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## Paula Pietrowski, interviewed by Annie Howley

Paula K. Pietrowski

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# ACCESSION SHEET

## Maine Folklife Center

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**Narrator:** Paula Pietrowski

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**Description:** 4198 Paula Pietrowski, interviewed by Annie Howley, April 21, 2003. Miller, age 36-37, talks about her decision to join the Coast Guard; her family and boyfriend's reaction to her enlistment; her basic training experiences; returning to Maine for assignment; male vs. female commanding officers; tension between men and women and between women; minorities in the Coast Guard; sexual harassment; whether women should be included in the next draft; how she spent her leisure time; her discharge and transition to civilian life; rising through the ranks; gays and lesbians in the military; whether she would do it all over again; her most positive experience in the Coast Guard; her biggest struggle in the Coast Guard; and her advice for people, particularly women, joining the military.

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# An Interview with Paula Pietrowski United States Coast Guard



By: Annie Howley



## Interview with Paula Pietrowski

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Interview with Paula Pietrowski  
United States Coast Guard

Interviewer: Annie Howley  
Interviewee- Paula Pietrowski  
Transcriber- Annie Howley  
Date of interview-21 April 2003

Begin Tape Side A Session 1 [000]

Annie Howley- What is your name, and when and where were you born?

Paula Pietrowski- Okay, my name is Paula Pietrowski, I was born here in Old Town  
Maine in 1966.

Howley- What branch of the military are you in and what is your rank?

Pietrowski- Okay I used to be in the Coast Guard and that is E4, which is like a staff  
sergeant.

Howley- Okay I am just going to back track a little bit before we get into your own  
military experience, just so that we can put things into context a little bit. Where and  
when were your parents born?

Pietrowski- Okay, my mom was born in 1925, here, right here on French Island, and my  
dad was born in I think 1935 in Erie Pennsylvania.

Howley- Okay, so why did you decide to join the military?

Pietrowski- Well, my brother, I had two older brothers that went in, and they were in  
Vietnam, and I think one of the reasons was the challenge because it being a male  
dominated field, and I wanted a challenge, I was always the type of person that, cause  
you're a girl you can't do it, then I want to do it, you know that type of thing, so I think it

was more like for like career, I wanted to be in law enforcement, I was in the military police, second was, I thought it would be just a challenge to be able to accomplish that, so I think that was it.

Howley- Did you enlist, or how did you join?

Pietrowski- Yep I volunteered, went down to the recruiters office one day, sober and I just asked some questions about just like what they have for career options and college credits, also I got some money to go back to college and stuff like that, so the biggest thing was I wanted to change my career field, and I wanted to have kind of like life change. Just kind of go out there and try something new.

Howley- Okay, how did your family feel about your joining the military?

Pietrowski- Well my brothers were pretty supportive, my brother Rick, because it was the Coast Guard too that made a difference, he was in the Army, he was thinking that the Coast Guard would be a better place to go. My dad he was in the military for four years, so he had this kind of attitude like, well you got to find out for yourself, you know go for it, you know. My mom was kind of a little bit more, I would say she would be the one who was more reluctant to giving support, because I guess being away too, and oh she was afraid of wars because my brothers went to Vietnam, so she would be afraid that I would be called off that was a big thing.

Howley- Did you have a husband or children or anything at the time that you enlisted?

Pietrowski- I did have a boyfriend, a long term relationship, and he supported it actually because he was also in the military and at the point when I enlisted he was in the reserves and he was real supportive, actually for a guy I thought he was like, yeah go out and do it, he wanted me to go for it, so I was really lucky in that sense.

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Howley- So did you have to go to boot camp.

Pietrowski- Yeah we went eight weeks, now this is something that I didn't realize, each boot camp is different in the military, I mean the Air Force is easy boot camp, and of course the Marines would probably be the hardest, so nobody ever went in the Coast Guard much, so no one could tell me what the boot camp was like, so from the recruiters are going to tell something you know good. It was a very hard boot camp, and it was because if you think of the Coast Guard we have so many different missions and I thought okay I didn't think going in was going to be hard, they gave me a physical, a test that said this is what you need to do, I mean you got to pass this one task, you got to pass this physical agility test and all that, so I made sure I could do all that before I went in, because I was scared to death because if I faulted then they pushed you back a week, so you already had horror stories where people were there for twenty weeks, okay boot camp is eight weeks but if they couldn't pass the test then they kept putting them back and putting them back, so I was kind of afraid to stay there forever because it was like a prison, so I made sure that before I went in that I could do my swim test and I could do everything they expected of me, and plus meanwhile you are not dealing with a lot of sleep, okay so they are stressing you out they're yelling at you, they're waking you up in the middle of the night. Here's something interesting for women, a lot of them didn't have their periods because they yapping people with stress it was so intense that was one way our bodies were showing it, so some people didn't have their periods for like eight weeks, which was fine with me, but the other thing was sleep, oh my gosh you were living off of four hours of sleep, you know a day and mean while not only do you get the

physical thing to tend with, it's the mental, cause you got classes to go to, you have to learn all this stuff about boats, about tying knots about safety, first aid, everything, it was just crammed, I mean one day you are talking about sixteen hours of non stop, so by the time you get back to our barracks you're like did I frigin sign up on this, did I volunteer for this. So I thought the first week was hard. You think you're not going to make it, and you think you're in prison. Then, what's happening is that you're slowly going OK; I think that I'm going to make it through; I'm going to adjust to this. And so you start to, you're body starts adjusting to the sleep, four hours of sleep, maybe less sometimes, adjusting to the stress of constant people around you, there's no privacy, OK, you don't have private showers. You know, you don't have a private mirror. You are sharing all this stuff with all of these women, you know and it's such a drastic change from the civilian world. So, you have to deal with this like twenty-four hours a day. So, it's scary, but the best part is when you finish you feel like you're on top of the world. That's the thing.

Howley- Did you go in with other women? Were there other women in the groups with you?

Pietrowski- I went in not knowing anybody, and then once you get there everybody pretty much starts out. It's like being on a team; you said you're on a team.

Howley- Yes.

Pietrowski- It's like everybody starts working together because you are all scared and you all want to make it through and you start connecting with people and who's your buddy and who's someone that's going to be annoying, you know, you have to work on, you know, but I would say we were all, and the guys were like that too because I have talked

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to them too, you all start working together as a team, but that's what they want you to do. Because, you know, the coast guard is not just one person, it's a team. So, I guess that's part of the atmosphere.

Howley- Now did you guys have to do the same things as the men?

Pietrowski- Yeah.

Howley- Yeah?

Pietrowski- We were training with the guys. And I thought that was really cool because in the other branches, they have separate men's and women's training.

Howley- Yeah.

Pietrowski- But, because the coast guard is so small we have to work with the guys. And, because we are going to be doing the same thing when we are doing search and rescue and things like that. And I thought that was great because I was a tomboy growing up.

Howley- Yeah

Pietrowski- I got really competitive with the guys and they were pretty supportive most of the time.

Howley- Really?

Pietrowski- I was really surprised. This was back in 1989 I went in and I was really impressed. You know, you have the guys here and there, you know, one or two out of a group that might be kind of a male chauvinist, but they didn't really show it much here because the drill starts to get on their ass and all that, you know. So, I thought that was cool about that branch, to be with the guys, and train side by side, eating with them, the

only thing we had different is that we had separate barracks which were right across the hall sometimes.

Howley- Really?

Pietrowski- It was in the same building.

Howley- Oh, really?

Pietrowski- Yeah.

Howley- Did you guys have to take the same tests, and did they downsize it a little bit for the women, for like passing.

Pietrowski- Ok, well the academic part would be the same. The physical task, well we had to do the same swim task,

Howley- Really?

Pietrowski- We had to do the same shooting, you know, we had to do M-16's, 9mm's, um, I'm trying to think of what would be different. Upper body strength. I think maybe we got away with doing less pull-ups, but the push-ups we had to men's.

Howley- Really?

Pietrowski- I think I remember the push-ups because I had this one girl in there and she could kick ass with push-ups. She would beat some of the guys. So, when we had to go to the final task, our minimum might have been like twenty-five and the guys' might have been like thirty-five or forty, but we had to do the same type of exercise. I don't think they were very lenient on women, I was kind of glad though.

Howley- Yeah. Do you think that that is good, to just try to keep up?

Pietrowski- I think so, because the guys respect you better.

Howley- Do they?

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Pietrowski- Uh huh.

Howley- And motivationally, did the drill sergeants treat you the same, and were they as hard on you?

Pietrowski- Oh yeah, they called us...they used the f-word, they called us female, they'd yell that in our face, you know, about two inches from our face. I mean, even if you broke down and cried, which I didn't, but there were times when you're like, you know.

Howley- Yeah.

Pietrowski- Um, they would yell at you even harder and you say what are you crying for, you joined the coast guard. I thought they were pretty strict. I think that getting through it was like whoa, emotionally.

Howley- Yeah.

Pietrowski- That's the thing too, it's not so much a physical thing. I think it was an emotional thing to get through it.

Howley- Yeah. So was it ever too much to handle, like were there women who couldn't make it through the physical aspect of the whole training? Did everyone make it through?

Pietrowski- Um, the ones that didn't make it through, this is what would happen: They would go to the hospital, like sometimes they had knee problems, they hurt their knee during training, or they would get sick, pneumonia or something like that. They would put them in the hospital until they were better and then throw them back out into training and say you either pass or you're not going home.

Howley- Oh, wow.



Pietrowski- So, we had, upstairs they had a few women's stories that they were there for like twenty years because they had injury on top of injury and they would say go to the hospital, when you're cured you come back and you finish training where you left off. So, it was really scary. So, nobody wanted to get hurt.

Howley- I bet. What was the hardest part for you altogether?

Pietrowski- I think emotionally, because you're looking for privacy, going from a civilian world to the military world, when you want to just have some space to yourself. I'm not going to say physically, because I was in shape, but emotionally just to maintain your sanity, you know, sometimes when you felt like breaking down. I would say, just to maintain that it's almost over, and to see a light at the end of the tunnel.

Howley- When boot camp was over, what was your first assignment? Was it what you wanted to do?

Pietrowski- Yeah, I came back to Maine and I did, um what was I, oh the marine safety office which is in Portland, Maine. And what they do is they board tankers and they inspect tankers coming in from foreign countries. It was totally different than what you got trained for. It wasn't a search and rescue station.

Howley- Oh really?

Pietrowski- But, when I transferred out to Southwest Harbor, you know where that is, that's near Bar Harbor, that was a search and rescue station which is what we trained for, to go out, rescue, you know, body recovery, stuff like that.

Howley- So, did you have to take a test to get assigned there, or when you graduated from boot camp is that when they...

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Pietrowski- Oh, OK yeah, I missed something right there. When you get out of boot camp, you sign up for a school that you're interested in.

Howley- OK.

Pietrowski- And then you end up doing another maybe eight to twelve weeks of training in a class A school, they call it, which trains you for that specific field that you want to go into like mine was military police, so I had to go to an eight-week police academy which was another little boot camp, not as bad but you still had to shine your shoes and all that kind of stuff. So yeah, you got to kind of go into these classes and then get trained to that certain field.

Howley- Did you have as your superiors at school and boot camp and stuff, did you ever have women, that were your leaders, or was that mostly men?

Pietrowski- Um, the majority were men and to tell you the truth the women that I had, I thought they were bitches because they were trying to prove that they could do a good job. OK, and there's nothing wrong with that, I mean it's just the way they came about it. They were more strict, they were more um, totally unreasonable to deal with sometimes, you know when you say listen, you have a problem here, can we...you know, they just look at you like my way is the high way, you know what I mean?

Howley- Mm Hm.

Pietrowski- Whereas guys, they kind of would listen a little bit because they didn't seem like they had so much to prove. But, this was back in '89 and I'm hoping that it got better, but I found it harder to deal with women than with the guys.

Howley- They felt like they had more to prove?

Pietrowski- They had more to prove and they were just really unreasonable when it came to dealing with compromise, you know what I mean? So, I thought that was kind of weird.

Howley- Did the men respect the women superiors as much as the men?

Pietrowski- You mean being able to listen to them?

Howley- Yeah.

Pietrowski- You know, what I saw of it, if you were a woman that knew your job, you'd come across as a bitch and was assertive but did it in a tactful way, most of the men would respect you. But if you did it in a way of flirtation, you know how some women they can be in a line of authority and they're fine, it fits them?

Pietrowski- And some women, they just can't be. I think it depended on the person.

Howley- Mm hm. Was their tension between women and women, like fighting for spots or fighting for respect, like not the superiors, but you and the other women, you know, fighting to prove yourself?

Pietrowski- Then again, it was a personality thing. I think that, I feel that the women that I was with were very determined in their career, and the guys would respect you if you came across being assertive but not in a bitchy way. You know what I mean, say hey listen, I want this as bad as you.

Howley- Mm, hm.

Pietrowski- Um, the girls that were wimpy and crying, they were whiney and they were like oh you know this isn't going my way, men aren't going to respect you. But now, then again, I saw some men that I would not even want to have back me up if we were in that

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situation because they just couldn't do their job period, just like maybe a woman because of the job. It wasn't so much their sexuality, the sexual, you know, make female, it was because of the job, they just couldn't do it.

Howley- Yeah. Were there also groups of women stuck together, was there some...

Pietrowski- Oh yeah, clickish?

Howley- Yeah. Was there a lot of support between women and women?

Pietrowski- I found that some women were jealous if you were doing well.

Howley- Yeah?

Pietrowski- Yeah. I found that if I had a guy complement me on my shooting, or you know say Pietrowski, I would have you back me up anytime, any day, now if there was a women that heard that, she could take it the wrong way, and say well who are you sleeping with, you know what I mean so you have the jealousy and then you have some women that were buddies and were like, alright way to go, so it depended on the personality of that woman.

Howley- Between the male and female was there, I know you're not allowed to have any relationships is it between people, and were they strict with that, and were you friends with the men?

Pietrowski- Yeah you would go out with after work and like, and of course not boot camp, but when we had to go to class A school you would go out and have drinks at the clubs and stuff and they were not really strict on that, now they were strict if it was a teacher, an instructor, so if you were seen after class with an instructor going out for a drink, that was a no no, I didn't really see that a lot because if they did do it they were

very careful about it, but I am not saying it didn't go on, but as far as male and female socializing on the same level in the same school they were well, because we had to work with them, they were okay with that.

Howley- So there was no fraternization?

Pietrowski- The fraternization they were more strict about in boot camp, yeah very strict, don't even look at them the wrong way, you don't even, you didn't want to look at anybody just in case, but once you got out of boot camp it was a totally more realistic atmosphere, working atmosphere.

Howley- How about a like boot camp and when you went to class A school, did you notice that minorities in general were treated any different in the time period that you were there?

Pietrowski- Okay like Hispanics and stuff?

Howley- Yeah whether it be women or blacks or anything, do you think that they were treated differently at that point in time?

Pietrowski- They were very careful not to, really, if anything, I had a friend, she was from Puerto Rico, and I had another one that was from Porter co too and she fine but, but I hate say this but sometimes they looked for the discrimination, you know and then they would say, did you hear what he said to me. Why did you take it like that, I wouldn't have taken it like that, but I thought they were pretty cool, very neutral, yeah.

Howley- So there wasn't a lot of sexism going on, and harassment? Did they tell you to report sexism and harassment and stuff like that, and were they strict about it?

Pietrowski- Yeah, they would say, if there was any sexual harassment, in fact I think they gave a class on it, you would take a lick for that, to look out for, but I got to tell you

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the two stories I do remember. I remember some situations where it was borderline sexual harassment with a student, and where maybe an officer or something and it was their, you know against his. I had a friend that said I don't even dare to report this, I mean it was nothing physical, and the reason why was because if he rank involved, so yeah it does go on, I had sexual harassment, but it was verbal so I handled it my way.

Howley- Was it hard to report it because they were your superiors?

Pietrowski- So you go to your senior officer and he's a male, I think they did have in special situations like that they would have a female officer that you could talk to because of the subject matter. Most of the time, like I said, it was very rare, but if you were a certain person, and you could say, listen I don't think that's anything I really want to hear, and please leave me alone, now if it went further than that then yeah you would report it you know, but that's because of the institution.

Howley- We talked to someone who was in the Air Force Academy that said it was crazy and all the time, and they couldn't do anything about it because they were superiors, did you see that?

Pietrowski- I see that, I would say my advice to anybody would be to handle it yourself, what you can in that situation, you know unless you are raped or something you know, but if somebody came up to you and they propositioned you, I had an instructor one time that was knocking on my, on my room after school and wanted me to go out for a drink with him, and I am thinking hey this isn't right, you know what I mean, I mean but I was intimidated, so I went, well we'll go up to the lounge in the building and have a drink, and I was really surprised how bold he was about you know his going and not really

hiding it you know what I mean, so it does go on, but I kind of made it like, listen I have a boyfriend at home, I am not in here to find anybody okay, I am going home in couple weeks, and if you want to be friends fine, but it goes on more than you would think, it really does.

Howley- Do you think the women who were not as assertive had more of a hard time, like the women who maybe didn't stick up for themselves, or were these ones more likely to go get help from someone?

Pietrowski- There are two ways of handling it that I saw it, my way was to tell them directly to leave me alone, the other one was somebody would hear something, or someone would approach them and they were offended by it, but you didn't know they were, and then you didn't know until you got a notice from a superior officer saying, that we just had a complaint about you about sexual harassment, and they might be like , oh my gosh what's going on, what situation are you talking about? Those were the two ways that you would handle it.

Howley- Were most of the women who went in married, or single?

Pietrowski- I think most of the one's when I went in were single because they were either out of high school, or they were actually in a break up relationship and they decided to join the military, but would say that the majority were single.

Howley- About training, we read that some people now feel that the reason why women are not in combat and are not allowed to do some of the things men are is because men are more likely to protect the women than they are to protect other men, do you think that you saw that, like were the men that were along side you, were they more likely to protect you?

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Pietrowski- Okay I've got a good comment for this. That is Bullshit okay, because first of all, my situation, I was in the military police so I had to learn weapons training and I had to learn everything just like the guys did. If I was going to go to war, I would be on the front line. I think if you are a woman and you are getting into that field, you want to be a woman that can be pretty independent, and can take care of yourself. Now, there were women there that were very assertive, very independent and most guys if they are smart enough, they will pick up on that and they won't do that male female role thing, like oh you're a female, I need to protect you. Now the ones that they would probably do that with would be the ones asking for it. You know, I mean I'm serious like I broke a nail, I've got to put my makeup on, you don't want to be in that environment at all. I had women that worked with me that the men would respect just as much as the guys as far as like, the training and what we can do, what we can accomplish and maybe when they went out for a drink after the fact they might you know, say like OK, let me buy you a drink or something like that but I really think it was more like a buddy thing, but I'm not saying that intention wasn't there, but it depends on how you handle it. So, if you come across as being an independent, assertive woman, they would probably be less likely to treat you like that. Now if you come across the other way, then they're going to treat you like that.

Howley- So, do you think if they did another draft, do you think that they should include women so that it's equal?

Pietrowski- I think that if women can, I think depending on the individual, again, herself, I think that, I'm thankful that there isn't a draft because there is nothing good about war. I



mean, you know. I think if they did do a draft I think women today I think have more confidence, you know what I mean, they got better positive female role models, and you know we had positive female role models but we didn't hear about it, like World War II and stuff. But, I think nowadays we do and I think now that I can think a little better of people's attitudes.

Howley- How did you notice what people did to deal with the different situations, whether it be boot camp or otherwise active? I know sometimes during a real wartime situation there is a lot of alcohol and drugs, and sometimes people deal with things emotionally. Did people have a really hard time and how did they deal with going through all of it?

Pietrowski- I think that the healthy way was to buddy up with people to talk to. To tell you the truth, to this day the military has a high alcohol abuse rate and the thing is, they don't have so much with the drugs, with pot, because they do the piss test, so you never could be out, so you don't want to take the chance of smoking pot or doing anything, any heavy drugs. So, that's why alcohol abuse is high in the military, because people go to the club after. On every base that I've been to, the first thing everybody asks when they get to the gate is where is the club. And, it's because that is your social gathering, that's your after work, have a beer. It's very seldom that they go into town unless the town is really close by. I still think today there is a high alcohol rate.

Howley- Yeah, for something to do?

Pietrowski- Yeah.

Howley- Is that what, what I was saying is what did you guys do for fun?

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Pietrowski- Well we did, the thing that I did like about the military is that people would stick together and you really had close friends. And, they would invite you at their house, like if they lived off base, to be with their family, you know, and socialize that way, go out together, try to do like softball, basketball, things like that. So, they did sports there. The problem is that after the sports were over, everyone would get together and get beer.

Howley- So, did you ever, what was the, after you got your assignment, did you just work a job? You're not still in the military? Like, what happened after you got out and you got your assignment.

Pietrowski- After, you mean after I got discharged?

Howley- Well, what happened? Did you work a job for the military for a while after boot camp and all that was over?

Pietrowski- Well after boot camp, you go and get attached to a base and then that's the base you work at and depending on how many years you sign on the dotted line, that's where you would work. Usually, they would transfer you, like maybe every two or three years depending on where you were. And most of the time people would put in usually four years active and then they would have two like inactive or maybe just reserve. So, you were pretty well committed to about maybe four to six years.

Howley- What happened for you? Where did you go? What did you end up doing?

Pietrowski- I ended up, I think my last station was at Southwest Harbor. So, I finished my time and I got out, and oh, I had college still, I took advantage of that. So I went back to school and so I got an associates degree with it. Then I went into, in the civilian world I went into law enforcement which, you know, I got out of that because I, well it's hard, I

started working in the town I grew up in, and you can't do that. You can't do law enforcement in the town you grew up in, you don't give tickets. So, I realized that law enforcement was probably better for me to do in the military world but wasn't really what I wanted as a civilian. So, some of my friends did the same thing. They'd get out and if they had a field that they could use in the civilian world, or go to college, they kind of picked those two choices and some of them just totally got out and that was their past and they just got their discharge papers and that's it.

Howley- How does discharging work?

Pietrowski- That's the happiest day of your life.

Howley- You get to be done?

Pietrowski- Yeah. You go, your time is up and they know when you get close to your time, I guess this can be kind of funny too, when you determine to get out they go, so would you like to re-enlist for another four years? Most of the time, you sit there and you go, no thank you. You just say no I want to get my discharge papers. I'm looking for something else, I'm going back to being a civilian. Either you're in the military, or you're a civilian. And so, we got out, I mean I got out and I had all my stuff in this one bag and I went down to Goodwill and I said are you guys selling this military stuff, I've got boots, and they're like, people love this kind of stuff and I just dumped it into this big basket and I said, Okay see you, and it wasn't that I wanted to forget about it, it was just that, that part of my life was over, and then you go from military world, to civilian world, you know what I mean.

Howley- So is that a hard transition to make?

Pietrowski- For some people because like some people, can't, they can't do anything on their own unless someone tells them to do it, and what to do, so those people went back into the military, because they went to the civilian world and though, oh man, I've got my own choices, I got freedom of this. I chose, well I liked it because I am an independent person, so I just was glad to get out and make some choices, you know on your own and that you know like where you are going to live and when they call you up, here's a good one, cause when they call you and they say, there's a possibility we might go to the Prussian Gulf, and I was on call for that, and you're scared to death cause you're like, okay now I have to worry about people back here and getting a job and everything, and so those guys over there right now, I know how they feel, even though I didn't go over, but it's really, it's a total life change, going from the states to you know fight in a war, you know, so most people when they get done with it, some people now a days, because there are not so many that will put in the twenty, twenty five years., I don't know if the military is making it more difficult and they don't want to pay you for higher rank, I don't know.

Howley- Oh, do you get a pay increase as you moved up?

Pietrowski- Oh yeah, every year you would get another stripe, and if you get another stripe with that stripe you get a pay increase.

Howley- Oh okay, and were there, in the Coast Guard when you got your job assignment and stuff, were there many women then at that point that were the instructors or the superiors?

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Pietrowski- Once I got to a base it was still male dominated, but there was more women that were I would say like officers, a lot of officers, a lot of women went that way because of the pay and respect and all that kind of thing, which I don't blame them, in fact I wish I went that way myself. I would say it was a lot less competitive. Most of the women I met when I would go to different bases, they were glad to see another woman, and they would be like, oh come on you got to me so and so, you know and all of a sudden you would just kind of all go together, sit together, go out movies and stuff like that, not that you wouldn't socialize with the guys, it's just that you're looking for somebody, another woman to find out like how it is on base, you know how the guys treating you that kind of thing.

Howley- So was it at that point that women stood up for each other?

Pietrowski- Yeah it was a different atmosphere and I would say that there was less jealousy and maybe because also the women were a little bit older, like some out of boot camp they had been in the military for like maybe four years you know and stuff like that. But then again, I am looking at it in my perspective where I am an assertive person and now for somebody that's not assertive it could have been difficult, for some women it can be, you know they could set us back you know, if you take after yourself they are not going to mess with you, but if you let them you know mess with you they will.

Howley- So most of the women would you say were assertive like yourself coming in?

Pietrowski- I would say that the majority yes they were because they had the same type of maybe, type of personality where they wanted a challenge and they were assertive and very few women I saw in there that were, what would I call them, girlie girls, you know

where they would be like oh you know what am I doing in the military. Most of the time if you even make that commitment or decide that you already got to have a certain personality to even go for that, so I would say that the majority were pretty assertive.

Howley- And were the rules really strict, as they always say in the military, were they really strict in the way that everything was run, were people in trouble a lot, and were they pretty strict with how they had people behave?

Pietrowski- I would say that if you went out on town and you were pretty smashed and you made a scene in town and you are in the military you would get spoken to when you get back to base and they would have their own punishment which could be, oh I don't know if it's really bad you lose a stripe you know what I mean, so I mean they had different levels, but I would say they were pretty well, we're representing for other people, so we had rules that we had to go by and there was this cover up, but I never seen anything that was, I mean it was mostly people that were drunk, it was alcohol related most of the time, trouble most of the time, yeah.

Howley- Were there any situations with like gays and lesbians did that come up at all?

Pietrowski- Yeah that's a good point. They didn't have the policy of Don't ask Don't Tell, which is shit, you know if somebody gets to know you and they go over to your house or wherever you are living off base, even if you don't say anything and you got a roommate or you got a, I mean it's pretty obvious of your life style to most people.

When I was in there, I think, now yeah if you were a lesbian it was pretty harsh, or gay.

Howley- Really?

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Pietrowski- Yeah because they didn't have that policy, so it was tough, in fact if they found out and they recruited you, then you are automatically booted. So most of the girls or guys that were in there would not talk about it unless they knew you and they trusted you, so it was very, very strict as far as that goes. I don't know even when I got out; I didn't see it getting any better.

Howley- Really?

Pietrowski- Really.

Howley- Having been in the military yourself, do think it's a good rule to keep gays and lesbians out of the military, like do you think it has a negative affect?

Pietrowski- You know I think if, there are some people out there that are brought up bias, they have a problem with their own sexuality, and I would say the ones that, I don't want male bashing or anything like that, but guys would have more of a problem with it, women, us women we were pretty well like, hey you know you're a humane being, you know, your life, I was secure with myself. I don't have a problem with anybody's lifestyle, it doesn't hurt me you know, but I saw guys who, they were turned on if it was a woman, oh it's okay of you you're a lesbian oh I mean because you know like that was cool, now if it was a guy they would, I am talking about harassment, I am talking about I would be afraid for the guys life, not so much maybe life, but his getting beat up.

Howley- Really?

Pietrowski- Yeah I think it was tough for the guys, I really do.

Howley- So if they found out then they would discharge them?

Pietrowski- If they did find out and they could prove it, it wasn't so much hear say. I'll put in this way, I had a girl say this really, good, it's called witch-hunt. If they really wanted to find out and they really wanted to boot you, they could make anyone look like a lesbian, you know what I mean they could set you up, it's hear say, unless they actually take a picture and prove that you are in a romantic relationship with someone, then that's one thing, but it's that typical thing that's hard to get through, and if they really wanted to prove it and they wanted you out, they could make something up.

Howley- Really?

Pietrowski- Yep, and now I am not saying that, that happened a lot, but I am just saying that I really think today, I don't know how bad it is now, but they still have that restriction on it, so I really think that anybody that's gay I don't think they have any chance, even with that don't ask don't tell. That policy is BS; it doesn't do anything, really.

Howley- And then did you notice any change or shifts as time went on when you were in the military, the way that minorities in general were treated, did they get more respect this time around, and were they more comfortable with gays in the military?

Pietrowski- I would say, I had a situation where it went to extremes. You have, there are a lot of African Americans in the military and there still is, and we had a situation where the African American at one of the barracks was complaining of discrimination, I don't know the whole story, it was dealing with this other barracks that was across from us, and they were really, they were looking from what I understood you know and one comment that might have been made got blown out of proportion and then the next thing you know we are all evolved and we're all bias you know and next thing you know you got people



fighting and arguing, going you're a bigot, no you're a bigot, and so I kind of though like it got oversensitive, where it was like, hey listen you know what, we know there are minorities here, I am a minority, I am a woman in the military. But I found that some people got, well they were too sensitive to it, and instead of letting a comment that probably wasn't meant to be a bad comment, they would blow it out of proportion, so I was I think, if anything I would say that the white males in the military were getting discriminated against, like reverse discrimination because everyone was so sanative to the minorities. Now I am not saying that they don't have a legitimate complaint because there is sometimes, yeah someone will call you a name, a dike or they could call you, I don't know, you know whatever, there are all kinds of names you will hear among the group of people if say you pissed at somebody. I don't think it's bad, but I think that it's not gone completely. Here is an example, coming from the north with hardly any African Americans here, I go into the military in DC, I didn't know, I didn't have prejudice toward African Americans, cause I didn't grow up with any thing, or anyone mentioning it, you know what I mean, like anybody saying negative stuff, so I get down there and all of a sudden these people are coming from the south, who do have whites discriminating against them, so they were thinking that because I was white then I must be predictive and I said you know I am not saying I am innocent or anything, but I really didn't have blacks that grew up around me so I didn't have this predisposed you know about what blacks should be or what they do, I found I was discriminated against being white by blacks.

Howley- Really?

Pietrowski- Yeah, I had some instances, cause of where they grew up, cause they had discrimination of whites, I mean whites would, coming from like Alabama you know what I mean, so they would say well you are white so you must think like this and I am like, no way you know what I mean, I am like I am from the north, have you ever been to Maine, you know and it's like a different area, so that's what happens when you get all cultures together and they have to live together, you know what I mean, and it could be a lot worse, but, we did have our problems but it wasn't as bad as it could have been.

Howley- Did they stick together at all, like did you notice that?

Pietrowski- You would see them, you would go to a table and if there were all whites at the table, say if you there was the black guys that's what got me faltered, white guys, black and white guys were like totally separated from each other, and I thought the women, the while women and the black women were more integrated, I think because we are more open, and we are less afraid of like that kind of gay stuff and the blacks and Hispanics because I find women more open and they are less likely to go with the norm you know with what, the guys I think had more of a problem with, so me being a women I wouldn't notice it so much because I was integrating with everybody, whites, Hispanics, gays, lesbians, whatever, I didn't care you know cause we all work together you know, men had more of an issue with stuff like that, and they still do today.

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Howley- So how about the women then, did you notice the same kind of thing, was there ever like women kind of crying wolf, women saying that, you know that they are a minority kind of thing, like you said the blacks were, and so maybe the women weren't really being discriminated against as badly as they said?

Pietrowski- I think what is was, the instances that came up were with sexual harassment, when there might have been an incident that they said was sexual harassment, and I said, you've got to be kidding me, you know what I am saying and I think what happened with that was bad judgment on both parts, maybe they got in the situation, or they could take care of themselves by saying, hey I don't like the crap so just leave me alone okay. I found some women to be oversensitive about the sexual harassment and some women just maybe oversensitive about how the guys treated them, because, well I think it depends how they were brought up, you know what I mean? Like see

I was brought up by two older brother okay, and it's not that I have real thick skin, but I wasn't so sensitive if like I guy yelled at me, I am like whatever, because you got to be assertive , and I think a lot of it depended on the woman's personality, it really did, and how she was brought up.

Howley- Do you think that there is a place for women in the military then?

Pietrowski- For some women I do, I think there are just some women it just doesn't match their personality maybe they are better off in the civilian world because of their upbringing, their values, where they come from, and they should not go in the military because it's not a perfect world and I'll tell you it's not in the civilian world either, but in the military sure as hell isn't perfect, so I really think it depends on, I mean even if a

woman goes in she wants to be a nurse okay, she still had to go through certain training with guys, she still has to socialize with them I mean at work, and if you're a woman who wants to go in and have the doors opened for you, you know what I mean, like when I guy comes you know the old fashioned thing they open the doors and all that stuff that you know, some women do like still, then you don't want to go in that world, and stay in another world that you can handle, that's what I tell them.

Howley- What about you, do you regret going in or are you happy with the decisions that you made?

Pietrowski- Yeah I really look back on my experiences, even if it's a bad experience I never say I regret it, because that's who I am today, and my experiences are in my past, and this is who I am now, and I am comfortable with that. The military made me appreciate my freedom, made me appreciate my choices I make as far as when I got out, like you don't know how much you take for granted being a civilian, you really don't.

We go in the military and they say, you will go to war because you signed on the dotted line, and you are going to be over in Iraq say, and hey unless you're pregnant and unless you can prove you are insane you're going, you know what I mean, and I think what made me realize is that we have so much freedom of choice being a civilian, I mean when you are in the military you're in another environment you know, they dictate where you are going to go, where you are going to live and all that kind of stuff, yeah I don't look back at it and say, well I wish I never did it, I am glad I did it because now I can look at my civilian life and appreciate it, like being able to say, this summer I am going hiking, and I am going to go here, here, and here, and stay as long as I want and just to have that freedom of choice that's what I got out of it.

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Howley- What would you say is overall the most positive experience that you had?

Pietrowski- I would say that when you are scared to death, or you are depressed and you're in a situation and you're really afraid, I was really very, very inspired by how people got together and they wanted to help you and I think that there is so much good in people, you hear bad stuff on the news about people who do then and that, but the military, I thought that the people there they stuck together and there was a few that maybe they were loners and that's another thing, if you're a loner I don't think you want to be in the military because you are constantly around people that are you know trying to, they want to be friends, they don't want to be alone, but just to meet different people of cultures where they came from, what their upbringing was like, why you ended up being such good friends you know, and I think it's usually, I could say that you would make friends for life, and even if you don't keep in contact with them, you always, somewhere in your thoughts, throughout life, you think about where they are now and go, I wonder what they are doing, I wonder how many kids they got you know what I mean, but for some reason, compared to my upbringing as a child, my childhood friends, the military friends I made were two different, like definitely different.

Howley- Did you find yourself having strong bonds with other women, or did you have strong male bonds, or both?

Pietrowski- I would say because of the sexual harassment thing, I think you made stronger bonds with women, you didn't want to come across as, the guys liking you, or as a slut or anything like that, so you would probably tend to hang out with the women and hook up with them and I think also that was probably why there was the gay world too, of

lesbians because they didn't want to go out with guys, just to be friends with the guys because even if you are friends with them you get a reputation. If you are with a guy and you hook up with him and you don't sleep with him, okay then that means that you are probably a dike, because you're not interested, okay now if you do hook up with him and you do end up sleeping with him then you are a whore, you know what I mean so you're stuck alright so I think that's why the women kind of tend to stick with the other women, it's because they didn't want to have to deal with that stereotype. Is it like today? I think so, I think that you could still get that label. I was friends with guys, I had no problem about being friends with guys, but I wasn't the one to sleep around, now I did have some friends, it's their business, but the stories I would hear I mean they really didn't respect you as much, you know what I mean, so I would much rather be labeled as a dike than a whore, so I chose to hang out with the women, and I chose to you know if I did have male friend then I kept it as a friend, and of course also I was attached at home, so you know what I mean so that helped, but I think it's still like that today though, I really hate to say that, but from what I gather from talking with other people that are in, I don't think much of that has changed, you know.

Howley- Overall, what would you say has been the hardest thing, or biggest struggle for you when you were in?

Pietrowski- It won't really be the physical stuff, I would say it really mental, I think it was, you had to find your place, what you were comfortable with, and you got okay, you got to find a place that you are comfortable with your co-workers, are you going to hang out with the guys and be labeled as a whore, you make the choice what you are comfortable

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with. The other thing was promotions, did you get the promotions because you were a woman, or did you get it because you earned it? You had to deal with hear say, and just being with so some people that you are just really not going to click with, but they are in your face say twenty four hours because of the job, say you are on a search and rescue mission, and somebody dies, male, female it didn't matter you had to really, you couldn't just tell to go take a hike, so you had to learn to work with them, and I think it's different and it's debatable, in the military world, if you go do that you re dealing with your superiors and they can really, they can really make it really miserable for you. So I would say the hardest thing for me was emotionally, mentally, if I had to work with somebody that was a total idiot, which didn't happen a lot, but they were there and you would have to deal with it, and you would think they were border line something was wrong with them, you know what I mean, you were thinking, how did you get into the military, not that they were retarded, but you really think they had a personality disorder. So that was hard for me because I was like, it's not now, because I think because I am older and I deal with everyday people like that, but because of my age, I signed in my early twenties, I wasn't exposed to so many eccentric people in one place and that's because of the culture, everybody being from different areas, different backgrounds, and to get along with them, I would say that would be a challenge right there.

Howley- What advice would you have for people joining the military now, especially women going in , do you have any advice that you would give to them going in?

Pietrowski- I would say, it's not for everybody and what you heard me just say and if you are still interested in going in, and you have that personality, that drive, then go for it, but don't go in there thinking it's going to be you can make it, it's going to be an environment that you are going to have to do a lot of adjusting, but there is also that reward too at the end, you know to me I think the thing that sticks out is when I worked with guys, and they were so pleased with how I handled myself in situations, and they would say, you know what Ski, that's cause I had Pietrowski, they called my Ski because it was short, and that's another thing I will tell you about, and they would get all, Ski I would have you back me any day, and that made you feel good, because you're like not only are they saying that because I know my job, but they actually some of them had to go down to that level and say that in front of their other male co-workers, you know what I mean, and I thought that was like, the ego's gone, they looked at me as another worker, co-worker with them and not as being a woman, so I would say that made me really proud because I didn't prove it to you I didn't go out and prove it, but I did prove it to myself, I can be just as good as any guy in this field, and it depends on my capability, but I just felt like, there see you can be a woman and you can do anything, you know, you really can. Getting back to the question as far as my advice, I really think you got to have this competitive attitude, and if you're in sports, I am not just trying to eliminate people who aren't in sports, but usually I see women who played sports, they have this competitive attitude, they seem to do well in the military, but you got to have this thick skin, competitive attitude, you can't let every little thing get to you. The reward is when you make it through, and you say, you know what look at that, I did that, like I shot this



and I really think that if people would say, if you're a person who wants to go in the military, male or female and you feel like you can do it, do it, I hate these friggin labels I really do. Feminists they put way too much labels on females hard ships in the past and you know all the stuff and you know we probably wouldn't be who we are today if our past were not so hard and determined. Women are very determined people I think and I think there are other people, I call my mom, old fashioned that think that you know, yeah women shouldn't go to war you know women should, not like stay in the home, but there are some things that they shouldn't have to do, and one of them would be the draft, oh my gosh she would be dead if women were in the draft, but I am kind of in the middle of the road, I think it depends on the person and I don't like the labels and I think, I think that male or female if you can do the military it depends on your character and it doesn't depend on if you are male or female, it depend on your character.

Howley- Great, so now is there anything I didn't ask you at this point that I could have?

Pietrowski- Nope, I think we covered everything, I think good overall interview, I mean I can't think of anything, with everybody's thoughts with the military, you covered just about everybody's way that they would look at everything, in the environment. I am just trying to think. I mean there is still more males in charge in the military, but that's changing and you are seeing a lot more women officers and stuff like that, being in charge and stuff like that, so I think that, that's a good thing foe females to look at, but we're still the minority, but not as bad.

M60, like an automatic, I mean huge gun, and you're just going I can't believe I shot that and I did so well. I did better than some of the guys, you know and you're like, oh this is so cool, not that I wanted to do better than the guys I just wanted to be able to shoot it you know and that kind of thing, but the rewards looking back, and I look back at my dog tags sometimes like when I am in college and I am getting really tired and thinking, this is never going to end, and I grab my dog tags and I go, look what I've been through, look at all the stuff I did and then those dog tags take me back to a time when I thought I was going to have to quit because I couldn't do it, and after looking at that I say, you know what after doing this I feel like I can do anything and that's the reward that you feel like you can do anything. I think that's great.

Howley- So you think that maybe you would say that it's liberating for females? I know that some feminists go one way or another, sometimes they say that women should be able to do anything, so the military is great, and then the other side of feminist say that feminist should protest women being in the military because it's just degrading for women because all the superiors are men, you know what I mean, so do you think, what way would you say is more accurate after having been in the military yourself?

Pietrowski- I think that with anything people can think extremes, and I have always been a person who thinks in a level way, I really do and what I have problems with in women studies classes, one course, I am not going to say all, a certain female instructor would think one way, and I would think, listen you know I am a female and I think that is bullshit you know what I mean, what you're just telling me. I think that there is extremes