An Oral History Project
by The University of Texas at Arlington

Interviewee: Lt. Col. Lora Rimmer
Interviewer: Melissa Gonzales
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Gonzales: This is Melissa Gonzales. Today is Monday, April 29, 2013. I am interviewing Lt. Col. Lora Rimmer for the first time. This interview is taking place at the University of Texas at Arlington Central Library, located in Arlington, Texas. This interview is sponsored by the College of Liberal Arts and is part of the Maverick Veterans’ Voices Project.

So would you mind stating your rank and branch?

Rimmer: Hi. I’m Lt. Col. Lora Rimmer, and I’m a Signal Corps officer.

Gonzales: And where are you originally from?

Rimmer: I’m originally from Paola, Kansas, which is just south of Kansas City.

Gonzales: And did you participate in ROTC in high school or college?

Rimmer: I did not participate in high school. I did participate in college, starting the summer after my sophomore year in college.

Gonzales: What made you choose to join?

Rimmer: I was a camp counselor during that summer for Lawrence City Parks and Rec., and one of the girls that was a counselor with me was in the Army reserves and she was in ROTC. She was pursuing a nursing degree. So we spent the summer together talking and finally I decided maybe I’d go in and talk to the ROTC department and went in, had an interview, and they offered me a scholarship, and so I joined the Army ROTC that fall.
Gonzales:  Was it what you expected?

Rimmer:  I wasn’t really sure what to expect. She and I talked a lot about the reserves, and you know the reserves aren’t full-time. They have one weekend a month and annual training in the summer, some schooling, and it sounded fun. It sounded like something different, kind of at that stage in my college career where I was kind of looking for a group to belong to.

And I got into ROTC and started taking classes and realized that I really liked what it was that they were doing, and I was really interested in learning. It was a good fit for me.

Gonzales:  How did your family feel about that?

Rimmer:  Well, after I had had my interview and they offered me a scholarship and I signed my contract, I went home and asked my father how he felt about me being in the army, and he was not very pleased about it and said, “Absolutely not. You will not join the Army!” and I said, “Okay. Well, I signed the contract already, so we’re in!” (laughs) He’s very proud of me. But it was a shock to him.

Gonzales:  So upon graduating from college, where were you sent? Were you sent for additional training elsewhere?

Rimmer:  I was. I went to Fort Gordon, Georgia for my Signal Officer Basic Course, and from there I PCS’ed to Germany.

Gonzales:  What was the coursework like for the Signal Corps?
Rimmer: Well, at that time they were just transitioning into a new kind of communication system, so we were talking a lot about that new system. Still a lot about radios. Computers were discussed but we didn’t really have a lot of networking of computers like what we have now. This was in the early ’90s, and so it was kind of right at the forefront of that, and so a lot of satellite communications, UHF radio, SHF, that kind of thing. We talked a lot about radio rays. We talked a lot about (indecipherable).

Gonzales: Do you recall your first days in the service, what it was like transitioning from college and into that?

Rimmer: Well, it was exciting and kind of a little disconcerting because you weren’t really sure if you were doing the right thing as a lieutenant, but I don’t really recall it being a tough transition. I was really excited to get started, and I had friends who had graduated previously from the program, so we knew how things were going. And I was really, really looking forward to it.

Gonzales: Did you do anything special to get through training?

Rimmer: No, nothing special. I started classes in July that year. That was 1990, and Iraq invaded Kuwait on August 2 that year, I think, so that was a big discussion—that was a big topic of a conversation in all of our classes because things were shaping up to be
significantly different than the kind of Army that the instructors had known previously, so I was a little anxious about that.

Gonzales: So after training where were you sent from there?

Rimmer: I went to Germany. I PCS'ed to Germany, and the unit that I was assigned to had already deployed to Desert Storm. They were part of the—it was the Thirty-fourth Signal Company—and they were part—Thirty-fourth Signal Battalion. I was in Alpha Company—they were sent—they were already in Saudi Arabia.

So when I arrived in Germany, we went through in-processing, and one of the things that I do remember is that we went through where we get all of our clothing and all of our gear. And I went through the line, and the gals there said, “Oh, we’re really sorry we’re out of cold weather gear.” And I said, “Well, I’m going to the desert. No problem.” So off I went, not realizing that in the desert in the wintertime it gets significantly colder than one would necessarily think that it was going to get. So I realized after I’d gotten there and had spent a couple of weeks in the desert in the winter that perhaps I did need that cold weather gear after all. Lesson learned.

Gonzales: Were they able to send it to you?

Rimmer: They weren’t.

Gonzales: Oh, geez.
Rimmer: So I just had a lot of layers, lots and lots of layers. (laughs)

Gonzales: And so you were deployed to Desert Shield/Desert Storm then?

Rimmer: Yes.

Gonzales: What was that like? Did you feel your training prepared you for it?

Rimmer: I did feel like my training prepared me for it. I was really concerned about being a platoon leader and losing a soldier. That was really uppermost in my mind because I felt like the things that I was trained to do, the things that I was—I mean, putting myself in harm’s way, I’d already, you know, kind of dealt with that and come to terms with that, else I wouldn’t have been in the army. But the thought of having to take care of the soldiers and make sure that they didn’t get hurt—and if they did, informing their parents how they died, that really weighed heavily on my mind.

And we went through some basic marksmanship training in Germany right before we deployed. There was a group of us that was going to deploy late, so we went through that training and then got on the plane, and I was really very nervous. Everyone in my family knew that I was deploying, so there was the concern about how they were feeling as well. It was very stressful for them.

Gonzales: How did they manage?

Rimmer: Well, being in the Signal Corps, I always had access to a telephone. So that’s one of the beauties of kind of—the MOS that I
have. So I was able to call home probably a lot more regularly than other folks. We were able to connect through satellite stations to call back home. I think that helped them.

We had kind of come up with our own little code about—you know, because when the news reports came on and said that a scud fell aimlessly in the desert, I was aimlessly in the desert. My parents didn’t know where I was, and so that was very, very disconcerting to them. I think they probably aged about twenty years that time that I was gone. But they knew that I was being as safe as I possibly could and doing the things that I was supposed to do, and we got home safe.

Gonzales: At that time, were there other female platoon leaders?

Rimmer: There were. I actually—the signal company that I came into had a female executive officer, so she was the second officer in charge, and there was one other female signal platoon leader in my company. And so I wasn’t completely alone. There were several other females that were in the company as well, and my first—my platoon sergeant was actually a female. So that really didn’t—wasn’t a huge impact. That was a learning curve though.

The port-a-johns were homemade, and the homemade kind have the fifty-five-gallon drum in the bottom, and they’re all kind of airy up underneath and not very private. I think men built them
because they had like a screen in the front, so you sit down and everybody’s (laughs) walking by. Hi. So that was quite an experience.

The showers also because we had showers, and so they had homemade showers and they were open at the bottom as well, and kind of open about eyelevel, and then we had a trough on the top, and you’d put the water in the trough because it would heat up during the day and then you’d have a warm shower. And at the door—the doors were—I’m kind of short—so the doors were kind of high at the bottom and it kind of, you know—I couldn’t see over the top of it, but a good portion of my legs were out in the open. So we had those showers.

And then we went about two months without showers, so we took birdbaths and had a tub that we would take our birdbath in. And then we got a shower trailer probably about three and a half months into the deployment. Then we could just switch the male and female on the door. That was good. That was kind of how we handled that. So it worked out.

Gonzales: Did the women that were already there offer you any advice or suggestions as you came in?
Rimmer: (laughs) You know, I don't remember anything specifically. I'm sure—I'm certain that they did, but I don’t remember anything necessarily that they told me.

Gonzales: So I imagine you were involved in a combat environment and you didn’t see—were you actually fighting or were you just in the middle, you know, of all the combat that had been going on?

Rimmer: Well, we were in the middle of it. The mission for my signal company was to connect—be a relay station between the four units in Iraq as we crossed the line of departure back into Saudi Arabia, which is where the main headquarters was. And so we were about seventy or eighty kilometers inside the Iraqi border. During the first morning of the attack, there was lots of artillery and we were attached to the First Armored Division British Unit, so we crossed the line of departure with that unit, and there was significant action up near the front of that convoy but nothing that we particularly had. We did cross through minefields that had been cleared, but there’s always a concern that they didn’t clear all of the mines.

And it was a lot of stopping and going. So lots of stopping and starting because as skirmishes were happening, we were stopping the convoy and we were waiting, and sometimes those could be extensive waits. Of course, it was dark and we couldn’t
see a lot in the desert, necessarily, so folks were falling asleep, and we were having to wake them up to get the convoys moving again.

Interesting story, though, about the British folks because they’re very flamboyant, the officers in the British Army, and the night before the attack was to begin, they invited all of the officers over for officers mess, which, you know, up to this point I’d been eating our regular army mess, which was nothing necessarily to write home about. I mean, it was fine food but, you know, paper plates and plastic and all of that.

So we go over to their headquarters and they had tables with tablecloths and fine, white bone china—which up to this point, I probably hadn’t showered in, like, several weeks, and we were females, so very—that’s an all male unit. And so we were kind of an anomaly anyway, and so dirty hands, dirty fingernails, fine, white bone china that we sit down, and they had roast beef. So, like, carved—a chef with a chef’s hat on and all white and everything, and it was really surreal. And it’s one of the things that really sticks out in my memory of that whole time, was how that tradition—but that was—and after we had dinner, we had tea, and we sat and everyone talked and got to know one another, and that was their tradition. I always thought that that was surreal but it was kind of
neat. It was kind of a neat way to be introduced to their army. So I'll never forget that.

Gonzales: Were there any other differences between the way they did things and the way the U.S. did things?

Rimmer: They don't—we have a set uniform, and we talk about uniform, uniform, uniform. In the British Army, they are very flamboyant. The handkerchiefs and mishmash of minutes—or mishmash of uniforms, different, you know. You didn't see the same outfit together. So that's kind of like those were little things. That's like minutia. They're there to do a job, and they did very well. They did their job very well in that particular complex, so it was really an exciting time.

The other thing that I remember that was significantly different is that when you drive in blackout drive, our blackout drive lights are white, and they're slightly covered, so on the back of our vehicles, there's just a little, itty-bitty light for blackout driving.

Well, their lights were red. So we had to put a red cam light on the back of all of our vehicles, so that they could identify us from the enemy because they wanted to make sure that they didn't shoot at us, so we had to make sure we had the red cam lights on.

And that was—everybody was worried that the red cam light was going to fall off in the middle of the convoy. (laughs) And they
didn’t, and everything worked out okay, but those are some training
differences and those are some equipment differences that you
have to accommodate for when we actually do a multi-national
operation.

Gonzales: Did they prepare you in training for managing cultural differences?

Rimmer: We did. We had some language discussions. We did have some
basic cultural discussions, nothing like what we have today, and
certainly, I think that that was perhaps one of the first indicators
when we went to Desert Shield/Desert Storm that maybe we
needed to start focusing on that a little bit more than we had up to
that point. We’d been very much a U.S.–based kind of—we have
bases in Korea and we have bases in Germany, but other than that,
the rest of the world we weren’t very in tune with the cultural
differences. And certainly that was an environment where we’re
going to have to be.

Gonzales: Were there any casualties in your unit?

Rimmer: We had—one soldier committed suicide. But we didn’t have
anybody sustain any wounds or die from the combat action.

Gonzales: Since this is a high stress situation, did they have any counselors
available for people onsite?

Rimmer: We had chaplains in each one of the units, and at that time those
were the primary folks that we would use for counseling services.
And they visited us. We didn’t actually have one in our company. We had one at the battalion headquarters, and she would travel quite extensively in a helicopter to get to our units forward. But we didn’t have the resources that they have today.

Gonzales: How did you manage the stress while you were over there?

Rimmer: (laughs) I played cards. Soldiers play cards. We played lots of Hearts and lots of Spades, and so I played a lot of Spades. My folks would send care packages to me that had books and letters and things in it, so that was always good. I’m an avid reader, so having something to read—

Sometimes during the scud attacks—because our guidance was to stay in our tents, and we had to don our protective masks, and we didn’t know how long we were going to be in there, I had a couple of coloring books, (laughs) and I colored furiously because you didn’t know what was going on when those scud attacks were happening. And so we were just kind of waiting.

Gonzales: Were you able to go on leave while you were over there?

Rimmer: Actually, no, I was only deployed during that particular deployment for six months, and we weren’t—none of the units that were there were really there for very long, so there wasn’t an R and R like what we experience today.

Gonzales: What were your other deployments and assignments after that?
Rimmer: Following my deployment to the desert, I went back to Germany. The unit that I was assigned to was deactivating, and the army was in a drawdown period, and so I was quickly assigned probably two months after I got back to Germany from Heillbronn to Darmstadt. I was assigned to the 440th Signal Battalion in the headquarters, and I worked as an assistant S4, which is a logistics officer. And then as an S4 for just a short time before taking over another platoon. I was a platoon leader there for a couple of years.

Gonzales: So what were your duties as a logistics officer? What does that entail?

Rimmer: Well, we managed the budget and the property for the battalion, so we also had fuelers. As a signal unit, obviously we had a lot of rolling stock and so we used a lot of fuel when we go to the field. So coordinating fuel stops, depending on where it was that we were going for exercises. Port-a-johns because in Germany they wanted port-a-johns everywhere that we were going. Any contracts that we had with any vendors for food or any other services, I was working those contracts. And the budget was probably managing how much we had, how much we’d obligated, and how much we still had remaining in our budget.

Gonzales: So other than the dining with the British Army, do you have any other memorable experiences?
Rimmer: From Desert Shield/Desert Storm?

Gonzales: Or any other assignments?

Rimmer: Oh, other assignments. Well, my most recent deployment I was—I deployed with the First Cavalry Division in 2006, and we had just fielded another new set of equipment in the army, and I was the first (indecipherable) Operations Officer for the First Cavalry Division, and that was quite an experience because up to this point, we wouldn’t have been able to command and control as many units with the previous configuration of communications equipment. We were satellite based and we had a lot of line-of-sight radios as well, and so we were in Baghdad, and we were assigned to MMB Baghdad. (laughs)

And during the surge, which happened during our deployment in January of 2007, the division actually at the end of the surge, had probably thirteen or fourteen brigades that were attached to it that we were managing. And we wouldn’t have been able to do that with the previous equipment. So I was very proud of the fact that we were able to manage that and it is in the central command. They were able to assume those new brigades up under the headquarters, and so were able to transition them pretty quickly over to them.
So I think that the group of people is the thing that I remember from both deployments the most is that the folks that I was there with and in this particular deployment, I knew several—we were there for fifteen months together.

And my husband and I were deployed at the same time, so we shared a trailer. It was a thirteen-by-thirteen room with your husband for fifteen months. But we didn't kill one another, (Gonzales laughs) and we worked across the room from one another as well, so those were good days. I was pretty much stuck in the headquarters based on the job that I was doing for the time that I was there. So I didn’t get to get out among the people very much. I did get to take one trip to Taji, so I got to fly on a helicopter, and that was fun. I don’t get to do that kind of stuff too much. But both fantastic groups of folks to work with.

Gonzales: So you mentioned you were deployed with your husband. Did you have children at that time?

Rimmer: I did. Our son was ten months old when we deployed. He stayed with my sister during the week. My whole family is from Kansas. And he went to the farm to stay with my parents on the weekend, so Mom would drive over and pick him up and take him to the farm, and he’d be there until Sunday or Monday, and then they’d drop him back off at my sister’s house.
We redeployed when he was twenty-five months, missed first and second birthdays. So that’s probably—I mean, that’s a significant emotional event. Leaving was really hard but coming back for R and R and being home for two weeks and he was—we took him to get his first haircut, and he still wasn’t talking very well. He was walking before we left, but was still just kind of babbling, not really talking. And really, your family is—that’s where it gets you is leaving family.

So they’re the heroes. They welcomed him into their home and my sister has two older boys who are older than him, and they—every day—and she would get up at—again, since I’m a signal officer, we had access to the network, and so we could get on the Internet and do a web cam, and it would be about three o’clock in the afternoon there, and it was about four fifteen or five o’clock in the morning in Kansas, and she and Ian would get up, and he wasn’t really paying attention to us so much, but he would play and she would kind of turn the camera toward him and he would—we’d kind of watch him play and we’d talk to him a little bit. And we did that a couple of times a week with them and then also with my folks on the weekends, and then on the other days we’d call as he was having breakfast, and of course, he wasn’t talking to
us. He was stuffing his face with bagels or whatever it was that he was eating. (Both laugh)

But I think because we had the ability to maintain that kind of communication—when we actually redeployed, it was right before Christmas. It was, like, two days before Christmas, and everybody was at Fort Hood when we came back, my sister, my parents, my brother, and Ian and we got back and, you know, hugs and kisses and everybody goes to the house and a flurry of activity, and then my sister and my brother flew home to be with their families for Christmas. And Ian stayed and my parents stayed for a few extra days and then they left and he was, like, okay. Perfectly adaptable. He knew who we were because there was pictures of us, and he talked to us on the—he knew us, we were around all the time on the computer even though it was the computer. So it worked out.

Gonzales: Did you experience any—well, we talked about being a woman in the military, and I didn’t know if you’d ever experienced any discrimination or harassment at all while you were overseas or deployed.

Rimmer: I haven’t experienced it personally. I have seen it happen. There are predators in the military just like there are in general society. As an army universe, we’re grappling with that and sexual assaults and sexual harassment. It’s scary to see it and then to figure out
what it is that you can actually do about it. Probably the first time I was exposed to it, I didn’t—I kind of relied on other senior females who were there, who said that they quickly were addressing it at the chain of command, but it is one of the things that I felt guilty about because I didn’t go tell someone. And so ever since then—and that was really very, very early overseas and I always felt like I have to speak up. I have to be a proponent for that.

And certainly in my current job, most of my cadets, my soldiers know that that’s unacceptable behavior. We don’t treat anyone who’s on our team that way. I think the army’s trying to make great strides with that.

Gonzales: I was just about to ask if you felt like they’re doing anything as far as training is concerned to encourage people to speak up.

Rimmer: Yes. Lots of training. Lots and lots of training. We talk about—for the cadets here on campus, we actually have training that is specifically directed toward college students, so we talk about them being cadets. We talk about predators on campus, meaning, don’t go out unless you go out with a buddy, someone—with—one of you needs to be responsible. How to avoid situations, what to do if you find yourself in a situation, what steps you should take to mitigate that as swift as you possibly can. And I think it’s good that they’ve created—there’re videos and simulations that the cadets can make
answers and they can make choices, and then depending on the choice, it kind of shoots to the next scene. And so it changes depending on what choice they make. And sometimes when we’re in class, we explore choices that they know are not right, just so everybody can see kind of how the threat goes.

We haven’t had any issues here since I’ve been here, but there’s always the potential. Lots of folks from lots of different backgrounds and belief systems, and sometimes some of the situations are just based on not knowing one another and maybe something that was acceptable at home is not so acceptable in the general army, and so we have to address that too because it’s any kind of uncomfortable environment.

Gonzales: So with women now able to—with the whole (undecipherable) of women in combat, what would you say to the naysayers or people out there who are kind of against it?

Rimmer: I would say that the only—this is my personal opinion. It’s not endorsed by the army—but my personal opinion is that as long as you segregate women away from portions of the army, you are setting up a situation where they’re different. And when somebody’s different, then it’s easy to harass or to assault them because they’re not really part of the team.
So I do not believe that the army should reduce the standards. If the standard for an infantryman is to lift eighty pounds and carry 180 pounds, then that’s the standard. And if there’s a woman out there who can do it, then she should do it.

There are lots of males out there who can’t do that, and so the standard needs to apply across-the-board. We shouldn’t reduce the standards. I know that last summer and the summer before, the females and the males lived in the same tent, they sleep in the same barracks. You have to make accommodations for the fact that people need to change and there has to be curtains and there’s a certain time when the guys are in the shower and there’s a certain time when the females are in the shower, and they have to accommodate for that.

And the cadets handle it just fine. It’s some of the older folks, some of the cadre that have a favorite issue that women cadets typically have. And my point to all of my cadre was if you put them in a different tent, then they’re not in the communication loop, and that makes them different. And then you’re just setting yourself up for a situation where they are going to get harassed and assaulted. So I think what the army’s decided to do is a good thing, and I think that they’ll help in several different ways kind of level the playing field.
Gonzales: I imagine it’s a trust issue too because you’re serving side-by-side with these people, so you have built some kind of trust and relationship and by segregating people, I imagine that doesn’t help at all.

Rimmer: It doesn’t. It doesn’t.

Gonzales: So were you awarded any medals or citations, and if so how did you get these?

Rimmer: I’ve been awarded several awards. Obviously, the unit that I was assigned to is a meritorious unit for the activities that happened during the surge. So I’m proud to wear that. I’m proud to wear the First Cavalry Division Combat Patch. I wear it on my dress uniform. I wear it on my ACUs. I was really proud to be there, probably that—we had a patch ceremony where they actually came and they put the combat patch on, and that was probably one of the bigger deals for me was that we were all out there and the deputy commanding general came down and he awarded us all a combat patch, and he put it on the shoulder. I mean, that was just really, really—I mean, that’s cool. That’s the group you were there with is how you identify your time there. That was good.

I was awarded the Bronze Star while I was there, and, again, I think a lot of that had to do with the surge, the level of activity that we actually performed while we were there. But no combat, and I
certainly don’t want to take anything away from the folks who did receive an award like that with that one.

Gonzales: You had mentioned before that you built strong relationships with people in your unit. Do you still keep in touch with them?

Rimmer: I do. I do. My boss there at the First Cavalry Division, he is a mentor—he is my mentor, and he’s very calm and level-headed and I have a tendency to get a little overexcited about certain things, and he just—he’s very professional, very wise, and he knows lots of folks in the signal community, and he’s been very, very successful. So we still keep in touch. I kind of keep track of the other officers that I was assigned there with, and they’re all doing very well.

One of the signal officers that was assigned to one of the brigades actually just retired not too long ago, and I got an email from him on Friday, so he’s now mister, kind of getting up to that age where we’re becoming “misters” and “missus”. But they were fantastic.

Then several of the general officers that I served with have gone on. General Campbell is now the vice chief of staff of the army. So they’re doing fantastic things, and I’m always glad to hear about them, and some of them I keep in touch with a little bit more than others.
Gonzales: So when you returned to the States after Desert Shield/Desert Storm, do you remember what that was like and if there was any difference to your recent return after your more recent deployment?

Rimmer: You mean from how folks treated us?

Gonzales: Well, not only how folks treated you but you also transitioning back to the U.S. -- just that environment.

Rimmer: Yeah. I actually left active duty in 1993 after my tour in Germany was up. The army was drawing down, and I wasn't sure that I wanted to stay or that the army was going to keep me around, so I decided to go ahead and leave active duty. And I came home and I worked for a government contractor for a while, still doing communications type activities, some training, and joined the United States Army Reserves. And I was in a quartermaster unit out of Missouri—out of Belton, Missouri, and I was the signal officer for those folks, and kind of still kept my foot in it and thought that I maybe wouldn't miss it as much as I did. It turns out I missed it a lot.

I finished my graduate degree and one of my friends said, "Hey, they've got this Captains Recall Program going on, and you need to come back on to active duty." She and I have been friends since we were lieutenants in Germany together. And I was, like,
okay. So I put my packet in for captains recall program, and I actually got accepted.

So in 1999 I came back on active duty and went to Fort Gordon again for my officer advanced course and was stationed in Fort Lewis, Washington then as my duty station after that. So I can’t complain. Lots of folks complain about their duty stations. Germany and Fort Lewis I can’t really complain too much about that.

But company commands probably besides being a professor in military science, that’s probably the funnest job that I’ve had. And the most rewarding job that I’ve had as well. So I only had about a hundred and ninety-six folks assigned to my company, and we were—our primary mission in that battalion was to support the Pacific Rim, kind of the first corps area of operations. So I had satellite teams in my company, and we deployed and went to (undecipherable) in Thailand, (undecipherable) in Korea, Yamashiro in Japan. Lots of war fighters in Hawaii, and so we got to experience—those soldiers got to experience a lot of the world that a lot of folks don’t get to experience. So that was a fantastic assignment as well.

Gonzales: Is there ever a time when something brings back memories from being overseas, like music or smells or anything like that?
Rimmer: Loud noises. Loud noises. Where my parents live, the folks across the street, like, you know, typical country people, like to shoot their shotguns, and then they drink beer and carry on. Right after we had come back from deployment we were visiting, and they shot off an m80, and my parents were downstairs, and my husband and I were upstairs. It was, like, late at night, nine, ten o’clock at night. It wasn’t too late, but we were already—and she heard thump, thump, because we had both rolled out of the bed onto the floor as soon as we heard that go off. (laughs) So things like that make me uncomfortable.

My first earthquake was when I was stationed out at Fort Lewis, and I’ve never—tornadoes in Kansas and Texas, right, but not earthquakes. We were sitting in a staff meeting in my office, and it sounded like tanks, like when the tanks—their chains when they’re hitting the cement. So it sounded like that, and the building was kind of moving, but there’s no tanks at Fort Lewis, and so the first thought was, “Those tanks are awful close.” And the second thought was, “Wait a minute. There’s no tanks at Fort Lewis because we have Striker, and they have wheels.” And somebody said, “Earthquake!” And when was the last time we had an earthquake drill? So everybody’s in their doorways and we’re in the building. Well, once the actual earthquake stops, the building was
moving like it was a waterbed because the plates were still shifting, and so you could feel the building just rocking. That was by far one of the freakiest events that happens, like, (undecipherable) I was completely out of it before I even knew that was getting ready to happen. So it was like a seven-point-something, and it was not very far away from the epicenter. It was not very far away from the installation.

It’s noises mostly. It’s not smells so much, and probably if I was in more of a desert environment or maybe if a sandstorm or something came up, then it would remind me because I have a tendency to get a little claustrophobic when a sandstorm happens because you can’t see anything, and the dust is all around you. But the noises—the noises get to me.

Gonzales: So when the Jodies are practicing, is that okay because you’re prepared for it?

Rimmer: I’m prepared for it. But even the cannons going off—because we sound the cannons in honor of our fallen—I have to, like, really concentrate and make sure that I don’t spill my drink or whatever just because it’s so loud and you just feel it. And the rockets were the things that you really had to be concerned about when you were deployed always, both deployments that I was on.
And “Taps,” so probably whenever somebody plays “Taps,” I have a hard time, I have to really control my emotions there because it’s very moving, and it makes you think of—during our last deployment, we didn’t actually lose anyone who was assigned to the unit that I was in. Several hundred soldiers died while we were deployed there. Some of them doing signal missions, and so you just always think about that whenever I hear “Taps” especially. Even the National Anthem sometimes can catch me. I get kind of emotional there too.

Gonzales: So how would you say the service has affected your life overall?

Rimmer: It’s given me real purpose. I feel like—and when you get ready to deploy and you’re leaving your ten-month-old with your sister and your family, and they’re stressed out. The thing I tried to emphasize to them is that no matter what happens, this is what I was supposed to do, and I’m doing exactly what I am meant to do: leading soldiers, taking care of soldiers, and I’m protecting freedoms, and it’s important to me to have that kind of purpose in my life.

When I worked as a contractor, I felt like it was all about money. And you know, they were billing me out at these exorbitant prices that, of course, the customer wasn’t getting that kind of return on investment. I’m good but I’m not getting that kind of return
on your investment, and the company was pocketing a lot of that money and getting wealthier and wealthier, and I just couldn’t reconcile that for myself.

This isn’t about money. This is about people and it’s about doing the right thing. I’m taking it a step further and so I feel like that it’s what I’m supposed to do. And I feel good about it waking up in the morning. I tell my cadets all the time, “You get up in the morning, and the only person you look at in the mirror is you, and you got to be able to live with you.” And what I’m doing with my life I can get up and I look at myself, and I’m proud of what I’ve done. And I hope that my kids are. I know my family is.

Gonzales: Do you feel that the ROTC training prepared you for active service?
Rimmer: I do. I do. It’s hard to teach everything that you need to know in a classroom environment, so there’s a lot of on-the-job-training that occurs, and I think the most important thing that we leave the cadets with—that I left with—is that I have a responsibility to do the right thing even when it’s not easy. You have to pick the hard right over the easy wrong every single time. And sometimes it’s not the most convenient thing to do the right thing, but it’s still our obligation. You have to do it because that’s—when we raise our hands and we take an oath, and that’s what we say that we’re going to do. And I think that’s what Army ROTC made sure that I
understood that. That I understood army values, that I understood what it means to never leave someone behind, and that’s what we try to inculcate in our classrooms here.

Gonzales: So when did you start as professor of military science at UTA?

Rimmer: I started in 2011 here, and I got assigned, I guess, in July 2011. So all the cadets—the senior cadets—the class that I was going to be assuming instructor responsibilities for, they were off at their leader development and assessment course. So I didn’t know—everybody was talking about, well, this person is doing this, and they had to land math today, and they did the water safety, and somebody had a problem out on their sticks lane. And all these names, and I didn’t know who they were talking about, and just talk, talk, talk, talk, talk about all these people.

So finally when they finally came back to school, and we started in August and I got to see their faces, I was finally able to put the name with the face, and how they did. It takes a year, really, as a professor of military science to kind of get your feet on the ground because in the school environment—most jobs it takes about ninety days in the army to kind of figure out kind of what your left and right limits are, what your boss wants you to do, how you can fit into the organization. It’s really hard to figure out that.
But here in the school environment, it’s a year-long cycle because there’s a fall semester, a spring semester, and then there’s a whole summer of activities that go on. So I’ve been through that cycle twice. I’m heading into it twice now—into the second summer. So I feel pretty good about what we’ve done and where we’ve gone, and there are all out—the first class is all out and in their units now. They’ve all completed their training and they’re all at their units, and they’re doing great things out there.

Gonzales: So what attracted you to the position?

Rimmer: Well, I think I probably—when you’re a cadet in ROTC, these are your mentors. They’re—I mean, you kind of put them on a pedestal and you aspire to be like them. And so it was always a job that I kind of had in the back of my mind that I really wanted to compete for and see if I could be selected to do it. I was, and I just feel like I have so much—I have a varied experience, I have been a lot of places and seen a lot of things that I can share some things with the cadets. A lot of what we talk about is based on personal experience, and they seem to respond to that pretty well.

Some things they don’t believe you. You know, you tell them that your new battalion commander is going to ask you to go out on a run and he’s not going to run two miles, he’s going to ask you to run six. So if you can’t run more than two miles, then you need to
start working on your mileage. Some things they don’t believe me, but they will. So when their boss takes them out on that six-mile run, then they’ll think, “That Lt. Col. Rimmer, she told me that that was going to happen, and I should’ve paid attention. Wonder what else she told me that I need to pay attention to?” That’s what I’m hoping for. I wish I could be a fly on the wall. (Both laugh)

Gonzales: So with all the changes that happened on campus in the last eight years, is there anything you would like to see change in the Department of Military Science?

Rimmer: You know, I think it would be really fantastic to bring the Jodies back. I know you’ve had folks in here who’ve interviewed who’ve talked to you about the Jodies. Probably four or five years ago, the battalion kind of let that slide. I don’t know if it was because it was hard. You have to practice a lot, and so you take up a lot of space out on the sidewalk marching up and down the sidewalk and have our rifles. They’re antique rifles. They’re not current day rifles but they’re antiques, and I think that it would be really fantastic, and I’m really pushing the cadets to consider bringing that back because that was—

You talk about belonging to a group. You’ve interviewed all of those folks and you can see it in their eyes what that group meant to them.
I think this current ROTC battalion is starting to gel as a group of people who find themselves kind of wanting to do more and be a part of that more. It's not just come to ROTC class and then we leave and then we go off and we do our other stuff. They really seem to be a really cohesive group. And they care about one another, and they're taking care of one another. So we're trying to work on those kinds of things to bring back that kind of Jodie-camaraderie. But I think having those organizations and having them be much more active would help further that. So that's kind of—it's not really what the University needs to do other than be aware that we want to come out and we want to stomp on the sidewalk two or three times a week.

Gonzales: So you mentioned the running advice. Do you have any other advice or suggestions for current UTA cadets?

Rimmer: I do. And I tell them this all the time, that their number one job is taking care of our soldiers, and that soldiers come with a complex set of problems, and every individual is unique. There's no cookie-cutter. There's no cookie-cutter SPMS with all of my students. There's no cookie-cutter solution for all of the soldiers that have been in your unit. And you have to take each situation independently. That means you have to spend the time to get to know your soldiers and make sure that the other leaders in your
unit know their soldiers. That’s how we prevent sexual harassment and that’s how to prevent suicide. That’s how we mitigate financial problems and stresses that are happening at home because with everything else that we have going on, there are things we can’t control, but knowing our people and knowing what challenges they face, we can be a part of that, and we can find a solution.

That’s probably the other thing. Be a part of the solution, don’t be a part of the problem.

Gonzales: Is there anything else you’d like to contribute to the interview that I didn’t ask?

Rimmer: Oh, I appreciate having the opportunity to chat today.

Gonzales: Oh, great!

Rimmer: Thank you.

Gonzales: No problem. We appreciate you coming out here and we want to thank you, Lt. Col. Rimmer, for coming out. It’s a pleasure talking with you. You’ve been very helpful and very informative throughout this process. So we just want to thank you for your service and for your contribution to the Maverick Veterans’ Voices Project.

Rimmer: Thank you. (end of interview)
### Index

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>4</th>
<th>440th Signal Battalion</th>
<th>13</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>advice</td>
<td>30, 32, 33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Arlington, Texas</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>awards</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Bronze Star</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>First Cavalry Division Combat Patch</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>Baghdad, Iraq</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Belton, Missouri</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C</td>
<td>Campbell, General John</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Captains Recall Program</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>civilian career</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>combat</td>
<td>8, 11, 12, 19, 21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>blackout drive</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>minefields</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>surge</td>
<td>14, 21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>cultural differences</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D</td>
<td>Desert Shield Desert Storm</td>
<td>5, 11, 14, 23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>discrimination/harassment</td>
<td>17, 33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>awareness</td>
<td>18, 19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E</td>
<td>education</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>bachelor degree</td>
<td>1, 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>master's degree</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>emotional aspects</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F</td>
<td>facilities</td>
<td>6, 7, 13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>family</td>
<td>2, 5, 15-17, 25, 27, 28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>communication with</td>
<td>5, 6, 16, 17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>heroes</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>First Armored Division British Unit</td>
<td>8-10, 13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>differences</td>
<td>10, 11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>First Cavalry Division</td>
<td>14, 21, 22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Fort Gordon, Georgia</td>
<td>2, 24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Fort Hood, Texas</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Fort Lewis, Washington</td>
<td>24, 25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>G</td>
<td>gear</td>
<td>4, 5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Germany</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Gonzales, Melissa</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I</td>
<td>Iraq</td>
<td>3, 8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>K</td>
<td>Kansas</td>
<td>15, 16, 25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Korea</td>
<td>11, 24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Kuwait</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>L</td>
<td>leave</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>M</td>
<td>Maverick Veterans Voices Project</td>
<td>1, 33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>memories and reactions</td>
<td>24, 27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>earthquake</td>
<td>25, 26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>loud noises</td>
<td>25, 26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>military career</td>
<td>3, 33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>active duty</td>
<td>23, 24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>deployments</td>
<td>7, 12-17, 23, 25-27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Desert Storm</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Germany</td>
<td>2, 4, 5, 13, 23, 24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>logistics officer</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>platoon leader</td>
<td>5, 6, 13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>professor</td>
<td>24, 29, 30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>real purpose</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>signal company</td>
<td>6, 8, 13, 16, 22, 23, 27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Signal Corps officer</td>
<td>1, 16, 22, 23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Signal Officer Basic Course</td>
<td>2-4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>training</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P</td>
<td>Paola, Kansas</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R</td>
<td>relationships</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Rimmer, Lt. Col. Lora</td>
<td>1, 31, 33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>ROTC</td>
<td>1, 2, 28, 30, 32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>cadets</td>
<td>18, 20, 28-32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Jodies</td>
<td>26, 31, 32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S</td>
<td>Saudi Arabia</td>
<td>4, 8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>standards</td>
<td>19-21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>personal opinion</td>
<td>11, 12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>T</td>
<td>Texas</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Thirty-fourth Signal Battalion ....................... 4
Alpha Company ....................................... 4

United States Army ..............2, 10, 11, 23, 27
females ................................................ 6-8
Reserves ....................................... 1, 2, 23
Signal Corps ............................. 1-3, 5
soldiers ..................... 5, 11, 18, 24, 27, 32

United States of America .................... 23
University of Texas at Arlington .... 1, 18, 29,
31, 32
Central Library ...................................... 1
College of Liberal Arts ..................... 1
department of military science .. 24, 29, 31

vehicles ..................................................... 10