

Transcript – Miranda Summers Lowe, 2009 MA

Narrator: Miranda Summers Lowe

Interviewer: Amanda Knox, Pembroke Center Assistant Archivist

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Amanda Knox: Good afternoon, my name is Amanda Knox. I'm the Assistant Archivist at the Pembroke Center for Teaching and Research on Women at Brown University. Today is Tuesday, December 14, 2021. It is 1 pm and I am here today, again via Zoom, this time with one of our alumni veterans who is open to sharing her story with us. Welcome. So Miranda, would you like to introduce yourselves, yourself to our listeners?

Miranda Summers Lowe: Sure, my name is Miranda Summers Lowe, and I am a graduate of the Public Humanities Master's program at Brown University, class of 2009. And then I'm currently serving as an Officer in the Army and in Washington, DC. Previously did two deployments, [1:00] one to Iraq and one to the Horn of Africa.

Amanda Knox: Thank you so much for taking time to be with me today. I have so many questions, you have done so much. I'm really grateful that you were willing to add your story to all of those that live in the Pembroke Center Oral History Project. But I would like to sort of start from the beginning, if you are comfortable sharing about your early life, your childhood, where you grew up, maybe what your parents did, things like that.

Miranda Summers Lowe: Sure. Yeah, so I grew up in Muncie, Indiana, mostly. I was actually, my parents were college professors, so my very early life was kind of a, an academic brat. So they did their masters at the University of Nebraska so I was actually born in Lincoln. Yeah, moved to northern Utah where the University of Utah is [2:00] while they got their PhDs and then they got faculty jobs in Indiana. So, I lived there from the time I was six to when I was – well, that, that's where it starts getting kind of complicated, oddly.

So, growing up my parents both taught at Ball State University and then, when I was 15, my mother passed away and you know, my, my dad just kind of like wanted a reset and so he decided to move out to the Washington DC area. And I had just started boarding school in Indiana so I stayed out in Indiana to finish high school and would spend summers and school breaks and everything in, you know, the DC suburbs. My family's been in DC since then.

Amanda Knox: Wow. What was that like kind of, losing your mom at such a young age [3:00] and all of this change and sort of maybe displacement, not to put words in your mouth, happening around you?

Miranda Summers Lowe: Yeah. You know, I think most of this stuff, like it sounds so much worse when you hear someone else talk about it, and when you go through it it's just kind of, you know, your, your life and you're doing it one step at a time, but I think it, it undoubtedly changed the outcome of my life. My family was kind of interesting, too, in that, you know, they were these college professors, and so it a lot of ways I grew up with like a lot of privilege and opportunity and like access to education and, but they were also very like religiously conservative and I think they very much thought that, you know, I was very much raised with that idea that you know, like my primary like job in the world was to be like a good wife and mother and that like education or work was, was like a means to that end. [4:00] And so losing my mom at that point, you know where I think most teenagers are kind of forming a new identity and like breaking away from that, I think, in a lot of ways actually ended up being kind of liberating in that like, that, I guess that, like that connection was starker. Right? Like I know a lot of people who make a lot of decisions through you know their teenage years you know to kind of like please their family and so kind of experiencing that displacement, where it was like, you know, even like, like the loss of that community, like it was hard going through it at the time and now, looking back at it, I think it actually set me up a lot better to like not feel united to one place. Right? Like, I remember applying for colleges and you know talking to like the guidance counselor at school, and I was like, "I guess I'll just apply to all the colleges in Indiana. My friends are." And she was like, "Have you heard of in state tuition? Like you, [5:00] I mean you can, but like that doesn't make sense for you anymore." Right? Just those little like mind shifts where it was like oh I don't have that like home base so I can do anything. Yeah.

Amanda Knox: And that's so interesting that you kind of grew up with these sort of traditional gender roles around you and, from my perspective, and what I'm given to understand by the research that I've done for this interview, you've not pursued traditional gender roles, generally speaking. So, tell me about, I know, again based on my research that sort of a pivotal moment in your life was kind of going to college and you know some national events happening. So, would you first mind talking about your decision behind like your application processes and where you wanted to go and why and sort of what you were thinking in those moments, as you were kind of moving on. [6:00]

Miranda Summers Lowe: I was lucky enough to get to go to Indiana's like, it was a boarding school, for you know the, the gifted and talented students so just everyone that I was going to the school with was very like into college, college driven, cared a lot about where they were going. And, you know, I, like I just wasn't feeling that, for some reason, I still don't have like a great idea why. I was really young when I decided I wanted to join the Army. Right? Like, I remember this happened, maybe like sixth grade, just really feeling like called to do this. But, like everyone in my life was like don't do that. Whether it was like at home, and I think a lot of that was very gendered, that you know, the, the military wasn't a place for like nice girls and it certainly like wasn't a place for like smart people. Like my, my parents definitely felt that way. [7:00] And some of it came from like a really educated place. Like, my mom's dad, my grandfather, was in the Air Force and my mom grew up on military bases her whole life so she, you know, was coming from a much more educated place on that opinion [inaudible].

I have to laugh now because sometimes I think, like there was a family martial tradition, it just like skipped my parents' generation and like hit me. Wouldn't necessarily have thought that's where that would display, but you know, I think my parents were coming out of that Vietnam generation, where it was like the last thing you wanted was to be affiliated with the military.

And, so, like, you know, going into college I'd like, I just really didn't like even want to apply. And I think part of that was, too, growing up on college campuses like there wasn't this big like sense of mystery around it. My parents signed me up for my first college class when I was 15 right, like, I would just take concurrent credit over at Ball State, [8:00] so I knew exactly what it was, and you know, yo my view it like wasn't that enticing. And then plus with all the

other upheaval going on in my life like with my parents moving and you know boarding school had been this like safe supportive environment, I was going to have to leave that. I was just like I don't even care, right, like, I, I really put like no effort into college applications. And my parents had been like, "Why don't you, why don't you apply to the military academies? Right? And if you don't do that just try a different college and, like, if you still want to go into the military, then why don't you do it as an officer? Right? Like go to college first and this thing will still be there for you." So I did not get into one of the military academies and my dad did just apply to a bunch of colleges, for me, basically. Looking back, honestly, like I am so [9:00] ashamed, like how little I cared about this. But it was like sort of at about the time I, like my friends were getting into college like it seemed embarrassing to like not be part of that. But then I just really was not like investing in schools or, I don't know. That's, that's not where I was. I kind of just thought all colleges are the same.

So I ended up going to George Washington University, which is in like downtown DC. And my what second, third week of class was September 11. And you know, like from where we were it wasn't like close enough to really like be part of the chaos, right, like I wasn't in any like, you know, physical danger myself, but you know, like we got locked in our classrooms, our, our dorms, right. Like you couldn't go in and out of the dorms. Our like cafeterias and office [10:00] buildings got used like as evacuation points for like government buildings. You know, I just remember it was like close enough that you could like see and like smell like the damage from the Pentagon.

And then just all of a sudden, you know I just kind of remember sitting there and being like this thing people are telling me that, like I should go to college and I could go to the Army whenever, you know, later that that would wait, that just felt really off to me and I was like oh actually like you know the nation's under attack. Like, this feels like the moment, like the you know, like the sign I needed. So, you know I did finish the semester. I got that far. And then I like, I dropped out. I, I tried joining the Army like right away, but there were actually like so many people who joined the Army, or wanted to, there's this like huge backlog. So I actually ended up going back to Indiana to join there because their, you know, different, anyway, the way that the Army does recruiting [11:00] worked out that I could join faster in Indiana.

So yeah, I joined when I, I joined the National Guard, because you know at that point, I did think that you know I wanted that flexibility to be able to choose school or military. And you know, I thought that I would get that in the National Guard. So, joined when I was 19.

Amanda Knox: Can I ask you for some more of your memories about 9/11 because that's a bit of a blank spot in our oral history project right now, where you think, you know, we're, we're 20 years out, but it's still almost seems like too soon as the kids say, were like a lot of people, it seems like such recent history that nobody really talks about it, and I know you know, it was a pivotal moment in so many people's lives, mine included. So, can you just tell me more about like how did you hear about what happened at the Pentagon, or like you know what was the first piece of news that you had, had gotten, and what was your reaction or the reactions of the people [12:00] around you?

Miranda Summers Lowe: Yeah. So the way I remember it, I had this I'd need to check the time, but whatever it was, I had this like two hour block of a language class. I was taking Russia right, and I think it was from like 8:00 to 10:00 am, but I just sort of remember that, like, as I was leaving for class I had like a radio alarm clock – see if there's something that kids don't have anymore – And NPR was on, and that was at the point where, like the first plane had hit, but like nobody knew why. And I just remember leaving and thinking like, well that's really weird you know, but still I don't remember, if this is what like the news said or how I took it, but thinking like, you know, a bad pilot, like it had been a mistake. And then leaving, right like it's interesting to think at that point, it didn't even occur to me that [13:00] that was like something big you know.

I went to class and I just, the classroom was in the basement, I remember this, and we have this like super strict like Russian professor. And I just remember that, like there was like ambient noise, you know that sounded like traffic or whatever, and it was just getting like louder and louder and our professor, you know really sticking it out for a long time just being like, “No, like, you need to focus on what's happening here.” And then eventually it's just getting to the point where like she couldn't hear us and we couldn't hear her and just clearly like something was really wrong with all this road noise and she was like, “Okay, you know, leave, I'm going to cancel the rest of class. We'll figure this out.” And getting above ground and like, you know it's

pretty dense and urban around campus, but it's also really close to like one of the only two bridges, or three bridges, or whatever out of the city. And, and just cars everywhere, like [14:00] cars had pulled up on the sidewalk, cars had pulled up like into all the grassy areas on campus because there was just nowhere to go, they already shut down the bridges in the city. So everyone's like honking and everything. It was just, like that's what I'll never forget, like walking upstairs and I still had no idea what was going on, but like when you see that you know, like something is really going on.

I walked back over to my dorm and at that point there were a couple of like police officers there and they asked for my student ID and you know, sign number two that like, you know this is like not normal. And yeah, I got back up to my room and then that's the point where you know where like I could talk to you know my roommates and the other kids in the hallways and you know they explained what had happened. And at that point, you know, the second plane had hit, the Pentagon had already been hit. A lot of people forget this, but there was a [15:00] bomb threat called in at the State Department, which was like two blocks away from where I lived. So, that was part of it, too, they were evacuating all these government buildings.

You know, but then it's like it's like, you know, clearly there's like, I remember, like watching TV. I don't remember, the next thing I remember my dad calling because he worked in DC and he was kind of like yeah, you know, "I'm, I'm fine." Like, you know, "I was able to like turn back around early enough to like get back home," but not really realizing anything else was like bad news, until we all realized that, like you know we were freshmen and like we, like how much food, do you have in your dorm, like, as a freshman? And you know, they sent out this campus wide announcement that like you weren't allowed to go to any of the cafeterias. So like, like what ended up being the nicest memory of that day is I [16:00] actually like didn't have a great experience in my freshman dorm. And by that I mean they put a few rooms of freshmen in an upperclassmen dorm and those upperclassmen didn't really have much interest in like, befriending freshmen and it was kind of an awkward fit. But that day, as we all kind of started looking around and being like, "Okay," like, "Who has snacks?" Somebody had, like all the ingredients for spaghetti and we made like this big like pot of spaghetti and had this like big meal. And I remember that being like actually really nice and where I met some of my best friends from that point in my life was like that one day. Yeah.

I'm trying to think what else I really remember out of that. Yeah, because there was probably like two or three days that it was still like just so strange around campus. We were supposed to like wear our student ids around our necks like visible. Which now is like so common like every elementary schooler has that, [17:00] but it just felt like I was like in a police state, you know. Like the classrooms had never been locked before, now all of a sudden, they were. Oh, oh, I know what I was thinking of. That dorm, we used to go sit on like the fire escape, like we'd go up the fire escape and like sit on the roof, and really honestly, it was like my friends who smoked. Right? Like they'd go up there to smoke and I'd just go hang out. And I remember that night after dinner, you know we went to go hang out outside and you could see like all these snipers on like different rooftops around there and just looking at each other being like, "Okay, we've got to get out of here." Like, our little hangout spot's gone now, like we can't have this anymore.

The next day I did, you know they were looking for volunteers, so I did get up and go down there and, like the closest I got was like making peanut butter jelly sandwiches for volunteers, but that was still like probably like the most kind of upheaval [18:00] I had seen at that point, you know, like, desolation. And you know I think we got back to in person classes, a day or two afterwards. And I kind of remember going into my like first class and there were like 2, 3, 4 students missing and there's a huge like New York to DC connection there. Like a lot of New Yorkers go to school at GW. And our teacher being like, "Yeah you guys just need to be extra sensitive because, like these are people who went home because, like, you know they lost like a friend or a family member or whatever." But it was like enough people missing from class that you would notice it.

So yeah I mean like that definitely changed how I thought of things. I sort of remember, if I, if I kind of went into college not really understanding you know why it was like useful or meaningful that definitely like, you know, like everything in my mind just turned to like, I'm just in the wrong place [19:00] right now, you know.

Amanda Knox: And so I realized I jumped ahead quite a bit in your story, can you tell me like what drew you to thinking about the Army at such a young age, and like how were you thinking about it, or how were you envisioning yourself as part of it?

Miranda Summers Lowe: Yeah I still am like pretty mystified why it is that that's what I was drawn to. I remember that, like the moment it hit me as I was watching Forrest Gump in theaters and you know there's like that whole part where he goes into the Army and something, just like lighting up inside of me, and I was like, that's it. Like, that's what I want to do. And almost immediately knowing that like, that was, that wasn't like a feeling I was supposed to have, right.

Miranda Summers Lowe: You know, and, of course, like by the time I talked to my parents about it, I was little so you know, they're like, "That's nice, she'll grow out of it." [20:00] But I got you know pretty serious about it pretty quickly because I was like not an athletic child. I always liked outdoor stuff, that's really helpful, you know, really liked scouting and – But yeah you know, because people would say like, "Well, if you want to be in the Army, you have to be like in really good shape and do all this," I was like oh great I'll just get there. Like, I remember like really holding out and then you could join Civil Air Patrol which is like this, it's like an auxiliary of the Air Force and they have a cadet program and you can join it like 13 I want to say, and begging my parents to like let me be a part of this. And they did. And they had these like, you had to wear an Air Force uniform and you got to like go to these encampments you know that were sort of like basic training style and, especially the first couple, they just kicked my butt. Right, like it was just the hardest thing I'd ever done. [21:00] And it was interesting because that in a lot of ways cemented it for me. You know, like I, I think in a lot of ways, what attracted me to the military, while I'm still there, why I am still there, is because I did just have this thing where I really like, I wanted, it's like I wanted to be of service, you know. Like, I just wanted to do like something bigger than like what I was doing, but I also wanted to do something like hard. I think I had this in a lot of aspects of my life, where like school had always been really easy for me. Most of the other outside things I did had always been really easy for me. And so there was something about doing this like military stuff where I just felt like completely engaged, right. Where a lot of it, it was hard for me like intellectually, academically, and the physical stuff was really hard, and you know so often it's like all together. And like as I got older, [22:00] like through high school, you know, I remember a lot of people talking to me and they're like, "But like, why the Army?" You know because there's like stereotypes of the different services. It's like, well the Air Force is where the smart people are.

Amanda Knox: My brother is in the Air Force and he also considered the Army and it was just, it was just so funny that that's exactly what people told him. You go into the Air Force because that's where the smart people go, and so my next, my question to you is like, what, has it always been the Army or, or why Army?

Miranda Summers Lowe: To an extent, it was always the Army, but then like as I investigated it more, especially doing like Civil Air Patrol stuff because, like, you know, obviously it's an Air Force program so a ton of people go into the Air Force and I, by the time I made that decision I just looked around that was like, everyone I like really respect, like I really want to be with – because there was all these adult mentors from the different branches of the military – they were all Army, right. [23:00] There was something about like the Air Force and the Air Force stuff we did, where it was like wow this is really like clean and easy. Done early.

Amanda Knox: I can't wait to go tell them that.

Miranda Summers Lowe: And you know, this is what I thought, when I was like 18 and I still kind of think that. And you know stereotypes being what they are, I, I do think some of the all over like finest military people you'll ever meet are Army, but it's like that's like one slice of the pie that's a pretty big pie of like everyone else. Whereas yeah I think that's probably true especially like certain communities and, like the Air force or the Navy is like, no everyone's really high quality. Whatever it is, you know. Like, once I joined the Army, I think that's a different thing you know, like once you're experiencing it and really you know, learning and meeting people. You know, because, like when you join it's much more based on stereotypes. But no honestly I was like I'm not [24:00] joining the military because I want you know, a paycheck and a bed to sleep in. Like I was joining because, like I wanted that challenge, and I wanted to like get dirty, and I wanted to like you know have these big adventures and do these things so talking to, and I did talk to some other recruiters and they'd be like, "Well, you could have a desk job," and I'd like, "Nope. I'm, I'm out."

Amanda Knox: So knowing the little bit that I know, based on my brother's experience, can you tell me a little bit about your process of getting into the Army, because I mean it may have been different because 9/11 had just happened, but can you tell me a little bit about that part.

Miranda Summers Lowe: Yeah and I do feel lucky, too. I'm exaggerating a little bit because I ended up joining in 2002. And, in some ways it was like I was still in like the '90s Army, because things changed so quickly after 9/11. [25:00] It's kind of interesting to think about now but, yeah I mean, like you, you have to go talk to a recruiter and at that point, I was back in Muncie where I grew up, Muncie, Indiana. And the closest, you have to go to like a Military Entrance Processing Station, or MEPS, and the closest one was in Indianapolis, just about an hour away. But I sort of do remember that being like, you know, where, where things really start to change, you know they put you in like a minivan and it's you know, kids really, who are interested in joining like any branch of the military. And you know, they bus you down to whatever, like a Days Inn in Indianapolis. And I hadn't taken the ASFAB yet, like the test that you take to get in. So you know, I had to take that on like whatever, a Friday night I think it was. And then you know, you stay overnight at a hotel and then the next morning you do your [26:00] physical and, if all goes well on those two things you just enlist that afternoon, right. Like you get it all done in a day and then some people go in active duty, like they don't even go home after that. They'll just keep them at the hotel until they can actually leave for basic training. So I do just definitely remember doing that and starting to realize like, how much of a bubble I'd been in, right. Like I grew up in this pretty like conservative religious environment, you know I certainly wouldn't, especially like going to boarding school, I didn't go to like high school parties or anything like that. And you know, like that, that first night, you know I was getting along with the other people kind of just fine, but I remember like one of the other guys like, you know, I don't even remember what he didn't like about me, but I had like a, like a hooded sweatshirt on, but it was like made out of sweater fabric right, [27:00] and he like just took his gum and like stuck it in the hood of my sweater and like smashed it down. Just sort of realizing already that like you know, like this attitude like this, you know machismo would just like be something I'd have to deal with.

You know I remember like hanging out with this, like of people I was talking to, I remember talking to this one young lady. And she was back for like her third time. She was

trying to join the Navy and she had been like, “Well, like I, I can’t do it because, like, like you have to literally pee in front of someone because they drug test you and you know they’ve had enough problems with people manipulating the tests, but she’s like, “Well I get too nervous and like I can’t do it.” And then finding out like a couple days later talking to someone else, like that’s like, that’s not what she’s doing I don’t know if she’s ever going to join the Navy, right. Like she comes here [28:00] like, you know I don’t know if she was like experiencing homelessness or like couch surfing, but she just comes here and like gets the meal and like parties and, like meets guys, and like hooks up with guys, yeah and probably she’s not peeing in the cup because she would test positive and then she goes home. And she’s going to do this as many times as she can get away with. And my just like having no idea that this was something that like, like it, this level of like strategy like had never occurred to me. That’s like day one, like I’m not even in the Army yet.

Amanda Knox: Yeah.

Miranda Summers Lowe: And like that night being like, well, like I got back to my hotel room and they put you in like two person rooms. And I remember walking in there’s this like really large like man in my room and I was like, “Oh, I’m sorry. I’m in the wrong room.” And he was like, “No you’re not. [29:00] I’m just seeing my friend who’s here, and she walks out and it becomes pretty clear to me, so like they’ll also put you back into MEPS if like a couple of other things happen. So like she had finished, like her basic training and then before she left for her first duty assignment, like she got to go home and visit her family and they were just going to send her to her first duty assignment from MEPS. So that’s what was happening, and she was like saying goodbye to her boyfriend and she was like distraught. So already, like she’s like so upset she’s like, like all night like, “I don’t know why I ever, you know, why did I do this?” And I think she was going to Korea so it’s pretty far from home, but, that being like my introduction.

And the next day, and like I mean it is like a ridiculous physical. I don’t know if it’s changed now, but yeah you just do a lot of, [30:00] boy I don’t even remember a ton of details, but you do a lot of really weird and embarrassing things. I already talked about having to pee in front of someone. There’s definitely you know, a part where you’re like in your underwear and you have to like walk across a room with like a bunch of other people, there were like 10-20

other people in there. And like a bunch of weird ways, you have to like walk like a duck and all of this. And they're checking for like body alignment problems. It's all like, really weird. That was the first time I'd ever been to a gynecologist. They do check that.

Amanda Knox: A lot of first experiences all at once.

Miranda Summers Lowe: I'll never forget, because, like the gynecologist who did my examination was talking about professional wrestling the whole time. He was like, talking to like a nurse or a medic in the other room.

Amanda Knox: It probably wasn't their first time. [31:00]

Miranda Summers Lowe: I know. And I mean honestly, if you think about it, how many exams do you think he did per day?

Amanda Knox: I'm given to understand, again based on my brother's experience it's very thorough and that was from his experience, so I can only, only imagine.

Miranda Summers Lowe: Yeah that's my memory, too. But now I'm thinking about it and I'm like I can't remember a lot of detail.

Amanda Knox: Do you remember your first day at basic?

Miranda Summers Lowe: Yeah. So I mean you do, right, like, at least for me like you have to fly there and I do remember that, like the recruiters dropping us off, once again, you know at like the Indianapolis airport and then somebody kind of being like, "Who's been on an airplane before?" And I was like, "Me." And I was the only one. They were like, "Great you're like the team leader now and you need to make sure all of these people know how to use an airport." Which, I know [32:00] airports are like pretty user friendly, but that's funny for me to think back to afterwards. Like, so if I would have said no, you still were just going to be like okay.

Amanda Knox: Good luck.

Miranda Summers Lowe: Yeah. Good luck, get yourself there. It's literally illegal if you don't arrive.

Amanda Knox: Right. No pressure.

Miranda Summers Lowe: Yeah. And the Army, they kind of do it a little differently than the other services, or like what you've seen on TV, because first you go to this place called Reception. So they like pick you up and they do kind of do the normal like drill sergeant stuff you'd think of, you know, you like get there in the middle of the night, you're like on a bus and they you know, have you like, you know, leave the bus, and like lineup like in a formation outside and kind of do some light yelling at you. I know I remember, they made everyone like tuck their shirts in and, like all the women pull their hair back. And you know, just the fashion of the time sort of like that Britney Spears era where everyone's jeans were like [33:00] super low you know, if you had a couple of inches of skin showing that was like perfect. And like how many of us were like, "Okay, but like it doesn't tuck." Like you're trying. Luckily, from all those years of doing Civil Air Patrol I feel like I was much better prepared for this than people who hadn't done like Junior ROTC or Civil Air Patrol or something like that.

But then for the next week or so they're, they're actually pretty like easy on you. You spend about a week doing like another physical and like getting your uniforms issued, you did your vaccinations, you do all this and it's like pretty quiet that week. Don't get me wrong, it's miserable, but it's not that like, you know, you're not doing like a lot of exercise, you're not getting yelled at a lot. Like, generally if you keep to yourself, like you'll make it. I think it can be as short as like three days or as long as like two weeks that it takes to get [34:00] – because they process through enough people to like start the next class. So they won't like start a class halfway empty. And it does make sense. They do another physical. You take like a fitness test there. They make sure you're not going to like, that you know, you're healthy enough to like start. And I do remember because, like the test you take to start I think it's a mile and a half run. Maybe, I think it was a one mile run. Yeah. I think was one mile. And I had done track in high school, so I didn't really like think anything of that. I also remember like, like not trying that

hard, right. Like I was just like, okay just run a mile. Because they didn't say it was like for time or anything, right. It's really just to see if you can run a mile. All these people who couldn't run a mile without stopping. I remember somebody like having the first asthma attack of their life. And like you know, leaving in an ambulance and this like, [35:00] girl I had been talking to and I both finishing a little under eight-minute miles, right. And then getting to basic training and we were like in the same class and they were like great like, with your running time like you need to go run with the guys. Like, having no idea that, because compared to even like high school track, you know the Army's just like a much more distributed population of people who have never worked out a day of their lives before they get there, so. That actually helped a lot with like, like, I was very insecure about like my physical fitness because I was really like not athletic growing up, even though it like, I'd really worked at it, still like you know, compared to like varsity, like other varsity athletes like I wasn't that good. And then I got to the Army and all of a sudden, I was like great. But yeah, you have a week before you have that like, you know the, the classic introduction to basic training with, you know, the yelling and the screaming and the [36:00] duffle bags and, yeah.

Amanda Knox: Can you, if you're comfortable sharing, did you notice anything either just generally in your time or when you first got there about sort of like gender stereotypes or anything in that realm of gender roles, masculinity, the machismo you had mentioned?

Miranda Summers Lowe: Yeah. And you know honestly it like took a while for me to start noticing it. Like now that I've been in for a while – I hit, I'm at 19 years right now, so – like, I think, often the best environments are things like basic training where it's like very standardized and regulated. Looking back at it, I think one of the harder things, you know, [37:00] the way that they had done like a lot of the physical stuff. Like women just had lower standards and everyone was okay with that. Like the way that they do like the physical fitness tests, it's scored out of 300 like, there are three events, and you know you can score up to 100 on each one, but it's like adjusted for like your age and gender. And pretty quickly like by the time I was like done with basic training I could get like a 300, for me. And feeling like it was like, it was good, like, I was like done and it taking a long time to realize like I could have been getting like a 320, a 330, you know. Like, but it wasn't just that, like nobody else was pushing me to do that, I

wasn't pushing me to do that. It was very like internalized. Largely my memory, I thought, like [38:00] going through basic training, you know, or like my next, you know, like follow on training, pretty good. I mean, I think we got treated pretty evenly. It wasn't until I got later in my career that I started noticing, right, like some of these kind of like especially institutionalized kind of problems with sexism.

Amanda Knox: In these early parts of your Army career, were you also going to school at the same time, or were you kind of strictly dedicated to the Army.

Miranda Summers Lowe: I spent a little over a year just doing Army stuff and then at some point in there, I mean I do remember that actual moment I was like in basic training and you know we were doing this, you know drill I guess where we moved all of our like bunk beds like to the center of the room, and then we all had to like scrub the floor and like you know those green scrubby pads that big, [39:00] we, there weren't enough for everyone, so we had to figure out how to like break it down and share them. So I had a quarter of scrubby pad and, like my assigned squares to like get on my hands and knees and scrub and that was the moment I was like I don't, I don't know why I thought college was so bad. I really did. I was like, huh, this is probably as good as it gets for me, huh? Because, especially at that point you know I, to get into the Army and to do all of this, I had like taken some time off of school, I'd worked some other jobs. And I, you know became really familiar with like, how many people joined the military because it absolutely is like the best thing out there for them. I met people who were literally homeless before they joined, you know who were coming from backgrounds with like a lot of crime, a lot of addiction. Yeah that's about as good of a job [40:00] as you can get, you know, without some sort of like higher education, or apprenticeship, or you know connections, family connections, something like that that would help you. And just having that moment where it's like, yeah well you know I'm pretty lucky because, like obviously like I have the intelligence to do this and I had the academic preparation to do this. And now I get free tuition at any in state school, like as long as I go to a state school, like the Army will pay my tuition now. So, I did decide to go back to college after that. I did the one weekend a month, you know, do your thing, so.

Amanda Knox: And so when you please, forgive my ignorance on this, when you enlist, and forgive my vocabulary too, when you enlist into the Army National Guard I assume your basic training is not a one weekend a month like your basic training, you, you go and you do that for a chunk of time, so you are kind of the same way as if [41:00] you had not done, the National Guard. And then, after that, do you kind of go home and fall into like a regular schedule or is there like tech school, or how does that element work?

Miranda Summers Lowe: Yeah, you got it right. So your initial entry training, they call it – so for the Army that's basic training, and advanced individual training is what the Air Force calls tech school.

Amanda Knox: Sorry.

Miranda Summers Lowe: Yea, well, but you got it right. You know, like the Army, the regular Army, the Army Reserve, and the Army National Guard all go through the exact same schools for that. And then usually after that, like you go home and you fall in with a unit and then there's all these like temporary all the way up to like permanent jobs that you can do in the Army National Guard. So anything from the, you know, kind of one weekend a month, two weeks a year to, I took some – they changed the name on this, but it's like [42:00] active duty for Operational Support so that's you know it's like your, there are these temporary jobs that set up that like people in the National Guard can do all the way to there's this program, the Active Guard Reserve Program where it's like you're active duty but you're still part of the National Guard so it's still like your full time every day job, so. There's actually like quite a bit of flexibility in that and I got pretty lucky too, because I ended up joining to be in supply, I was a supply clerk. And just really badly needed right, like every unit like always needs help in supply, so I could always kind of pick up assignments, or you know, like a week here or a month there you know, especially like waiting to go back to school. I did that for a while.

Amanda Knox: And so, while you were doing that while you were in school, did you feel supported and almost kind of having like this other life that [43:00] most of the other students

don't have – or didn't, maybe you didn't particularly need additional support, but how did you feel like that kind of balance worked for you?

Miranda Summers Lowe: Yeah. Most of the time I feel like it, it worked or it worked pretty well for me. I think more what was interesting is you know I still kind of ended up in that spot where I made way more money working the one weekend a month than I could have with like a part time job. But like it was just really hard to find any other kind of employment, right. Like in a college town, like all of the other, right, any other like college students who applies to work at whatever the Baskin Robbins or the college bookstore has like total availability. And I'd be like yeah well you know I know I can't work these weeks and, so it, [44:00] I, I think probably like the hardest part, looking back at it, like I found college like financially to be a huge problem. And it's like I wouldn't have been there, or I would have had a really hard time being there, if I weren't in the National Guard right, because they were paying my tuition. But like at that point, the GI bill was, I think it was 200 bucks a month. So I got my tuition paid, but I still had to find a way to pay for all my fees, pay for all my books, and then it was like yeah I think I got \$400 a month for my drill paycheck plus my GI bill, but when you think about like you know what I had to do, you know, like just pay rent and everything. Like, I felt like I was just always scrapping, like I could never find a regular job so it was always like nannying or doing this, and I just had a lot of trouble with financial aid because, like I looked like a really good candidate because, like, or like I didn't look like I deserved a lot of financial aid to the school because my tuition was being paid. [45:00] But you know, my parents weren't like supporting me financially at that point, so I just ended up being in this spot where it was like I made too much money to get help, but not enough money to like actually be comfortable or like, focused. And that was hard and I did start doing ROTC because I thought, like honestly I don't think I really understood what officers did. Like I think I was just like, oh yeah I should be an officer. I think I had more problems with ROTC than I had, as far as like making sense of like this part of my life. Like, because I feel like when I did like normal campus stuff like I had sort of settled in pretty well and, you know, they knew that I had these other things I did. Like I joined a sorority, but it was just sort of like, I don't know, like the group I spent a lot of my time with, we were all doing something sort of exceptional. [46:00] And so it sort of seemed to like fit in there where, like I remember one of my friends was like on the cross country team and like didn't really understand what she was

doing but it super cool and I wanted to support her. So it all kind of felt like that, like I was like, “Yeah, I’m just going to be gone like one weekend a month,” and everyone was like, “Yeah, okay that’s cool.” I don’t know, like in the way that everyone’s like having their adventures in college it didn’t feel weird.

But then sometimes like when I’d go to do ROTC stuff then there was a lot more of the like, Enlisted Officer divide, or you know, feeling like maybe I don’t know, like especially ROTC I felt like could be really competitive. And so, like I’d go to drill and I’d feel really good about like my career and my service and everything and then I go to ROTC and they’d be like, “Oh you’re like really low ranking,” you know. “You haven’t done all these cool things, you know, like jumping out of airplanes.”

Amanda Knox: But then you get a call, right?

Miranda Summers Lowe: Yeah. [47:00]

Amanda Knox: And I hope you called these people up recently and say, “Excuse me. Let me tell you.”

Miranda Summers Lowe: I talk to these guys sometimes still. I’m glad that, you know we’ve all, you know, worked through that part of our lives. Yeah. My senior year I got deployed to Iraq. So I started getting hints about that over the summer, but you know at that point it was like 2005 so I’d say, you know, pretty much through most of college, there was sort of this shadow out there that you knew units were getting deployed, and it could be you. It was always kind of going back and forth, though, because you know, we have the hindsight of history now, so we can laugh at this, but you know 2003, 2004 everyone’s like, “Oh, these wars in Iraq and Afghanistan they’re not going to last that long. This is like one iteration,” Yeah. It was always one more, [48:00] one more iteration. And I think most people still had this idea, like, oh, the National Guard like you wouldn’t call the National Guard until absolutely every one of the regular military is already gone, which I now know is not true, and it was never true. But I thought that, too. You know, there’s just like a cultural thing out there. So I didn’t really take it seriously at first, and then I got

my actual orders in October, or to leave in October. So I guess, I must have gotten them in like September.

So yeah, I did actually, like I left school in the middle of my senior year of college. That was all pretty interesting to work out, too. I mean like I was in a really unique situation, so I think for any school, it would be there, to be so close to graduating. And like after I met – as far as I can tell, William and Mary, where I did my undergrad, they had had one [49:00] student deploy to Iraq before. And he was actually really great, like really supportive, talked to me a lot throughout, but like he was a sophomore so it was pretty clear he was like just going to take a leave of absence, come back and finish. Whereas like I sat down and it turned out like I even had the credits to graduate a semester early, so I was leaving like you know six weeks before. Yeah at first, the college really was like, “Okay, see you in two years, then come back and finish.” And I don’t even remember where I got this idea, but you know somebody tipped me off that like, look, every professor is allowed to grant credit however they want to. Like, that’s a rule, so I just needed to find four professors that would like, let me mail in the rest of my coursework. So I was able to do that, and I am forever grateful, right. Like I found four people that were like great you know, like they, I took incompletes that [50:00] semester, I had through the spring. So deployed to Iraq that year, and actually was able to like you know walk in my May graduation, you know, like what I thought I’d be doing so that I’m really, really grateful for.

Amanda Knox: Can you tell me a little bit about getting the call for deployment or telling your family that you are going to be deployed. What was that, like, for you?

Miranda Summers Lowe: Yeah. You know, like I said, we’d had all these rumors for a long time and I knew it was pretty serious that summer, because they actually asked me to come in early. So that summer I, you know my unit was out of Richmond, Virginia. And I actually like went and like moved to the aviation facility that we were out of for like the summer and did a bunch of work. So I could tell it was like, pretty serious but still, especially at that point, I was like, all I need is for this to happen in like November, December [51:00] instead of October. Like I just needed a little delay. And then, when I finally got my orders and knew it was real, I just remember I was like standing in the warehouse and somebody was just passing out sheets of paper you know, like someone my rank, wasn’t like a big announcement or anything. It was like,

oh no these are your orders, you're really going. Just like standing there, and like, I knew what I was looking at, but there's still something very like kind of where it's like this can't possibly mean that. You know, and like even in there, I remember, we lots of physicals we love physicals in the Army, but like we had to have like a pre-deployment physical and I sort of remember, you know just a lot of downtime and like waiting, you know, and you know from station to station like before you go like get your eyes checked or whatever. And all these people, because you know the Guard has a reputation for being like older, too, so especially it was, like all these [52:00] older guys, you know they're like, "Oh I just got disqualified. Like, I'm not going with you guys, you know. It's my whatever, my sleep apnea," that was like the big one. And then you know, just getting called over to some random station I don't really remember, and them like you know, taking this green stamp, too, and being like, "Good to go!" And just staring and being like, "I don't know if I want this." For all I want approval in my life. This was, you know something where, yeah I would've been okay.

I think I learned pretty quickly, you know, like I think people learn with like a lot of like bad news, I learned pretty quickly that like when I told people it needed to be more about them than me which was interesting. You know, like, especially like, [53:00] yeah like friends right. Like you know, my parents, I think I had sort of warmed them up enough that as much as you know, at this point, you know I will give them a lot of credit, because they have tried really hard to like support me in what I wanted to do even though you know I know it's been hard for them. And so I think like they were trying to be strong for me, too. You know, even if it's like that's just got to be horrifying, as a parent, you know, to like know that you're like sending your child into danger. I think i'm more like sympathetic about that now. You know, and, if nothing else, just like all the upheaval, you know. Now, also I can look back at it and, and know that you know, like, for my dad within what about five years it's like you know his wife got cancer, his wife died, he moved across the country he got remarried. [54:00] You know sort of like the life they had built in DC, like my older brother and I were just sort of like out of the house. That way that it's like you have like your little nest you know. So like here I am being like, "Oh, I have to leave school. Can I store my things here? And I have this car. What am I doing with this car?" Like all the practicalities of what it's like to have a loved one deploy I think my parents got hit with pretty hard, or at that point my dad and step-mom. Yeah. But yeah, like friends, I think you

know I just remember, yeah so it was just like so early I don't think anyone really knew how to take it. Early in the wars, I mean.

Amanda Knox: Right.

Miranda Summers Lowe: You know, talking to people now there's a little more of like a cultural understanding and like a script and like, you know you sort of know what's happening. And I didn't know either, so I probably was like not that helpful, quite honestly.

Amanda Knox: I love your nonchalance with [55:00] all of this. You're like, "Yeah I got deployed, whatever." So, of course, I'm, I don't even want to pretend that I have any idea what that experience would have been like for you and I, I guess all I want to ask is do you have any memories or moments from that deployment that you would like to share for the historical record? Or, you certainly in no way have to share any memories about that time if you don't want to.

Miranda Summers Lowe: Yeah. No, I don't mind talking about it. Especially now, if anything, I'm starting to like get kind of nostalgic. It's been a good, gosh 15 years. And so I think in the way that a lot of people think back on like college or summer camp, study abroad or something. I'm like oh, that. Wow you know, like I did have that.

Amanda Knox: That time I was in Iraq.

Miranda Summers Lowe: Right. [56:00] It just like such a you know, like a huge adventure. You know, you know, made some of the best friends I've ever had. I think, like the sense of purpose you get doing something like that is amazing. You know I think all those things I was sort of attracted to in the Army to began with were you know doing something really hard, you know, like being part of a team, doing these incredible things. Like I got to do that, like every day. And you know, like in that way I'm like, really glad that, you know I got to go and I got to go when I got to go. If that makes any sense. I mean, there were people in my life that wanted to try to help me get out of that deployment and go later right, so that like I could finish college. And now I'm

like so glad that I - at the time was just like, well, this is my unit and I've been with these guys for like three years [57:00] and I just really felt this like sense of loyalty that like, you know it wasn't right for me to like take the college money and everything and then like not go with the unit during a war, like that's not why you like join the Army or join the National Guard. It's funny to look back at it now because I would have had so many more chances, you know, like they would have been fine.

Amanda Knox: You would have gotten there.

Miranda Summers Lowe: Yeah, yeah, but, no. And you know, probably the most interesting part you know, the thing I'll like never live down – So, like I, my job is I, I worked in supplies as a supply clerk and then like while I was at training, I was with a Black Hawk helicopter unit so like that was my whole battalion and, you know, they there was just a signup sheet one day about, you know, how they needed people to train as door gunners for the helicopters. And, and that's you know you asked about like sexist moments I actually remember thinking like, women can't be [58:00] door gunners. Right? I don't know where I got that like input, but from what I was seeing it was like, I think all the pilots but one were male. Now I know that there were some female crew chiefs, but I'd never met them, I'd never seen them right, so it was this very like male environment. And I remember my company commander being like well, "Miranda, you should do it." I was like wow that seems really cool. So I did this other training to be a door gunner. And getting to do that, like getting to be on like, both on like those teams and to also like have that experience, like in the helicopters, I mean we went all over the country. Like my job in supply, I would have mostly stayed in like the same couple of like operating bases, you know. Being on aviation status, I get to like go all over the place, [59:00] and just see a lot, see a lot of different stuff. Yeah so I'm really grateful that that worked out, even if, like that was something that maybe I did like once a week.

Amanda Knox: So, I don't want to push your timeline too far one way or another, so feel free to stop me as I have been stopping you, but that was about 2005 you said? Further down the line, eventually you end up at Brown university. Can you tell me a little bit about when that was and why Brown?

Miranda Summers Lowe: Yeah. Yeah, so I deployed in 2005 and then I spent all of 2006 in Iraq.

Amanda Knox: Oh wow. Like consecutively?

Miranda Summers Lowe: Yeah, so I had about six months of pre deployment training and then spent the, [1:00:00] yeah, yeah like January of 2006 till like February 2007.

Amanda Knox: Wow.

Miranda Summers Lowe: Yeah. Well, and a little bit you know, I'll hand it to like one professor like before I left William and Mary who had kind of been like, "Yeah, so what are you doing when you get back?" And just kind of being like, "You, you crazy. What?" But I had kind of thought I might want to go to grad school or law school and so at least like from her nudging I managed to take the GRE before I left.

Amanda Knox: Before you left for Iraq?

Miranda Summers Lowe: Yeah.

Amanda Knox: Oh, my God, I cannot imagine how outstanding your brain must be. Like you, like, you must intellectually and emotionally be preparing for a deployment; trying to wrap up school; and now planning for years ahead for when you will move on to the next school.

Miranda Summers Lowe: Yeah. And that maybe was not like my [1:01:00] best method, but I did think of something.

Amanda Knox: But it worked, apparently.

Miranda Summers Lowe: Yeah, it worked. You know, maybe I shouldn't put the story into the record, but I did have to, I had to drive to like Fairfax to take the GRE, right, like it wasn't near where my parents lived to find like a – also I didn't study for it. There, you know were like a lot

of problems here. And you know I had friends in the area, and so I took it over Christmas because we got Christmas leave, right, so I was home over that, I managed to like find a day and I had some friends in town from my unit and one of them had been a, like a waiter at this, it was like a McCormick and Schmick's, right, like a fantasyish restaurant. And, like the night before I took it, he was like yeah you know, like we'll go swing by, see my friends, it was like a bunch of us that were all going to Iraq. And somehow like, in this restaurant, like the word that we were like all [01:02:00] about to deploy spread and, like all these people started like sending us drinks, they like comped our meals. So, on the one hand, like, I remember this like really fondly, you know because right, it was before anyone had like figured out to say like, "Thank you for your service," and especially to like, right, I was so young, like how many fancy steak dinners had I ever had in my life? Like, not that many. On the other hand, I was pretty hungover the next day for the GRE and that, that was not my best plan and yeah so that was not responsible, shouldn't have done it. Especially because, at least when I took it like, you're not allowed to have a water bottle or anything, right.

Amanda Knox: Oh no.

Miranda Summers Lowe: Like, completely like you know.

Amanda Knox: Oh, my God.

Miranda Summers Lowe: I don't know if they still do it that way. It was just like a terminal. Anyway. So, towards the end of the time I was in Iraq I was just like trying to figure out like [01:03:00] what I was going to do when I get home because most people were going back to like their job or school or whatever. But, like the disadvantage to how I'd managed to graduate when I was done, I was like yeah that life wasn't there for me. I couldn't just, and I was like well I kind of thought of applying to school before so I'll apply to some colleges, some different graduate programs. And I was still kind of thinking law school, but there was like no way to take the LSAT. So, these are things I think about sometimes anyway, like as far as veteran's advocacy, like how much a little thing like the LSAT can like forever change someone's life. But you know, this time I had all the time in the world to like investigate colleges and I think I did

have a lot of sense that I felt like when I did it at high school, I didn't do it like right and I didn't really like research colleges and like what they were, what they focused in, what the student environment was like. I didn't have like a really [01:04:00] clear focus on what I wanted to study. And so, actually I had like a ton of spare time in Iraq because you know, if you think about it it's sort of like being on like a cruise ship or something. I don't know if that's a bad example. Anyway, there's nowhere to go. That's all I'll say. You work, you have the gym, you probably heard this from your brother, it's like there's books and movies, but you know what I mean it's like there's just –

Amanda Knox: Yeah.

Miranda Summers Lowe: Things get weird. You get a lot of time to think. And so I like went into like so much research and by then I knew I wanted to do something in like public history or like cultural policy or like some kind of like educational policy. And you know, well there, and then there was the other thing, because I couldn't do anything, I couldn't apply any place that required the subject GRE, right. So you know I looked at it and I was like wow, the one program I would [01:05:00] really love to go to more than any of the others is Brown, but like you know who, who am I, like applying to this like ivy league university. And so I applied to like four or five schools, didn't really think too much about it. I was like, well, you know, maybe, if one of them works out I'll go this year, if not I'll go next year when I can like take these other tests and do the interviews in person and all the other things. And then I was just shocked.

I'd been home for like two months and you know if you can imagine, like what homecomings like, it's like a really, it's a weird moment in your life, especially since I didn't have like a follow-on plan too much. I was like at my parents' house. I remember, I was literally wearing my Army issued sweatpants like because I went through this weird phase when I got home where like clothes just felt really weird. Like, like women's clothes. Like I'd been in uniform for so long that, well, number one, like [01:06:00] most of my clothes like just didn't fit. Like whatever I'd saved from before, like I did have to like rebuild my life in this very like material way. So then I'm like supposedly like a young adult and have like a college degree and now I'm a veteran and I'm like sharing a bunk bed with my little sister. And like, I remember I was literally like wearing Army sweatpants and like drinking mountain dew for breakfast. And

my dad like comes with the mail from the night before and I have this like acceptance letter for Brown. I was like oh, I actually have a plan now. Like I mean like, I had hoped, a lot, and you know I am impressed because like at, at Brown they were actually willing to like, you know, like, I wrote back and forth with professors, you know, like to try to consider me as like a non-standard student a little bit. Whereas, like some of the other schools that I looked at applying to, they were like, no we're just absolutely inflexible [01:07:00] with some of these requirements. Like, I don't care that you're in Iraq, see you next year. I mean they wouldn't use those words, you know what I mean.

Amanda Knox: Yeah, but that's – yeah.

Miranda Summers Lowe: Yeah. So I think it goes both ways in that like I wanted to go to Brown so much and actually doing all the research this time I was like I want to do it right. Like, I want to actually do my best. But then also you know, like kind of that Brown environment where they were you know, like my advisor and the other professors were actually willing to like, right, you know what I – I don't think they even had to bend any rules, they just had to like accept like emails instead of like an interview, you know, like –

Amanda Knox: Yeah.

Miranda Summers Lowe: – Some pf these like, yeah. Anyway, you get it.

Amanda Knox: So what was this transition like from living in Iraq for a year to now, did you move to Providence? Like now you're relocating again and [01:08:00] entering like a completely different universe.

Miranda Summers Lowe: Yeah. Yeah. And luckily I, I moved up that fall, so I had the summer and actually, the same college professor I had who had encouraged me to take the GRE before I left, helped me find a job at Harpers Ferry National Park. Like, she helped connect me with some people over there, so I had this you know magical summer, you know running around a national park. Moved up to Providence and, yeah largely it was like, like so many of the things that had

sort of been a problem for me in college were, were gone now, right. Like you know, the GI bill got a lot better, you know, so I could actually like afford to be there. You know, academically you know, looking back at it this sounds like such a humble brag but, like, I went to such a [01:09:00] good high school that you know, especially my first few years of college, like everything was just sort of like unspectacular and it was like hard to feel engaged and I didn't really feel that like, you know, like intellectual stimulation until close to graduation. And then I got to Brown and I was just there like immediately and so it did really just kind of feel like things had like falling into place studying something that I really loved. You know, my classmates were great. I think it's a weird period, like some of the transition was really weird. And I think everyone's got to go through it, right, like there's a certain sense of like displacement. In some ways, I think it was really hard being with other young people just in that like, wow I mean, like I think this would have been true at any college campus but, like you know, most of the people fighting [01:10:00] these wars were like you know 18 to 25 and who's on a college campus, people who are like 18 to 25. And it just seemed like most people I met at Brown just had zero sense of like awareness or appreciation of like what their peers were doing. And I don't think it's out of malice. Like, I remember at some point, like seeing like a small like war protest and just feeling really like, like lifted by that where it's like oh my God, someone cares.

Amanda Knox: Yeah.

Miranda Summers Lowe: Because I think it's really hard to like go through this thing where, where right, like some of it's really hard and you see young people like you know, my, my peers in Iraq like being scarred forever, you know, like people died, people have permanent physical injuries, people get PTSD, or you know other like anxiety conditions from their service. And then to think like now, I know, especially because of like Reservists, because of Guard Reserve like that's why [01:11:00] we don't have a draft. And then to like be on a college campus like they don't even notice, like they don't even notice what we did for them. I feel this way as a woman a lot where it's like the, like the number one reason that like women continue to serve is because something's got to make up manpower and like men don't join the same way, so it's like you either have to like have a draft or like allow women to serve. And I think I would go through these phases at Brown where most of the time I'd be like this is so nice, I don't have to be

military anymore, look at me I'm all like safe and warm and reading books all day. It's really wonderful. And then I'd have these moments of either like sadness or rage, or just feeling like really misunderstood. But you know, like looking back at it, I think Brown was like the perfect place to do that. There's so many people experimenting with so many different like [1:12:00] ideas and ways of living there that honestly I think the better, you know when I went through some of my like veteran rage moments, it was like a better time and place to, to do that.

There were a few veterans there when I was there. There were three at least, three Iraq vets, and then a couple who had you know done some time active duty but hadn't deployed. And we all kind of ended up finding each other and really like advocating to the University for like better support. And, which felt kind of crazy, and it did take a few years to get there, but like in that way, I think the university was like, "Okay, yeah, you're right. Like, we weren't ready for you guys." You know, like, they weren't really familiar with like how to process our GI bill type stuff. I'm trying to think of some other things. Like now there's like a, I think still part time, might be full time, like Veterans Coordinator on campus. [01:13:00] You know there's like a website, there's like materials, there's like a whole program that helps recruit veterans and like none of that was there when we were there, but I think, you know, when that first kind of crew came through and was like, "Yeah you know, like we want to fix this." The University was like, "Okay. Yeah, yeah we do. Let's do this."

Amanda Knox: Yeah. Well, so I read that you are a founding member of the Student Veterans Association on campus. Did that come out of this advocacy work and trying to build a community of people who have a more similar experience to what you had?

Miranda Summers Lowe: Yeah, absolutely. And that was interesting because, obviously, like Brown had had veteran student groups before, but you know they kind of went away at some point. And yeah, there were a small group of us and most of us met each other because the University had held like a Veterans Day ceremony one year, and you know, then we were just looking around. You? You? I think what was most interesting about that as we kind of started pushing for like more support, realizing how many other veterans there were on campus and a lot of them like faculty. A really strong alumni network. I mean Brown actually has this like huge veterans' heritage right, like had one of the first ROTC programs in the country, like was hugely

supportive through World War Two and after with like the GI bill generation. And like connecting that back up because I think the pervasive attitude was then, and probably still is, that like Brown is like anti-military and like the more we got into it, the more it was like a lot of people feeling like – actually I don't know why we let the Vietnam generation like hijack the narrative here, quite honestly. Like I respect their [01:15:00] position and like what Brown went through in like the '80, in particular, but yeah I mean like now that – once we kind of started that work it did, more and more, you know you go to the student body and they were like, like, right, if anything it's more like, "Well, we don't care about," I don't know.

I think one thing that really changed too, that I was starting to see when I was at school there, I think Brown's a very like public service-oriented place and so we would meet, like all of these people, who were very interested in public service and usually their first thought was like Peace Corps, State Department, Foreign Service, something like that. And then, when you start looking into it it's like, you know, those are really hard organizations to get involved in and then, when you look at a lot of the work it's like well then there's military and, right, like so much of the work of like foreign aid worldwide is done by the military, right. So, [01:16:00] you know, started seeing a lot of people who were like, wait a second. This thing, like, I want to do and this thing you're doing, it's not actually that different. Or you know a lot of these conversations I'd have like with other students would be like, "Well how could you do that?" And then I talked about the work I was actually doing and they'd be like, "Oh that's actually really cool and like I think I'm interested in it, I'm just not interested in wearing a uniform." And we can sort of like come from that place of commonality.

Amanda Knox: So before we close today, I've got a couple more current event questions. But before we get there, is there anything else you'd like to share about like your time at Brown or shortly after Brown?

Miranda Summers Lowe: Boy that's hard. No, because I really did just, I loved my time at Brown and, like, my cohort, and the experiences I had there. Just undoubtedly [01:17:00] like my life is the way it is now because I did that. But yeah so much of it, it's more just, right, there's the obvious like, I took this class and then I was prepared to do this, you know, my job later. But, no I think more like, I just remember getting to school and, like everyone read novels and like I

didn't read novels. I felt like I couldn't participate in conversations and like picking that up and being like oh, I do actually like love doing this. Or like I was there during the like 2008-2009 presidential election and people were like so interested in that election. And that was the first one I remember really kind of getting involved and, like having peer pressure to like go volunteer with campaigns and you know really follow like the election and keep track. And I think it's like those experiences I think back on and I'm like, like that really changed me to like [01:18:00] just being around students, and students from different places and different backgrounds, you know kind of just, you know developing my personality, right.

Amanda Knox: So you certainly don't have to answer this in any way, shape or form, but you had mentioned how the early thoughts on Iraq and Afghanistan were that that's going to blow over, but we very, just we, the United States this year has pulled troops out of Afghanistan, and that has, just for you know some context for our listeners, that has created such, at least in my life, so many conversations from so many people who predominantly have never been in the military or to Afghanistan and you don't have to share your opinion on it one way or another, but maybe more like, that day like, if you watched anything on the news about [01:19:00] troops being pulled out of Afghanistan, like what was that day like for you? Because I know you also are a historian of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan and, did that feel like a particular day that marked anything for you or anything of that nature?

Miranda Summers Lowe: Yeah. Like, I definitely remember for even like the past few years, you know, like when I'd be hanging out with friends of mine who served, you know it just hit this point where there's just like such a sense of frustration for like why we were still there. And, quite honestly, I think most of us just felt like we've been forgotten. Like, and you know and I remember like just sort of saying things in like casual conversation where I'd be like oh yeah well you know, I have a friend who's deployed and a civilian would just be like, [01:20:00] "Really?" Like, like people have just like totally forgotten that, like we were still involved there. And you know, when we finally left I actually remember I, like feeling like, yeah, no, I did feel this whole sense of just like loss or like, I know like it wasn't even like my war, but I think you know, like when the US pulled out of Afghanistan, or sorry, out of Iraq, I do remember you know talking to a few friends and we were just like oh, so this is like how it ends? With a memo?

Like that's really unsatisfying. But, like all the attention like switched over to Afghanistan, and I feel like that worked for me too. Like I remember kind of thinking like, well that's weird. Like, the US was involved in Iraq for what, a decade? Like hundreds of thousands of troops and we were just gone? It wasn't really a big deal. And yeah, I mean through this whole fall even I feel like I've had a lot [01:21:00] of conversations with other veterans where I would say overwhelmingly the attitude is like we needed to get out. The way it happened wasn't great and your level of anger at that I think has a lot to do with like your experiences and your political persuasion. But I think one way or another, for a lot of us, that was like, like the closure we never got to like watch it happen, like. Yeah and I do remember I like texted one of my friends from Iraq something, you know where I was just kind of, I don't know, like I said something to her about like, "Oh yeah you know, like, for all the sacrifices we made like this is how it ends. But it's actually kind of cool because you know, like I'm friends with you." And her like calling me and being like, "Are you okay?" And you know, like right now I'm working at the House of Representatives so it's actually like sitting like in front of the [01:22:00] Capitol Building, which is like a very spectacular place to do this and just having like an hour long phone call conversation where I'm like, I'm even like missing a meeting right now, and you know, like no like this is where I like need to be right now, talking through that. Because I do think one of the hardest things for like a lot of the young veterans, like the way that these wars went where we all like did our year and went home. And a lot of us went back, you know, I know people who have been back two, three, four, or five times. They're just, right, there was never that sense of like satisfaction, closure, or completion. So yeah I mean for better or for worse, you know, seeing how it ended, I think for a lot of people it's like, well at least we have that now.

But I guess, I will say too, I know a lot of us really feel like, I wish this weren't true, but like a sense of like shame or embarrassment about it. [01:23:00] Like for a while there, I know, like a lot of the Iraq vets were like, because everyone would talk about like Iraq like, "Obviously that was a mistake and the US never should have been there. Not like Afghanistan, which is this good war and we got attacked first and we definitely should have been there." And it just got really awkward to like say you went to Iraq, like around here, you know, like living in DC, like a lot of foreign policy circles or whatever, it can be like yeah, yeah. You know, people would be like, "You served?" "I'd be like yeah, in the Army." They'd be like, "Oh, did you go to Afghanistan?" And I'd be like, "No. Iraq." And They'd be like, "Oh, yeah." And you're like, "I

kind of feel that way too.” For better or for worse now I think everyone’s feeling that way. You know, like we’re all just kind of like. And in that way it’s a good time to talk to Vietnam veterans quite honestly because it’s like we can all like have a big hug over here, where you can’t really downplay like what that time in your life meant to you or like your family. And I can appreciate this as a historian, like as it gets like cast [01:24:00] and recast, you know, like what the warming to the country, not matching at all to like what the war meant to you, right.

Amanda Knox: So I know we’re running up on time here, and you have done so many outstanding things in your life, including with the Smithsonian and continuing with the Army, and I apologize, that we have not touched on all of those things. So before we wrap up, is there anything else you would like to add to the historical record while we’re here about anything you’ve done or, or, you know, any ways that maybe civilians can help support the veteran community? Any final thoughts that you would like to, to get in here today.

Miranda Summers Lowe: No, I don’t think so. I’m sure we could talk all day about all kinds of things, but.

Amanda Knox: Well, I thank you so much for the sacrifices you’ve made on my behalf and on [01:25:00] behalf of all of us who have never enlisted. I thank you for your service and so much for your time today and donating this oral history.

Miranda Summers Lowe: Absolutely. Thanks.

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