

Robert Morris University Oral History Center

Iraq/Afghanistan Veterans Project



Transcript of an
Oral History Interview with
AMANDA HAINES

September 10, 2015

Haines, Amanda (1985-), Oral History Interview, September 10, 2015.

Biographical Sketch:

Amanda Haines was a Cryptologic Linguist in the United States Marine Corps. She was born in Beaver, PA in 1985 and served 5 years in the military starting in 2003 until 2008. Amanda attended boot camp at Parris Island, SC. During her time in the service, Haines was stationed in Camp Lejeune and deployed twice in support of Operation Iraqi Freedom in 2006-2007 and 2007-2008. Both tours of combat were at Camp Fallujah, Iraq in the Al Anbar Province. Amanda exited the Marine Corps as a Sergeant/E-5.

Topics Covered in Interview:

- Camp Fallujah
- Al Anbar Province
- Cryptologic Linguist
- Veterans Administration
- Leadership Role
- Female Engagement Team
- Prophet Hammer Team
- Technological Advances
- Post 9/11 GI Bill

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Edited by: Dr. John McCarthy

GD: This interview is part of the Iraq/Afghanistan Veterans Project undertaken by the Oral History Center at Robert Morris University. I am Gabe Dachille and today is September 10, 2015. I am joined by Amanda Haines. Amanda can you please state your full name and whether or not I have your consent to interview you today.

AH: My name is Amanda K. Haines and yes you have my consent.

GD: Alright we're going to start with your date and place of birth.

AH: I was born January 17, 1985 and pretty sure it was in Beaver, Pennsylvania, might have been Pittsburgh ... but (laughter)

GD: Your branch of service, your years of service, and your rank?

AH: United States Marine Corps, I was in for five years from 2003-2008 and I got out as a Sergeant E-5.

GD: Your place of enlistment and the reason why you joined?

AH: Place of enlistment was Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania and the reason I joined ... (laughter) it's kinda silly I um, I was actually originally slated to come to Robert Morris. I was accepted and I was going to come for an education program, um but I just wanted to do something different. Everyone else was going to college and I had no idea how I was going to pay for it so I went with the military.

GD: Do you have any history of family service?

AH: No, I do not. Um ... I think I have a great grandfather maybe that (inaudible) definitely that was in the Navy, I think it was during World War II. I hadn't really heard much about him until I enlisted. My grand-pap talks about him all the time now.

GD: What was the impact of 9/11 on you?

AH: 9/11 was huge. I was in 11th grade when 9/11 happened. I remember I was in biology class. My teacher got a phone call from her mom, totally frantic about this plane hitting a tower. My teacher was just like, "What're you talking about? You're crazy." And I mean that was of course

in the morning and um ... they started turning on TV's in the school and we saw everything happen and, I mean, that entire day I could remember every single moment. I remember getting home and my dad sitting in front of the TV and watching all the news coverage. Ever since then seeing all the memorials um ... it had a really heavy impact. I mean, I don't think I would have ever considered the military if it hadn't been for 9/11. Maybe, but I know that definitely pushed ... the issue.

GD: That answers my next question. Apart from what happened on September 11th, what was your understanding of the Iraq and Afghanistan Wars upon entering service, and has it changed throughout your course of service and afterwards? (0:03:25)

AH: I was a dumb kid whenever all that happened. I didn't know anything about the Middle East. I didn't know anything about what was happening over there. All I knew was what was coming out in the news and I think we know now that a lot of that wasn't true and there were a lot of things that, you know, weren't correct about what was going on over there, um ... but just in general, I mean about what was happening over there, um.. I really had no clue and so when it came to 9/11 and going into Iraq and Afghanistan I just figured people had made a lot more money than me or my parents were making the right decisions.

GD: Discuss your job, your training, and your life on base and overall feeling of deploying.

AH: Well, my technical MOS in the Marine Corps was 2674 a Cryptologic Spanish Linguist. But, obviously they don't really need that in Iraq, so it was kind of a joke. I went through all this training to learn Spanish of all languages and I had to test out every year for it in order to stay proficient and get paid for my job but, I mean ... you don't need that. So I got all this training to be a linguist and we got a little bit of Intel training as well. Um ... but ... it wasn't really everything I needed to prepare me for actually deploying and getting into Iraq and doing my job there. So, I guess just the background on, like, what I did, you know, I went to boot camp in 2003. I went to Parris Island ... got there in September so ... (inaudible) everything you hear about with Marine Corps training and uh ... got out of boot camp um ... and I would say the one thing I learned from boot camp is that, you know, I can really do anything if you just get out and do it, put your mind to it, um ... so getting a lot of confidence. Went on to the defense language institute in Monterey, California. That's where they taught me Spanish even though I had already had like, 6 years in high school. Tested out and then I went to intel training at Goodfellow Air Force Base in San Angelo, Texas, finished that up in a few months and, so I think it was ... 2005 that I finally got to Camp Lejeune in North Carolina. From that point, you know, there wasn't a Spanish mission for us linguists but they were sending all kind of (inaudible) there so we turned into either signal intelligence team members or um ... they would put us on the MEU's (Marine Expeditionary Unit) vehicles, they'd turn us into analysts. It just depended on where you ended up and what your strengths were.

GD: Did you get any Female Engagement Team Training (FETT)? Did you do any of that?

AH: Um ... they hit on hit a little bit before we deployed, but it was just so general. It was like an hour, um ... and I don't think it was legit. I think they just covered it and that this was what was happening. I did get to go out um ... on a um ... what was it called ... IWE Mission, Iraqi Women's Engagement um ... cause they were just kinda getting volunteers to go out for it so my second deployment I got to go out for that and it was pretty incredible. I wish I woulda done it more cause um ... I got to meet some of the Iraqi women. They were providing them with medical care. Got to see the kids and the kids just loved you. You'd give them soccer balls and they'd just go crazy um ... so that was pretty cool. I think that was a really neat experience.

GD: Now let's go to ... all right so you deployed. What dates did you deploy? And where? (0:08:09)

AH: First time was ... okay let me think here. First time was from late August of 2006 until early March of 2007. And then the next deployment came right after I left in September of 2007 and got back in February of 2008. They were always approximately, like 6 months.

GD: Right, and where were you both of those times?

AH: Camp Fallujah.

GD: Both times?

AH: Yeah. I was with different units both times. The first time was with Alpha ... well ... I was with Second Radio Battalion while I was at Lejeune um ... and I ... the first time I deployed with Alpha Company, so that was more of like a collections company. And the second time I was with what was called um ... it was like our headquarters group called the O-CAP(?) um ... so we were more of like the analyst division.

GD: You pretty much described your mission over there. Now you said your tours were 6 months?

AH: Yes. Approximately. My first tour was a little bit longer cause um ... they had me leaving first and then coming back later cause I was heading up a collections team out there and it was a fairly newer type of team cause it was a remote um ... in place team, so it wasn't moving around with the grunts. It was on Camp Fallujah.

GD: Can you go into the comradery that you shared with your fellow soldiers that you were deployed with? And kind of how that whole deal works.

AH: Um ... I ... well first of all I had some of the best times of my life when I was in the Marines. I mean I don't know if you can compare it to college like, you know you get out of high school and you go to college, you get a bunch of buddies and you just go out and party. You have a great time. And it's the same thing but you're doing a job and everyone knows what that one job is and you know there's a higher purpose to it all. Um ... you make some really great friends but at the same time you get, you know, people that get pissed off at each other. Um ... but everybody knows each other and no matter what, you know, what goes on you're always looking out for each other's back and um.. I mean I was in a very different role. It's not like I was

out in combat or anything but, I mean, everybody has to work together. So whether you like somebody or not you're always working together um ... and then some of my best friends, I mean, some of my best memories are getting off work, getting into shorts and a t-shirt and sitting and smoking cigars with a bunch of the guys. You know there weren't a whole lot of other girls but you know we'd all get together and just ... talk and BS and they'd play guitar and it was good times.

GD: Can you discuss the overall morale of the troops and did it differ between your two tours? And were there any major issues? (0:11:48)

AH: Um ... well I think between the two times that I deployed, the first time things were a little bit, I guess you can say more dangerous. I mean I know Camp Fallujah is a huge base but we were still getting mortared in the beginning it was like every week, every couple weeks. But then towards the end it really wasn't happening um ... and then second time around I think they only got mortared once. So I mean things were starting to get a little different and um ... and I guess ... I'm like losing my train of thought here ... um sorry can you say the question again? (Laughter)

GD: The morale, the overall morale.

AH: Um ... yeah, so I mean like I said everybody knew they had a job to do so they were doing it ... I guess it wasn't bad. The morale wasn't bad um ... I don't really know how to explain that sorry (laughter)

GD: No you're fine. Were you in a leadership position both times or was it different?

AH: Yeah. I was. The first time around I headed up a team of linguists. It was called a Prophet Hammer Team. It was one of the remote collection sites um ... but what was different about it was I had both military linguists and civilian. So that was kinda tough because the civilian linguists, they don't have the same work ethic um ... and I guess discipline that the military linguists have. So military linguists, they're ready to go to work 12 hours a day, but a civilian one is kind of annoyed to work 8 hours, so when you have needs and you've got all this different collection coming in um ... sometimes it's hard to negotiate that. Plus, I ran into some issues when we moved our site down to the south end of the base um ... they had the outgoing artillery going out there and it was really loud. I had this one woman, she couldn't do it anymore. She quit because it was too loud. It scared the heck outta her, which I mean people would criticize her because they're like, "Oh she comes to Iraq, what's she expect?" You know she's on a military base." But I mean you try to look at it from her point of view. It's a scary thing you know. But then the second time around uh ... I was in charge of, it was a team of analysts. We still got collection but I was in charge of the analysts going through the collection and picking out and instead of it being geared towards um ... like looking for the bad guys and protecting the good guys like it was the first time, this time it was a team called Security Governance and Economics, working the hearts and minds, stuff like that. We were in Al Anbar so Sheik Zatar was heading up (inaudible/words I couldn't understand) um ... so they were really helping us in the effort and getting things to calm down and fighting against Al Qaeda. So we

were listening in for the good guys and also the structure of the government and trying to get a feel for what the environment was there at more of a civil level which was totally different from what I had done before. But ... our higher ups needed to know that stuff.

GD: Do you feel that being in a leadership position affected your experience over there, as far as being in charge of other people? I know mortars are coming in and accountability and making sure your soldiers underneath you, all their issues are taken care of. Did you feel that that put an extra strain on you a little bit? (0:16:07)

AH: Yeah, absolutely. I mean cause like I said with the first time around you're dealing with, you know, both the military and civilians ... I mean, just stupid stuff like scheduling ... you know people get ticked off if you put them on a certain schedule or something, making sure making sure they're doing their PTA. You would think, you know, whenever you're deployed that stuff is so stupid, but it's still stuff you have to do and you know you're being judged as a leader on that. Second time around when I was in charge of analysts a lot of them were around my age and you know we were all buddies, all friends before that and you get in charge of your friends and sometimes people don't like that. So um ... that was tough sometimes dealing with just stupid stuff: waking up on time, getting to work on time. I mean we're all tired, we're all exhausted and some of these guys just didn't wanna wake up. Some of them didn't want to PT (Physical Training) and I get it, but it's like, when it's your job to make sure they're doing that even if you're overseas it's hard, it's tough. ... I know whenever ... I learned a lot, you know, being in that position and I probably sucked in the leadership role but um ... I learned a lot from it and I look back on it a lot and think about what I wish I woulda done and use that today anytime I have to do stuff like that.

GD: I know you talked about the lack of standards while in deployment and that's very interesting especially because Marines are supposed to not be like that but (laughter). It was a joke. You talked about a lot of what you did over there, let's talk about your free time while you were deployed. What did you do to keep your mind off, the separation between the mission and maintaining your sanity?

AH: Well, I mean, technology is a lot different now. So the first time around it was going to use the internet or something, send emails or something, watching movies. They ... the second time I was there it was pretty sweet. They had a shared drive you could get on to um ... with the connection in our little trailer/village (laughter) and you could watch any movie you wanted. They had everything. Other stuff too, I mean ... just going out to PT, the gym, um ... I think the best shape I've ever been in was in Iraq ... I'd pay to get in that kinda shape again. Yeah, just whatever. The first time around again just being able to head over to somebody else's trailer and sit outside, pull up a bunch of chairs and BS and you know, some of them would get a hookah or something and just sit around and talk and ... one guy got a guitar. He'd play guitar um ... just hanging out with buddies whenever we had the chance.

- GD: Did you feel, I know you were there '06 – '07, '07 – '08. Now there was an increase in technology. Was there really a big difference between your two tours and the technology available for you to use, as far as social media? (0:20:06)
- AH: First time around to get on email or order anything or get in touch with anybody online I would either have to get on the computer that was in with our group, our team or you'd have to go to ... I forget what it was called, what the center was called. The rec center or whatever it was and use the internet there. Second time around you just paid a monthly fee and you had it in your trailer, so you could get on your personal computer and you could chat with people. I know I was dating a guy going into my second tour. I used to talk to him on the "AOL Messenger" all the time. Same thing with phone calls and stuff, it seemed like the second time around it was easier to make phone calls and do that sort of thing. So that was a big difference.
- GD: Do you feel that the increase in technology helped you maintain more of a touch? I know that it's obvious you have more in touch with the world. Do you feel that it was more of a benefit or maybe a con?
- AH: I think it was a benefit ... well I don't know. Sometimes, I think maybe a benefit. I think ... as far as the difference I think first time around ... I guess I probably hung out with friends a lot more there and actually socialized with people, whereas the second time around I was sitting on my computer like a bum (laughter). I don't know, I think it was definitely helpful, especially keeping in touch with family. That was huge, being able to keep in touch with them cause I know my sister was going through a really rough time on my second deployment so I think that was beneficial.
- GD: How did your deployment affect your family back home and your relationships with your family members?
- AH: Well, I mean my family has always been really proud. I don't think they really ever understood my entire military service. I think they just saw, "Oh Amanda's in the Marines" and they think you're like this tough guy or something. I remember my dad's like, cowboy, biker dude, drinks his Budweiser (laughter) ... he's just ... you know ... I came home for my first time around and it seemed like everybody thought I could like drink and go crazy and I'm a Marine and I'm hardcore, I could probably beat anybody's ass. And I'm like, no that's not me, that's not what I'm doing. Yeah I'm probably tougher in some ways but it's not like I can kill you with my pinky or something. My entire family was always really proud. I think my mom kept pretty quiet about it. She didn't talk much about it, which is kinda nice because I think I've always been a little bit quieter about my military service. I didn't want to be out there in people's faces. You get some Marines that'll go to bars in their uniform. I just wanna kick them cause I can't get in that mindset. I think it's just too much. But, yeah I guess the only thing that irritated me was when people thought, you know, "She's a Marine." They thought I would just, you know, be somebody I'm not.

GD: Do you feel you being used effectively on your tours? I know that you were a linguist and that wasn't your job but do you still feel that the military made good use of you as a tool, I guess?

AH: I think so. I mean, because you always hear the saying "Adapt and overcome". That was just what they needed at the time and I'm glad that I had the chance to help. I do wish I would've had more training. I felt a lot of the time I was just getting thrown into a role and I think that had I had better training I could've done my job a lot better um ... cause you can't spend a year and a half training somebody to be a linguist and then all of a sudden say, "Hey, we know this is what you are but you're going to do this now." I'm a quick learner, but to be ... whenever you go over there and you do that you wanna be an expert and I didn't feel like an expert. Especially going from two different jobs each time um ... that was kinda frustrating, but adapt and overcome. (0:25:21)

GD: How did the wars change you personally?

AH: Well, I was in my early 20s so I think no matter what everybody grows up a lot at that point. But growing up and making the kind of friends you make that are going out and they're going into combat and feeling like you have this job to do to keep them and others safe. It's a lot of responsibility. So I think that's a big part. I did a lot of my young person learning, stupid stuff like relationships and um ... just making those stupid kid mistakes, but at the same time having some really big responsibilities and having things expected of you. So I think coming out of it I was a lot more prepared for the real world. A lot more mature.

GD: The media portrayal of the wars, do you feel they give an accurate portrayal of what's going on over there or what was going on over there throughout the wars?

AH: I think they tried, but I think no matter where you go whether it's here in the U.S. or somewhere else in the world people are going to take what they want and turn it into what they want it to be. Like I said my second time around I was doing a lot of the security governance and economics stuff and I knew what a big deal Saqlawiyah, Iraq or Saqlawiyah, Al Anbar and what a difference it was making in the war against Al Qaeda and Sheik Zatar, he ended up getting killed while I was on my second tour and like, knowing that happened, knowing when it happened, knowing everything about it, knowing what an impact that had um ... and they did do a documentary on that cause I remember when I got back I watched it on CNN or something and I was like, "yes! This is awesome! The American people are gonna know about all this." And that was the only thing you'd see. And I looked for books about it and everything and you just don't see a lot out there. I guess that can happen with anything. You feel like something's so significant and nobody really cares about it.

GD: Let's talk about re-integration from your tours. I guess you didn't have a lot of time to re-integrate between your first and second tours. So we'll talk about overall re-integration back into garrison life. Was it difficult?

AH: Well yeah like in between tours you were training for the next one. But the second time when I was back again my battalion was heading back out again so it was about training the ones that were going back, passing on that knowledge, helping them out. But, I think, I don't think it was hard. I mean um ... I was just happy to be back. I think I was trying to enjoy myself and enjoy my time with my friends and make sure I was passing on everything I already knew cause I didn't really have a whole lot more of a role other than that cause I think there was like five months before I got out after my second tour.

GD: So you were mission oriented when you came back? (0:29:42)

AH: Yeah you still had a purpose. I mean even though it was a little bit more relaxed because, you know, you didn't have to go um ... it was, you still had a job to teach them. I think it was hard (inaudible) it was nice knowing I didn't have to go back again, not that I hated it or anything I mean, I think I actually tried to stay longer but they wouldn't let me because I was so close to my EAS (End of Active Service). But ... there was a part of me that wanted to go back. I mean, I think this is a thing with all military folks, you get into that feel and once you get out you almost want to go back all the time. I know my brother-in-law tells me all the time he wants to reenlist. I thought about it for a long time um ... I guess you just want to be there with, even if they're not your friends, you just want to be there with those other people. You know you just have that comradery and you feel like you're doing something important. (0:30:50)

GD: Now were there any social affects upon redeployment? Not just personally but, like did you do the same things as you were deployed? Did you sit outside and BS with your friends and smoke cigars? Or did you find going public places was a little bit different or interacting with regular people or civilians upon being redeployed, did you feel there was a change, that you were changed before your deployments and after your deployments in regards to socialization?

AH: A little bit. I mean things we did were different. We'd go to each other's houses and drink or go out to bars and hang out there. We'd go to the beach and stuff like that. Things weren't completely different, I still had the same friends and everything. It was just a different way of hanging out I guess. I know even after I got out I went back down to North Carolina to see a bunch of them. We did the same stuff. Just hung out and went to bars, went to the beach.

GD: What do you believe the average American understands about veterans?

AH: You mean what the perception is of veterans?

GD: Right.

AH: I don't know. I think that they probably group them all into one category. I know personally I've run into a lot of instances where people are just kinda shocked that I was in the military and the Marines. I mean cause the Marines just have, like you know, tough guy persona but I mean I'm not exactly tough guy. I'm heavier now than when I was in, I was like 118 pounds when I was in so um ... Yeah I guess it's just grouping them all in one category and one mindset cause I know I

think different that probably a lot of other veterans do and everybody's different. It was probably the one thing I really learned being in the military. There's so many different people and that actually used to piss me off because I would meet people and I could not understand why they would think a certain way and I would just go on and on. I wouldn't argue with them but we'd just have differing points of view and they just had a certain mindset and at some point you just have to accept that's how people think and you're not going to change it. It gave me more of a world view. I mean there's so many different people and different ways they're raised and different cultures they live in and you just have to accept that's the way it is.
(0:33:56)

GD: What are some things that, if you were to talk to an average Joe on the street, what're some things that you would want them to understand about the war that they may not know?

AH: I guess just that there was a lot more to it than just guys going out and kicking down doors and fighting Al Qaeda. I talked about the second deployment, I mean the hearts and minds was a really big part of that second deployment ... and making sure we were rebuilding Iraq. So there was really, really different part to that war and it wasn't just about shooting guys up and killing bad guys.

GD: How do you think your war experience or your experience deployed compares to those from past wars?

AH: Well the technology, definitely. I mean there's new technology and communication, media. I remember whenever, I think my second time around President Bush came in the country and I think we knew about it ... it wasn't long before that he was coming in and we saw it all over the news. But communicating with family and being in touch with people and being able to tell them, you know, what's happening, what you're doing and ... yeah.

GD: Do you have a different perspective of the war now than you did going in? Obviously yes, but how did it really change?

AH: I think just learning more about the background. Like I said I was a dumb kid, I just went in and did it. But I do a lot more reading now about why it happened and, you know, what occurred while I was there. Which is kinda cool cause, you know, you know what was actually happening with the big wigs and politics and stuff like that. And then seeing what everybody's perspective of it was ... after actually experiencing it.

GD: Have you had any experience with the VA?

AH: Only with my GI bill and that was kind of a nightmare at first cause whenever I got out I went to CAL U for my undergrad and they were having issues cause it was the post 9/11 GI bill. They were having all kinds of issues getting things going with that. Somehow I ended up owing thousands of dollars and ended up having to pay it back and had to take out a student loan to

cover, it was just really confusing and slow. Everybody's perception of it being completely slow is 100% correct.

GD: How do you feel about the way your country treated you in terms of your service?

AH: Oh, sometimes I feel like it's just too much. I think, and that's, I don't know that's just me. Not that I'm humble about it, I'm just not flashy about being a veteran or, you know, being deployed. It's nice to know that people respect the service and stuff like that but I ... I feel sometime like it's almost a blind respect, like they don't, I don't know, like they'll hang their yellow ribbons. But then they don't have really any further ... involvement than that. They don't try to understand enough about veterans and the service and what actually goes into these wars. But that's just me, I mean that's just my own opinion. I'm really glad that there's that respect there because I know when I was out in Monterey for my (inaudible) training, we had people protesting the military on the side of the road every weekend. They'd fly the flag upside down when we'd drive by and it just ticked you off and they would spit on military, they didn't want us there. That's hard. I mean, and I can't imagine the entire country being like that, so I'm in no way ungrateful for the recognition we get as veterans and service members but, just sometimes I just feel like it's ... they just do it to do it. (0:39:35)

GD: Is there anything you would like to share that would maybe help, I mean you've already shared so much, but is there anything that you would like to share that we haven't talked about in regards to anything?

AH: I don't know. I know we talked about, you know, what the perception of the war was and everything and I just think it's important that people know of it. There's real people in other places, you know when we go into these wars it's not just, you know chess pieces or ... you know these are men, women, and children that lose their lives. There's people dying and all has consequences, I mean we're dealing with ISIS right now and a lot of that is, I mean, even though there's no guarantee that all this wouldn't be going on anyway but I mean ISIS is a big ... or the Iraq War was a big factor with um ... everything that's going on with ISIS (Islamic State of Iraq and Syria) today. There's people, I mean, real life people. If you looked at your neighbor and pictured them in the same position these people in other countries are in ... they want the same things we do. They just want to live their lives and be happy. I think we really disconnect with that in the U.S. and we don't do enough to look out for people that aren't here next door or whatever.

GD: We had talked about earlier about the photographs, journals, maps, movies, and we'll deal with that via email. Well that concludes our interview. Thank you Amanda for sharing your story. (0:41:36)

