

Interviewee: Christina O'Hara
Interviewer: Charlene L. Martin
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Abstract: Christina O'Hara was born in 1980 and grew up in Shrewsbury, MA. She attended Notre Dame Academy, West Point, and East Tennessee State University Medical School. She describes her experiences at West Point followed by intelligence training and deployments in Iraq. Currently she is a medical doctor specializing in occupational medicine at Walter Reed Military Medical Center. Christina's father and two brothers also served in the military and she explains her familiarity with military culture from a young age. Often she was the only woman on missions in Iraq and she shares her views on men and women serving together in the military.

Charlene L. Martin: So, do I have your permission to record you today?

Christina O'Hara: You do.

CLM: Thank you. I'm going to start with some general background-type questions. For the record, what is your full name including maiden name and married name?

COH: Christina Susana O'Hara.

CLM: And when were you born?

COH: 11/13/1980

CLM: And are you married?

COH: I am.

CLM: What's the name of your husband?

COH: Michael Terrance Lucas. He goes by Terry.

CLM: And do you have children?

COH: I do. Aria O'Hara

CLM: How do you spell that?

COH: Aria like the opera, A-R-I-A.

CLM: Very pretty. How old is she?

COH: She's 19 months.

CLM: What cultures and ethnicities do you identify with—your family background?

COH: I guess Hungarian, Irish [laughs].

CLM: And tell me about your parents and any siblings you have.

COH: They're all more amazing than I am [laughs]. My father, he grew up near Boston, the youngest of nine. They were pretty poor, but he did well for himself. He went to Vietnam after being a semi-pro hockey player. And he flew a lot of helicopters, got shot down a lot, got shot a lot, came out, he was an engineer, he raised us, he met my mom right in between there. She was born in Hungary in Budapest. And she came over not knowing the language so she learned English right away. And then she elevated herself by becoming a board-certified psychologist. She met my father at Amherst, UMass [University of Massachusetts Amherst] and then they had us three. She's amazing. My older brother went to the Air Force Academy and he's a major—now he's a lieutenant colonel, excuse me, he just got promoted last month. He's protecting our nation with missile shields. My younger brother went to Annapolis [Naval Academy] and he's a patent lawyer and he is just awesome. He's in D.C. [District of Columbia] with me. And I went to West Point—the best school even though we don't win at football—the best school [laughs]. And I was intelligence [United States Army]. Now I'm a physician down in D.C.

CLM: What branch of the military was your father in?

COH: Army. So, you know, girls have to—daddy's girl [laughs].

CLM: What was his rank?

COH: He got out as a captain and decided to get a master's to try to elevate himself outside the military.

CLM: Where were you born?

COH: Boston.

CLM: And where have you lived during your life?

COH: Oh, really all over the place. At 17 I went to West Point [Military Academy] so that was the last time I lived at home.

CLM: Was that from Boston, were you still in Boston?

COH: I was in Shrewsbury, MA, in high school. Nice place. Then I lived in West Point, New York and after that I moved to Arizona to do my initial intelligence training. I was at Ft. Huachuca near Tucson, at the border. After that I went to Alaska and I was there for a while and sporadically for a month at a time I would be going to different places, but I consider that to be more of a home base. So I was up in Fairbanks, Alaska and that was for six years, but out of those, two of them were in deployments to Iraq. And over there I guess you could say I lived in Mosul. That was the major home base, but I went to Tikrit, Tal Afar, Rawa, all kinds of places. That's where I was based, Mosul and Baghdad for the most part. But we were with the 172nd Stryker Brigade so we went, at the drop of a hat, all over Iraq.

CLM: Two separate deployments?

COH: There was—no. That would have been great [laughs]. So initially I went over, I couldn't believe I got picked to do it, but myself and an infantry guy, they're the guys who do the damage, like knock down doors and stuff. So he and I went over as ADVON [ADVanced Echelon-advance party] way before the rest of the Stryker brigade and then we came back with intelligence on how they use their Strykers [armored combat vehicles], how best to use trajectory with mortars, what the other guys did—Al Qaeda at the time—their strategies, their TTPs—tactics, techniques, and procedures—how to defeat them. So between the infantry guy and myself, which I operated more in a—we both went out into raids and stuff, but it was good to have both sides of it. So he played the blue force which blue force means friendly, and I was red force so I was the enemy. And so, I was looking at the enemy and he was looking at us and we would talk and it was pretty neat. And so I brought that back to now Major General Shields. He was our command at the time, Colonel Shields. And we figured out how best to deploy all our assets because it's billions of dollars in assets that we were bringing over and then, once you got there, how to up-armor them, what kind of armor to put on. And so I thought that was very interesting. I don't think I've ever talked about that to anyone because it just slips my mind because after that I was over there for almost two years straight because of the surge. We got stuck there.

CLM: So you were there the whole two years?

COH: Well, I came back to give the Intel.

CLM: How long were you back? Briefly?

COH: Yeah, a couple of months. Then I went back and, by the way, this whole time I'm studying Biochem trying to get into medical school [laughs]. Yeah, there's a whole other story. Or Organic Chemistry, that's what it was. Anyway, we went back from Alaska and we went in the heat of summer to Iraq [laughs], it was pretty bad, and we went for a whole year and then we were about to leave and the surge was announced. One of our battalions was already back. They had flown back. They had a beer with their wives and they were called back to Iraq the next night. And a couple of them died over there. But can you imagine this? I'm seeing it in real time because I never went back from Iraq. I know the people who went back to their families

and then I see them come back to us after seeing their—some had kids, like just born—and then came over. And then I see a sniper—they had started doing head shots because it was a new—they realized we had up-armored for the IEDs [improvised explosive devices] so they were starting to snipe people and six of them died. I'm talking, you see your husband for a day after not seeing him for a year, and then he goes back and is shot. It was so heartbreaking to me, so heartbreaking. So I was over for a certain amount of time, but those were the people—you were talking about spouses. Sad.

CLM: What year was this?

COH: 2005 to 2007.

CLM: You used a word before and I'm not familiar with it. ADVON?

COH: That's the advance party. You're observing the situation.

CLM: So how do you spell the abbreviation?

COH: I'll look it up later. I believe it's ADVON. It's really surprising to me that you pick up on the important things. If it was me in the civilian culture I don't think I'd pick up on the right questions to ask. It's such an important question and vital because when you pick someone for ADVON you're putting the trust of you, the civilian, behind me because what I'm supposed to do, my whole job at 24 years old was to randomly go over with nobody else but this random guy, right? And we fly randomly to Iraq then we somehow get to Mosul in the convoys or whatever, and our whole job is to go out on all their missions and just see where the flaws are and where they're not so I can come back and report this is what we should do this is what we shouldn't.

CLM: So you're observing in real time something that is going on?

COH: Yeah, but it, yeah you can definitely get shot or whatever, but that's not the worry. It's hard to talk to civilians saying that, but it's bigger than myself. I had to be there. We had to reconfigure what vehicles went first, which were fully loaded, which got the armor, where the Intel went because the Intel was underneath headquarters, but we had to first disperse it down to the battalion. So people got shifted around. When we came back we basically changed the configuration of the force.

CLM: Because of what you had seen in real time, not an imaginary let's go in and look at a situation.

COH: And that's why it was so neat because—and this is where it can get a little contentious so just—I'm prefacing it so that you understand this may be something you may or may not want to put in there. So the guy in charge—let me just say this, the Strykers, we were very unique in that we were the brigade that had nobody in charge of us. Most brigades—that's 4,000 people roughly, a brigade is 4,000 people, but we have the unique position where we didn't have a

division above us or a corps. Most everywhere else has a corps which has lots of people and divisions which can be 16,000 people in a brigade, but we had none of that. We were free riders, cowboys from Alaska so my brigade commander, Colonel Shields, had so much autonomy. He made the decision to allow me, a female, to go ADVON with the unspoken understanding that I would be going out to where you wouldn't necessarily should go as a woman. Now this is the guy I was on the hockey team, the Army hockey team with him. We were close—not like that. He would check me really hard and be like, “Your head's not up. I'll do this to you before someone else does.” But he was a great leader. He never put me above people. He just recognized that back then I was ready to do a mission and I didn't have kids or a husband so he figured I'd be... so it was not about gender, it was about what could this person do? That's why he sent me, putting me out there to check things out. I found that to be pivotal for me because it sets the tone for everything else for that deployment. Because he didn't look at me—it was so refreshing—he didn't look at me as a male or a female. He was like, “You have the least baggage, you're very smart, you can do the job, and oh by the way, you're a collection manager. You're the one who will integrate all the Intel assets.”

CLM: What was that called again?

COH: Collection manager. It's intelligence, surveillance, reconnaissance. Where does this satellite need to be moved and if I take it off of Baghdad to Mosul what generals am I going to piss off [laughs]. So I was the perfect I wouldn't say pawn because we had an understanding, the perfect person to punt up. If I had been somebody weaker I think they would have been concerned about gender, but this guy was—he wanted to do the mission and I was the best person so he sent me.

CLM: So he had already had the opportunity to see you in different venues like hockey so he was able to evaluate your capabilities without that gender issue.

COH: Yeah

CLM: So it was your capabilities.

COH: It was.

CLM: If it was another woman it wasn't necessarily that he wasn't going to send her because she was a woman; it was because he had observed her and she wasn't the perfect fit for that job.

COH: And it was totally—and this is why he's such a good guy—he was totally unbiased. And that's why he's a major general now. The guy—best leader I've ever met. Best leader. And yes, that's probably why I was out doing things out there in Iraq. And he met me a few times out there accidentally. He's going to do some raids and I happened to be there. Should it have been the case, I would have gotten slapped so many times by other people because they didn't want to see women out there, but all he did was look the other way. There was one time we got hit by an IED and he saw me and he's like [laughs]—you could tell he was thinking, “What the heck are

you doing out here.” But he knows why I’m out there. We have that understanding. And the only reason it would be shocking is because I was a woman back then in ’05-’07, but over there you don’t see it that way. It’s who could do the job. Now switching back to here, there was Ranger School. Maybe you heard about it, maybe you didn’t. Very elite male school in the Army. Women weren’t allowed and then a woman, a West Point grad, was able to complete it and it was this big deal. And that’s for garrison, that’s why I want to preface this. That’s a garrison view. Sure, I don’t necessarily like it either. Of course I’d like to go to Ranger School like my father, but I feel like sometimes men should kind of be allowed to have their men thing. I do [laughs]. I just feel at times women should just let men have a men thing [laughs].

CLM: Fair enough.

COH: Sometimes you can trample over men more so then men trample over us these days. That’s how I feel in the military. Because in the military I do not see any problems between men and women. I don’t. Overseas, in war.

CLM: I’m going to ask to hold that thought for one second. I want to backtrack a little because I want to make sure I have the full background of when you did what. And then I definitely want to get to that question. So you went from high school to West Point.

COH: Right.

CLM: Where did you go to high school?

COH: Notre Dame [Academy in Worcester, MA] – all girl school [laughs].

CLM: And then you went right to West Point?

COH: Which is weird because it’s all guys. From an all-girls school to all guys.

CLM: About how many women were in that class?

COH: I think it was eight percent back then.

CLM: What year did you graduate?

COH: 2002

CLM: So when you finished West Point—and educate me if I—does that mean you were automatically in the Army?

COH: Do you know the difference between enlisted and officer?

CLM: Explain it.

COH: It's important or else I wouldn't bring it up. Enlisted—they have a chevron like in the movies on their shoulders. So all enlisted—that's a big segment—they're subordinate to all officers. So you come out of West Point as a second lieutenant. That is the lowest officer category. However, here's the big deal about it, you come out at 20, at 21 when I came out, you're still above all these people. Like 98% of the people. And so it's a lot of power and with great power comes great responsibility. But that's the important part of that. I just wanted to explain it to you.

CLM; I need to know, that's good. You were 21, finished West Point. What happened next?

COH: I went to Ft. Huachuca in Arizona.

CLM: And is that where you got other kind of training?

COH: In general, after West Point everybody goes to Officer Basic Course. It's called OBC. You're specialized in something. You know before graduating West Point what that will be. And that was important because when I was a senior at West Point the towers [9/11] were hit. The smoke was over us. We were not that far from it. So that was an important thing. Officer Basic Course was very important. So I was there for six months because with intelligence, it's a longer training process than most. So then I got to go to Alaska in the dead of winter [laughs].

CLM: And why Alaska? Because of the intelligence background?

COH: I could have traded it for Germany, but I love riding my motorcycle without my helmet [laughs]. I just felt like you could be free up there. It's stupid [laughs].

CLM: You said you had a choice?

COH: Yes, but it's all based on merit. Really guy, girl, it doesn't matter. It's how smart are you, how are you on your physical stuff, how fast can you climb a rope, where's your moral compass? Everything at West Point. It's such a great place. I wouldn't have done anything else. And it's funny; you're stacked up against everyone else. So in front of everyone you have to go up to a chalkboard and write[laughs]. So it's pretty interesting how things are done there. Very old school back then.

CLM: So why did you even join the military in the first place? What was your motivation?

COH: [Pause] I think the best answer is that we grew up to see the military differently than most. I think that's the best way to put it. I can understand that most people would be, would have some trepidation about joining because they see it through a SHARP [Army Sexual Harassment/Assault Response and Prevention Program] sexual awareness program lens, you see it through as a woman you would be nervous about that, you see it through the PC [political correctness] lens, you see it through a deployment lens, you see it as unstable entity. We weren't

brought up with that. We were brought up with my father flying a helicopter over our house, having us run as little kids and we thought it was normal. He would sing cadences and I thought he was making them up and I went to West Point and everyone is singing them [laughs]. So it was such a common way of life, I don't think I understood how sensational a move it was to go from civilian to military. Would I have if I had? I don't know, I don't know. Especially now with all the media coverage, if I was a young child I think I might be scared to do it. So I think it all depends on the history before you in a lot of ways. Going back to your question as to why I joined it, with sensationalism being out of the picture, I think I joined it because my father survived it and it made him a better person. And one story that stuck with me that he told me, pretty much was the story that had me apply. He was caught in a firefight in Vietnam and he said the sky was lit up and they were being overrun and he said, "If I live to see the sun the next day, I'll never be upset again. I'll never be sad." And it's true because I grew up with him. I've never seen him sad. I never have, never. That, to me, was kind of the moment that defined it. He'll probably deny it (laughs). If it was that life changing for him to be in the military, it sounds weird, but I almost wanted to be put in a situation like that. Right? That's weird?

CLM: It sounds counterintuitive to what someone would say. You'd think someone would run in the opposite direction after encountering that ...

COH: Right.

CLM: ...but I understand what you're saying, it's a real test of a person's will.

COH: Exactly, you cut through—that's great. No, it's good because now I'm living with the product of that situation. And so to me it would be folly not to continue that. Also, my brother had just gone to Air Force Academy and I went there and I was shocked. Everyone was in shape, trim, smart, decisive, they didn't pull any punches. What you see is what you get type of stuff. I said, "I want to be around this. I don't want people hemming and hawing. I want to see what productive really looks like and be around the best so I can grow to my full potential as a human being because I'm lucky to be alive." So that's the reason why I decided that I should go. And, of course, unfortunately at West Point, the first year the plebes can't go anywhere. I totally, totally forgot there are handicapped people, fat people, bald people. Totally forgot because there's none of them there. It's very weird, a very weird utopian society, but you have to excel in that society to pass, to survive. But it does really prime you for work, that's the whole point of the school. So it's different for sure. Can't say the same for Annapolis or the Air Force Academy because I didn't go there [laughs].

CLM: So what's your rank?

COH: I'm a major now. It goes second lieutenant, first lieutenant, then captain, major, lieutenant colonel, colonel, and general. I'm a field grade [officer].

CLM: So I'm just trying to do the math in my head, how long have you been in the service?

COH: So this is where it gets wonky. You're right it's fifteen, but I don't get credit for—it doesn't make any sense, but when I was in Intelligence the first six years or so, and the whole reason I truly went is when you see stuff over there, you do stuff, you [long pause] want to right the scales. You want to do something. There is a time to kill, there is, but there is also a time to heal, and it needed to happen, for sure. So that's why I actually did put in when I got back—well actually I was still over there—I put in applications for medical school. I took the MCAT over there. I mean it's crazy.

CLM: So you were over there and that's when you decided on medical school in addition to everything else you were going through?

COH: Yeah, because I didn't want to get pervasive PTSD [Post Traumatic Stress Disorder]. I didn't want to get any of that.

CLM: So what year did you start medical school?

COH: 2007.

CLM: And where?

COH: ETSU, East Tennessee State University. I could have gone to Tulane [University]. I got into Tulane and a few other places, but I really wanted to go somewhere where there was a lot of green and everyone was relaxed and it was like a vacation in a lot of ways. But I was president of that class for four years. It was very hard, very hard for me to come out of Iraq and to see how people went about life here. It was very hard.

CLM: Well, that's one of my questions was going to be—and you weren't married. When did you get married?

COH: Just recently [laughs]. That was in 2013

CLM: So you came back and you went into medical school, I can imagine that for the common everyday person going to medical school it would be an ordeal. It would be for me [laughs]. How was that transition? What's the right word? Reintegrating? What was that like for you? Was it difficult?

COH: [Long pause] I think I have an extra set of armor because I'm good with people or I've never had a problem with people. But I can see why a lot of people in my unit had a lot of trouble. Especially men. I'm being biased here probably, but men have more trouble in general for social gatherings than women from what I've seen. Especially now, for good or for bad, there's a little bit more of a feminization of society and so men have a lot of trouble trying to be more gentle or passive aggressive than direct, blunt, whatever. So I saw a lot of guys have quite a lot of trouble. But going back to your question, I mean it was pretty easy and the reason it was easier than most was I had something to keep my mind on—trying to figure out the muscles in

the back, all that stuff. Second, I think I was a little far away initially, but they asked me to be class president and you get voted each time. They kept voting for me so it was just like a platoon again or a company command except this time they were a little more like children to me, than even the enlisted. But I'm not degrading medical students, it's just that they are, they are more immature and it's only because what have they being doing their whole life but school?

CLM: School.

COH: Exactly.

CLM: That's just the next step to them while you had this whole other experience.

COH: I remember being in the lab dissecting and you never get phone calls in there because there's no signal. And one phone call came through, "You're being redeployed back to Iraq." I'm like, "What?"

CLM: Was that during that in between...?

COH: No, I had already gone, come back, gone. I finally switched branches from Intelligence to Medical, but they hadn't gotten the memo, it had gone missing or something and it said you're being redeployed to Iraq and I'm in the middle of my first month in medical school. You've got to be kidding me.

CLM: But they didn't send you back?

COH: No, thank goodness

CLM: The paperwork caught up?

COH: Dr. Kwasigroch, our anatomy professor, he had been in Vietnam.

CLM: What's his name?

COH: Dr. Kwasigroch. Amazing guy. Really nice guy and awesome in a crisis. And I said, "Dr. Kwasigroch I don't know what to do." And he said, "Let's call them back and see." He was kind of a father figure when my parents were up here in Massachusetts wondering why their kids are spread out everywhere all the time [laughs].

CLM: When you were deployed, were you able to connect with family and friends via technology? Skype, email?

COH: Not Skype. [Long pause] I'm trying to segregate this in my mind. It's hard to answer the question and I apologize, but there are three levels of email in the military. There's JWICS [Joint World Intelligence Communication System], which is top secret; SIPR [SIPRNET Secret

Internet Protocol Router Network], which is secret; and NIPR [NIPRNET Non-classified Internet Protocol Router Network] which is basically just email. I was typically on JWICS or SIPRNET and that's a world you don't cross when I'm inside the wire. When I'm outside the wire I'm on SINCGARS [Single Channel Ground and Airborne Radio System]. We generally sent a handwritten note and a lot of it wasn't because of the SIPRNET, NIPRNET, it was because it just makes you feel better.

CLM: That's interesting because I was under the impression that with technology so many people were at least able to visually see their loved ones via Skype.

COH: I think maybe now, but it just wasn't there yet. And there weren't that many computers, but I'd try to let my Joes on it, the enlisted guys, because they had it hard enough. They did. They're the gunners; they're the ones that were going to get shot before I was as the vehicle commander. So we gave them a lot of leeway when they were in the wire as we call it, not outside patrolling.

CLM: Let me go back to women in the military and how they were treated, it seems to me you are saying that you were treated pretty equally.

COH: There was no difference but there was a reason for it. Very much so. And it's because—and this is where it may go against the grain, but it's because myself and one other female, we were allowed or invited to go out with them for Intel purposes even above other men, but because they knew we would never do a sexual assault case, never slander them, and if we had to pee before they did we would hold it because if you're in a Stryker rolling across IEDs and stuff, they don't have time for woman to say, "I have to pee and get out." As long as you're on their terms and they didn't have to deviate from their course, we were more than welcome to come out. And actually they liked it. They liked having a female, but it had to be the right kind and that's where it gets dicey talking about this.

CLM: Do you feel that other women were able to keep up with those expectations?

COH: I didn't see any other women.

CLM: Oh! You were really solo.

COH: Not once.

CLM: So when I ask a question like if you saw any examples of favoritism in one direction or discrimination in the other it's hard for you to say beyond your own experiences because you were really the only woman there in that particular situation.

COH: This is so hard for me and I would say good in some ways, in all ways actually, because—I wish I could draw a parallel for you on this. I'll go back to West Point. Men are stronger, they are faster, they're more designed for war. They just are. Whereas women are designed for

giving life or childbearing or nurturing. Not all, but most. So I feel like it should be, and I'm not trying to be sexist here, but in this situation it should be the man's choice because not only if he allows me on he's putting everyone one of his Joes in a country of children—the enlisted—at risk if I'm the weakest link. And by the weakest link I don't mean they can run faster or whatever. But it's the ideology, it's the leakage and spillage, if this girl says this guy assaulted her and he didn't, guess what? The whole battalion is screwed. The mission is done, people's lives are ruined, and so there is a lot of male vetting going on. So if you think like a male, act like a male, and you're not pulling any punches, this is who I am, I want to do the mission, they want to do the mission, you're simpatico, then I don't see a problem. However there weren't many women that even I would want out there with me. Their priorities were different in a lot of ways.

CLM: So it seems a lot about trust?

COH: Yes.

CLM: So sexual harassment, it erodes trust all the way around. But there have been cases of female soldiers getting harassed or sexually assaulted. When that happens I would imagine it all comes down to trust again so how do you trust as a woman another male in the unit wouldn't you say? But if you haven't personally seen or experienced it, I don't want you to guess, but it seems like the trust thing is so important.

COH: This is a sticky wicket, the stickiest we've had. I could really eat my words here, but—and this is what my husband and I agree on so much but—[long pause] I gosh....

CLM: We can move on. I don't want you to answer if you haven't seen someone experience it.

COH: Well, kind of through being in the military since '98, in general I've seen why things happen and I know why they didn't happen to me. I know this to be true but that's why it gets sticky because no one wants to hear it, but I understand the type of woman that would be raped. I understand and that's just the truth. I don't want to think about this, but it keeps me out of bad situations, it keeps me off different Strykers, it keeps me—it's my rudder, as a woman. I don't know why I have it, but I do and I tailor myself to my crew and my crew tailors itself to me and I understand. There were some women who wanted to go out with me and I'm like, "No way are you going out with me." Because here's what happens, they'll—it's just who they are. They give off the vibe of a flirt. They don't know they're doing it so you can't hold it against them, but they have no idea of the ripple effect of what happens. But I do. I see it instantaneously and I think, "You're not coming with me." Because I get it, we're on a mission. If a guy and me are on a mission and if I have a skill set and they have a skill set and it causes synergy I'll go out with them. We're professionals. But the minute somebody introduces anything like cologne or a walk or something. Small things, but if you haven't had sex in a year—it's male instinct, it's just sex drive. It's very, very hard to say—it's very, very true of course that rape is a bad thing, but there are definitely certain women that it happens to unless you're really, really unlucky and you're around the wrong group. And I just steered away from it, I never experienced it because

throughout West Point, throughout all these things, I developed gauges so that's the best way to do the mission, but how do you tell that to a woman? It doesn't sound right; it doesn't come off right for me to say this outside of the war zone. But in the war zone itself throughout basically my two years there, I never heard of any other woman in my platoon, never heard of anything. And I think it's because when you have people trying to bomb you and all that stuff going on you're not worried about that kind of stuff. Plus we ban all media in Mosul. We put a berm around the city—it's crazy because this city is not ours—we put a berm around it so terrorists can't get in but also media. We controlled everything about it. Which is good and which is why we won over there back then. Women didn't have to talk to media, "Let me tell about this guy who might have done something inappropriate." And I understand I'm slanted in this, I'm more biased towards men, but they were such good people.

CLM: That's your experience.

COH: And they protected us. They did all the right things that men should do.

CLM: Well that's very encouraging to hear.

COH: Now were they rude? Yes, of course. I'm trying to think, like they would come off a Stryker, and they would just urinate. And you were just supposed to sit over there and pee. And guys would joke around with other guys and whatever. But some of these guys are like 18 [laughs] so what do you expect so as long as you understand that and don't take offense to it who cares?

CLM: That was probably the least of your worries.

COH: [Laughs] Yeah whatever.

CLM: What year did you finish med school?

COH: 2011

CLM: And what do you actually do? What kind of medical doctor are you?

COH: Occupational medicine. I got into emergency medicine which should be unfathomable to you. But having a child, coming home from work, and someone bled out on me in the ER. But it was weird because of the cycle. Christmas you can't go to. It's a great specialty, but I'm in occupational/environmental medicine right now. It's another specialty.

CLM: And where are you?

COH: I'm at Walter Reed [National Military Medical Center].

CLM: Wonderful.

COH: Yeah, it's a pretty good place. I found the right—like if a beam or something falls on your husband, I'm kind of the conduit between him, his employer, the lawyer, where the insurance meets. Who's got what privileges, so it's neat. A lot more lawyerish than I thought [laughs].

CLM: Really? That's probably not the fun part [laughs]

COH: No, not

CLM: Now before we wrap up—I'd like to talk to you longer about this because it's fascinating but I want to get a couple of other—what would you say the benefits of being in the military are for you?

COH: [long pause] Kind of fascinating to be interviewed [laughs]. Well...

CLM: Does it relate at all back to what might have motivated you, your dad's story? Do you have any of that same feeling you think? Did it make you stronger in some ways?

COH: Oh without a doubt. I'm trying to sort through all the positives right now, but yeah I think it goes back to what my father said. Bad things happen to me, but when I look through the lens of how lucky I am, to be alive and in one piece, and to have a great husband, great family, everything falls away. And I realize that it's not about me, it's about you taking the time to interview me. It's about my mom taking care of my daughter so you can interview me. It's such a patchwork community and I've seen the bad and its worst moments as well as the best, but I still think hand over fist that we are—people are good. They are. We're just misguided. [Laughs]

CLM: And what would you say are the costs of being in the military?

COH: I guess maybe I'm old before my time. But also physically, fatigue. But, again, is it worth it? I would say absolutely. For me. If I were born into a different family it would have been hell. I'm pretty sure about that.

CLM: It's different for everybody. What are you most proud of? And that's life in general, not just specific to the military.

COH: [long pause] Wow.....

CLM: You'd better not be hesitating because you don't want to sound boastful [laughs].

COH: [laughs] I think what I'm most proud of probably is—and you can relate to this, everyone's had it in their life—when you see something you don't think you can get around, don't think you can get over, and you shift, you redefine yourself. And that sounds very trite, but

in my case it's a lot of weight to it. It's very, very true. And things a 30 year old shouldn't have to deal with ever. But even thinking about it and all these things that have happened that no one has to deal with, all kinds of stuff, it still doesn't crush me. It doesn't crater me and you have to keep going. For your husband, for my daughter. It's not about me.

CLM: For your patients?

COH: For my patients. It's all about them.

CLM: One last question, what would you like the public to know about women who serve in the military? You've told me a lot, but do you have any final thoughts that we didn't touch on?

COH: I'm going to flip the script on you; I almost want to say what they should know about men in the military in that they're unsung heroes these days. We talk about women, but [pause and sighs] the chivalry, the bravery of men in the military towards women, I'm talking about in war, in war, is unparalleled. A personal example, one of the things I had to do is the elections—I don't know if you remember the election in Iraq? The first free election? So I had to help distribute the ballot boxes and I had to meet with some officials to get Mosul to register to vote. I went there with a platoon of infantry behind me and I went up there—of course the only woman for eight miles—I go in the meet and I'm in charge but they say, "Not her. She has to sit over there. She has to squat. And she has to have her head down below her knees looking at the wall." And what do you do? I mean even though you have tons of people with guns behind you, you have this guy telling you, in his house, you have to do that with your Kevlar. I mean it's 120 degrees, all this stuff. You have your mikes, your headphones, I said to myself, "Do you want to make this a worldwide situation that's about to happen?" I'm thinking all this and I'm pretty good on my feet, but I had to think about this and it was very interesting. And there was this enlisted guy, he was E6, they're—it's a big rank structure, but they're in charge of all the enlisted and he flipped the table over and said, "She will sit with us. This is not how you treat a woman." He crushed them down. This is in their house. All their women aren't even allowed within the perimeter. They are at home with kids with their heads down. These guys are having sex with little boys. It's crazy right? But just the chivalry and the decisiveness and how it even overrode my own. He stood up for me. This is one example of so many, so many. It was very telling and it set the tone for the rest of the time with these guys. It was at great expense and peril to himself. That was just one of so many examples.

CLM: That's a great example.

COH: What woman wants to bend down below this guy's knees looking at the wall? I'm supposed to be leading all these people. So there are times when you have to stand up and in war it's paramount. So I just want to put out there, I think it's brave for women to go into war. It's a vital thing. But there's also times to acknowledge what men bring to the table.

CLM: That's a great example.

COH: Okay, hesitant to bring it up.

CLM: Would you want your daughter to join someday?

COH: I think it would depend on her temperament [laughs]. If she's gentle? No, I don't think so. I think it would rub her personality wrong. If she's tenacious and wants to set the world on fire? I guess.

CLM: Hopefully there won't be a need.

COH: I hope not, but from what I've seen of people, there is always going to be war. And I wish I didn't have to say that. I wish I didn't have to because there's other things than war, beautiful things too. Like that. I'm talking about it years later and it blew my mind. I'm in charge of him, I give him directions, tell him when to eat, when to convoy, all this stuff, but in a split second he saw what was wrong and he flipped the script completely on the whole situation. Could it have escalated? Absolutely. Over me! So I do see a place for men in this world and a place for women. Can we do it together? Absolutely. But we just have to know our roles in some ways. I could never have done that as a woman. I just didn't think fast enough to do it as a woman. As a woman it was too personal. "You want me to do what? Like a dog? Really?"

CLM: That is a great story and you have a great story. I really want to thank you for sharing it. I'm very much appreciative.

COH: No problem.