constant reminding that this is no longer acceptable. So I think over time we are going to see that this probably won't be as much of an issue as it has been in the past. I think our society as a whole; you know the military is a reflection of our society. So I think over time it is not going to be as much of an issue. And I don't think the service will allow it to be an issue. Cause they have taken have taken a strong stand against such behavior.

Hillary: Is there anyone you still keep in touch with that you served with?

Ursula: I do keep in touch with some army nurse core officers. Who are now retired and generally Christmas time we exchange holiday greetings. But that's about all. I don't really keep in touch with any other individuals that I spent time with. Many of us have moved to various parts of the country. Sometimes you'll read about you know your colleagues, perhaps accomplishments in various professional journals that you subscribe to. If you're subscribed to like the Army Times; which is something I used to subscribe to. You can kind of keep up with some of their accomplishments, promotions and different things, but now that I am retired I seem to be doing less and less of it.

Hillary: Do you think that all military jobs should be open to the women?

Ursula: Yes I do. I think where there was a time when society felt that we should protect women, in certain situations, certain scenarios. But I think if a woman wants to do that, I think they should have the opportunity to do that.

Hillary: It's their choice.

Ursula: That's right, exactly. And they may offer, offer a whole other perspective on how something can be accomplished. So I think they bring a lot of traits to a situation. That can be developed, that could benefit the unit, depending on what their mission is.

Hillary: And then last question, is there anything else that you would like to add that we haven't gone over that you feel is important?

Ursula: No, other than I think it would be nice for others to do what you are doing. I think if they haven't had family members or perhaps personal experiences with the military, to do a little reading about you know being in the active forces or you know even some of the movies that I have been seeing like Saving Private Ryan and other war movies that help us to appreciate the freedoms that we have here and the many other places that we have that kind of freedom in the world, is related to some of the sacrifices of the military veterans. And I think we need to honor them. One of the things that I am distressed at times by is the fact that the University of Maine doesn't provided students with a day off for recognition of Veterans Day.

Hillary: I've always wondered why I mean, we have, and I don't think we have ever had it off. And I mean, everywhere, I have friends who go to school you know in other places and they all have the day off, and you know we're in school, and it just doesn't seem.

Ursula: We'll if you're in school, perhaps maybe there should be sometime set aside to maybe reflect on maybe what doe sit mean? To have, have these military experiences or what the veterans have done for us. You know it's just an opportunity thing to get everyone to reflect a little bit about, about those veterans. Their suffering and sacrifice, and their families as well.

Hillary: Yeah, families are just as much affected. You know in a different way but.

Ursula: I think of all those mothers who had sons that died in the Vietnam War, and other in various conflicts. So I do think that we need to take time to remind one another of that.

Hillary: Definitely, I think so. I don't know why, don't know why we don't.

Ursula: So I think your course work helps with some of that.

Hillary: Yeah definitely.

Ursula: Helps to enlighten others.

Hillary: Definitely gives a perspective that you never would have thought of before hand.

Ursula: Exactly.

Hillary: I mean, I go read all these stories and then you start to think about all the things that you never thought about. Then you feel bad, because you've never really taken the time to you know to think about what everyone else is you know, you know done for you and your country and all that. Kind of feel bad ha-ha. But at least know I have a better understanding, and there are people out there who still may never appreciate or understand you know, what it is that, you know people in the military you know deal with, and you know do best. So I guess it's better to do it now than like never. So thank you very much and (?) it went well.

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[End Tape C 2346, Side B.]