

**Wisconsin Veterans Museum  
Research Center**

Transcript of an  
Oral History Interview with  
**ALICIA SCHNEIDER**  
Air Crew, Air National Guard, Iraq War

2011

OH  
1472

**OH  
1472**

**Alicia Schneider**, (b. 1987). Oral History Interview, 2011.

User Copy: 1 sound cassette (ca. 46 min.); analog, 1 7/8 ips, mono.

Master Copy: 1 sound cassette (ca. 46 min.); analog, 1 7/8 ips, mono.

**Abstract:**

Alicia Schneider, a Waunakee, Wisconsin native, discusses her Iraq War service as part a flight crew in the Air National Guard. She explains her family's reaction to her enlistment and addresses the issue of being a female in the military. Schneider details daily life during her deployment to Iraq, including food, living arrangements, mortar attacks, climate and recreation. Special mention is made of the cord handed out by the USO to make bracelets. She also mentions a vacation taken to Germany where she visited a veterans hospital. Schneider explains the boundary she puts between her military and civilian lives and why that boundary is necessary. She also reminisces about civilian reactions to her military status.

**Biographical Sketch:**

Alicia Schneider (b. 1987) serves with the 115<sup>th</sup> Fighter Wing 176<sup>th</sup> Fighter Squadron as a member of a flight crew in the Air National Guard. In 2009, she deployed to Iraq for 90 days, but her unit's home base is Truax AFB, Madison (Wisconsin).

Interviewed by Rachel Winkler, 2011.

Transcribed by Joshua Goldstein, 2014.

Transcription edited by Rebecca Cook, 2015.

Abstract written by Rebecca Cook, 2015.

## Interview Transcript

Winkler: This is an interview with Alicia Schneider who served with the Air National Guard during the Iraq War. This interview is being conducted at the Department of Veteran Affairs at 30 West Mifflin, Madison, Wisconsin on October 26th of 2011. The interviewer is Rachel Winkler. So just to start off tell me just a little bit about yourself like your background and where you're from.

Schneider: Well my name is Alicia Schneider. I am originally from Waunakee, Wisconsin so very close. I went to high school there and everything. I went to my undergrad at UW-Milwaukee and have my degree in history. I currently go Madison to get my MA in Anthropological Studies. And that's about it for that type of thing.

Winkler: Maybe like what your family life was like when you were growing up?

Schneider: Pretty typical suburb Waunakee. We did all the sports, did three sports a year, kept busy. I did a lot of outdoors type stuff and my dad was also in the military so it was something I knew and experienced. We got to travel a lot; he was in the Reserves so we maybe got to travel maybe once a year. He was high ranking so he got to do fun stuff like go to Germany and Virginia almost every year.

Winkler: Was he Air Force Reserves like you?

Schneider: He was originally Air Force for four years when he was like seventeen and then he became Army Reserves after he went and got his degree and everything like that.

Winkler: Were they surprised at all when you decided to join?

Schneider: No, [laughs] every time we went somewhere we stayed on military bases so it was definitely a part of my life. And my older sister is thirty-one and she joined before me. So it was kind of a succession of children. And my little sister tried to but her eye sight was bad so she didn't get to join. So it was pretty much coming but it was more when we were going to talk about it.

Winkler: Did you enlist out of high school or go to college first?

Schneider: I enlisted yeah in my last month of high school.

Winkler: What about the rest of your extended family, were they surprised by it or get any grandma's being like you shouldn't do that?

Schneider: No, definitely a huge part of my life. My grandmother is actually from Italy and met her husband who was a German G.I. while she lived there so got pregnant

with my father and came back so that was obvious. And my other grandma--my grandpa was in the Navy as well and my uncle so everyone is like okay.

Winkler: You have such a military family, that's great. So when you first started where did you go to boot camp and stuff like that?

Schneider: I went to San Antonio, Texas at Laughlin Air Force Base.

Winkler: How was it?

Schneider: It was okay. Always tell people that are starting basic, it is going to be something you remember but will be something you just want to remember because it binds you together with everybody that you meet. The military is definitely something where you can be anywhere in the world but if you meet someone in the military you have this common experience so you will already be friends. It doesn't have to take a while.

Winkler: For you, were you at boot camp with men and women or was it separated?

Schneider: Its men and women they have what you call Brother Flights and Sister Flights, so you'd be in the same building but you would be in separate bays as they say, so separate dorm rooms.

Winkler: Did you do the actual training together?

Schneider: Yes, every time you came down, the Air Force has flights instead of platoons or whatever the Army has. So you get into your flight and you'd get into your brother-sister flight would join a lot together. And you'd work out together, eat together, go to classes together pretty much everything but sleep together.

Winkler: Was there any competition between the two, any discrimination or anything like that?

Schneider: Definitely competition and the TIs kind of pushed it too because you know we are girls. But the girl flight did win in the end and got all the awards and the boy flight continued to get into trouble.

Winkler: So there wasn't any "we are better than you because we are men" kind of thing?

Schneider: No, not really.

Winkler: That's good. So after boot camp did you go to --what is in the Air Force? A-School, or?

Schneider: Technical school.

Winkler: Technical school.

Schneider: Tech School, yup, I actually had this thing called “split training”. I came in right as it ended so I was kind of grandfathered in which was nice for me because that way I could go to basic in the summer, then I started my first year of college and then I came back in my summer of sophomore of college for Tech School. Which is a little weird because they have a pipelining where they go straight from basic to tech school and then to your base. I had experienced what it was like to be in the normal Guard world. And then came back to active duty Tech School with everyone who comes out of basic scared and still in that hardcore regimen so it was a little weird for me to come back. I was sort of lax when I shouldn’t have been lax.

Winkler: So you were fresh out of high school when you did this?

Schneider: Uh-huh.

Winkler: So you were eighteen?

Schneider: Seventeen.

Winkler: Seventeen? Wow. What year were you born?

Schneider: 1987.

Winkler: 1987, so quite a young age. So what service unit did you get into?

Schneider: I’m in the 115th Fighter Wing and I am part of the 176th Fighter Squadron.

Winkler: Okay, do you have any stories from getting into it, like anything weird that happened or funny?

Schneider: No, I’m probably pretty text book besides the split training that was weird because I got yelled at a couple of times for that type of thing.

Winkler: How long was your basic training?

Schneider: It was only six weeks.

Winkler: How long were you at your tech school?

Schneider: I was what they called a pop-tart so I was six weeks too, just in an out.

Winkler: Did you have any instructors that stood out? Any were particularly harsh or nice?

Schneider: Well my basic CI was his first time with a girl flight and he basically he wanted to be tough but he definitely had that-- he learned that women treat a little bit differently. You can yell at us but whatever--we are different if you give us kind of that father over daughter thing and make him feel sad or a little disappointed we'll react and then we'll change our ways. So he kind of--instead of being super mean he'd be like "oh, I'm really disappointed that I had to hear about this today." And that would get us all upset and then we'd have to work so much harder the next time because you made him sad.[laughs]

Winkler: It's tricky, so were there any specific instances that happened, like the first time it happened you were kind of blown away by it or--?

Schneider: Well, we kind of acted like we ran the place. You know girls [laughs]; they make their own little hierarchy form. And rule each other by themselves instead of how guys normally do it. He always wanted us to be the perfect-- there were different awards you could get, athletic awards and dorm flight and all that type of stuff. And he always wanted us to have the perfect dorm so he'd be like "oh someone came in today while you guys were working out and saw how horrible your beds were made." And we'd be held to press. And we got caught and he knows about it like we were going to hide from our dad or something like that.

Winkler: That's really cool. What made you decide to join the Air Force instead of the other branches?

Schneider: Well my dad did say I was only allowed to join the Air Force but like that was going to stop me. It was basically was the best fit for me. I always thought I wanted to be a fighter pilot so I figured I would join the Air Force. It was just after I started to go to school I realized I didn't really want to be a fighter pilot. That I didn't want to take two years away from school to go live somewhere else and just focus on planes. I like my one weekend a month. I like my two weeks because it allowed me to have full civilian life but I did have my military life which I liked a lot. So the Air Guard was right next door basically at Truax Field so it was perfect.

Winkler: So after your Tech School where did you get assigned?

Schneider: Well that was the good part of the Guard, I got to choose, so I just came right back to Madison. And that way too is nice because if I wanted to move for my civilian job you can always join another Guard base somewhere else.

Winkler: What did you do when you were on base?

Schneider: I do airproof flight equipment which is basically just inspect pilots' gear. And since we had fighter jets it would be helmets and G-suits and harnesses. And then they also joined us together so we work on parachutes and things like that.

Winkler: So how does that work? If you find something wrong with it did you actually have to do it or did you delegate that to somebody else?

Schneider: That would be what I would do, I fix it. Even as a supervisor you would do that work too. Like, you go through phases. Basically, like medieval time you are a journeyman. You go through apprentice, journeyman, supervisor, those types of steps. So even as a supervisor you work on the gear and fix it yourself but then you can also oversee the younger enlisted Airmen and help them out with things like that.

Winkler: So when you first got to your first base what was your rank?

Schneider: I was an A1-C an Airmen First Class. It is an E-3, I have to double--yup E-3. It's basically in the Guard you get ranked differently than you would on active duty. And they'd make fun of us, you'd tie a shoe and get a stripe kind of. That was the joke about the Air National Guard. But because you graduate from high school you automatically get two stripes instead if you just went in to active duty you get what they call "slick sleeves", you'd have nothing.

Winkler: What's your rank now?

Schneider: I'm a Staff Sergeant.

Winkler: And how long did it take you to get there?

Schneider: Six years.

Winkler: Have you been deployed at all?

Schneider: Yes.

Winkler: Where'd you go?

Schneider: I went to Iraq in 2009.

Winkler: Where were you there?

Schneider: I can't say the city and I can't remember the base's name either. It's just a little too fresh but I was definitely close to the action I will say.

Winkler: Can you tell me what you did there?

Schneider: Yes, I did the same thing that I do here it was just in a war setting so you do it a little bit more-- it's actually what's nice about the job it is a little bit more lax than most in the desert which sounds kind of weird but here you do a lot of computer based training, stay up on everything. Make sure all your paperwork is in order and do inspections. When you go to the desert you make sure everything is good to go at all times. And then you have to do the extreme fixes in case anything happens.

Winkler: So while you were over there what were your living conditions like?

Schneider: Well everyone picked on me because I didn't get my stripe in time to get the single dorms so I had to be in a dorm with a bunch of people, which actually turned out really nice because my bathroom was connected to the dorms so everyone else had to get dressed in proper PT gear and walk out to the bathrooms so I got to go in my underwear. And everyone else had to put on their shorts, tuck in their shirts, put their hair up, put the proper shoes on, reflective belt, whatever you needed. And I just got up in the middle of the night and walk which I thought was the best thing ever.

Winkler: Sounds like it. Other than that were you living with only Air Force people?

Schneider: Yes the base--it is completely divided so that Army in their own section, Air Force is in their own section.

Winkler: And were you just with women in your dorm?

Schneider: Yes.

Winkler: Does anything stick out from while you were over there that you are allowed to talk about?

Schneider: I always think about, when I usually see fireworks I kind of think about it because we were kind of stuck "in the wire" as they say on base because we are Air Force and that is where we are needed by the planes. And planes aren't going off base unless they are flying so but we would get mortared like every day at least once or twice. I remember just walking to work, looking over "Look a firework", in my head I know it isn't a firework, but it exploded so pretty. Oh pretty, we just saw this mortar explode over my head but, oh well, let's go to work [laughs]. When you think about going to the desert you are like "oh my goodness I'm going to get shot at, get mortared." And then you are over there and like "Oh that is pretty." Actually we got to stay at a base that had a pool because it was not our base originally, so it was Saddam's base so we got a pool. And we got to hang out there of course in military regulated attire. And actually my sister got to go to Iraq with

me. We were hanging out on our day off, we coordinated them. And we were sitting there and all of a sudden we heard a pop and we heard this *weeee*. I-we kind of looked around and there is this boom right outside the pool. And they had music so the music stopped and I just remember looking down and me and her and this beetle on the ground and the beetle stopped. And everyone is kind of looking at each other and we are like "Oh my goodness should we take out our Airmen's Manual?" Here we are in our swim suits trying to figure out how to save this. And there are a couple of Captains next to us and we are looking around and we are like--and the music comes back on and okay we'll just keep hanging out. And then we heard the alarm, like Alarm Red, a bomb hit, be careful. And we are like okay I guess that happened, oh well.

Winkler: So did you have the firework feeling the first time you got mortared?

Schneider: No, it was pretty scary. I remember because I was really scared because my sister had gone in 2005. And just heard horror stories, bombs hitting, you never knew when anything was coming because she went to build a base. So, when I got there I was freaking out thinking "oh my God I'm going to die bombs they are going to be hitting everywhere." so the first time I heard an Alarm Red I was actually Skyping and you had to go underneath the table. So I went underneath the table, other people I saw kind of Skyping with their headphones on but under the table just trying to be like "It's okay, just hold on a second." And I'm like "Can you hold on a second, I'm almost going to cry." "We're going to die."

Winkler: You made it through?

Schneider: Yeah then it became, I want to go out and see [laughs] when I should be underneath the desk.

Winkler: Were there any other incoming things that other than the mortar and the bomb?

Schneider: I remember one time I was sitting at my desk and I got a little lazy and had my feet on the desk because we had just finished everyone taking off. So, I was going to take a break and eat and all of a sudden the whole building just shakes. And you are kind of like "What just happened, should I go outside?" There are three of us in there, okay who is going outside, should we go outside, should we stay in here, should we call somebody? We all kind of have to decide what to do. And we decided to run outside, there is smoke coming out and we are like okay cool and we went back inside.

Winkler: How long were you over there?

Schneider: Ninety days.

Winkler: Ninety days, was that your only deployment?

Schneider: Yeah.

Winkler: And when was that 2009?

Schneider: Yup.

Winkler: Are you still stationed here in Madison?

Schneider: Uh-huh.

Winkler: Ever been anywhere else?

Schneider: Nope, RAF cycle hasn't come up yet, coming up soon though.

Winkler: How has it been just being a woman in the military?

Schneider: It's pretty easy. I mean not easy per se like everybody doing things for you, but easier then you'd expect it to be. You know you always think of guys as kind of making it more difficult and things but at first it was a little difficult because our base was going through changes, growing and doing different things. And we only had one stall for our bathroom and then the number of women began to grow so then they were like okay we need to build a bigger bathroom. So that was pretty difficult but other than that everyone treats you the same, there's really no difference.

Winkler: That's good. Did it change at all when you were overseas?

Schneider: No. Not at all.

Winkler: That's good. When you were over there um did you like-- do things that you did apart from your job that you just had to do every day like good luck rituals or anything like that?

Schneider: I just slept a lot and then I got time off. I don't know why, it was just the comfort of every day going to the same job. And just knowing okay I am going to work from like six at night to six in the morning every day and I know what I am going to do. I know how to do it. It was almost relaxing. After coming from-- because I ran track in college and then I coached track and get down with my classes--I can do just this one thing and I can do it well. And I can go to bed and get some sleep so it was pretty much relaxing so we'd pretty much sleep all the time. But, on our day off they had this little Italian restaurant, it was ran by Iraqis so it was the only Italian you could get but we would go there every time and get pizza. And then we would go to the USO and you could get three strings a day and then you'd

make the bracelets. I don't know if you've seen the bracelet, a lot of people wear them. And they teach you how to make them and the USO gives you the strings so everyday people go get three strings a day. And then you get a button off an old uniform or have a button left over then you make these bracelets.

Winkler: But what are the bracelets?

Schneider: They are just--Almost like when you were little and made those little friendship bracelets out of those weird tiny strings. I don't know but made like Ben Franklin but they were just basically 550 cords, so parachute cord, different colors and they would give them to you. And they teach you this little way of braiding them. So they are kind of thick and you then you'd put the button on the end. It is a military button off a uniform because that is all we had and then you'd hook them together and that would be the bracelet. Usually, you see a lot of people wear them. I know commercially now they are trying to sell them because it is a cool thing but you can tell when somebody made them because it kind of sticks out.

Winkler: Do they mean anything?

Schneider: They kind of ending up meaning something because it is something all people do and all USOs pretty much gives out the strings and do it. So now if you see someone with a bracelet you are kind of like "oh you made that or got it from war or someone you know went to war" so it is starting to mean something.

Winkler: What's the USO?

Schneider: It's just an origination they have them in like every airport in a lot of cities and stuff just to help out servicemen and women--it's not like there are civilians over there at the USO, its people who volunteer. Military people on their day off can go volunteer and work there. They are the ones who help you--you can videotape books to your children. They rent Wi-Fi outlets so you can rent movies and books, just kind of a way to connect with home.

Winkler: But do you know what it stands for?

Schneider: I think it stands for United Service Organization, I'm pretty sure.

Winkler: So if you rented a movie where would you go to watch it?

Schneider: Well most people--that's what nice about modern day war, you can bring your computer. So everyone brought a laptop with them but there is also like the USO had TVs. And there were some places; you'd call them like day rooms. There was one building where you put your name down and you are able to use a computer

for a certain amount of minutes and they would also had TVs in there too so you can watch stuff like that.

Winkler: That's cool, so you said you slept in a dorm, what was that like?

Schneider: It's a trailer, [laughs] that's what it is, that's what we called the dorms. It's just a really long skinny trailer and then they'd have rooms off the hallway. And in there'd be a bunch of bunk beds so then you just picked a bunk bed.

Winkler: Was it nice?

Schneider: Yeah, I mean it's a trailer. There weren't holes in it or anything like that. I wouldn't trust it to be perfect but we pretty much made it look like a dorm room because you get a locker, you get your thing. And since we slept during the day time, we'd have blankets hung up all over our beds so no one could see you anyway. It was like your own little space.

Winkler: That's pretty cool. What about your mess hall?

Schneider: That was just another giant trailer looking building. It wasn't a trailer but they all kind of had the same siding on them. So it was just a giant building. Most of it was run by Iraqis just our way of helping them to start to integrating on base and things like that. So, it was the only interaction you'd have with Iraqis, you'd go there order a sandwich and talk to them.

Winkler: That's the only interaction or were there other ways they were bringing Iraqis into the effort?

Schneider: Well they did other jobs that were on base so I really didn't have any involvement with that besides seeing them at the cafeteria and they would pay them to come on base and work for us and things like that.

Winkler: You must have had some down time or got up to some kind of mischief or fun?

Schneider: Not really, we'd pull some pranks on people mainly because there were rules against having sexual items so we'd always pull pranks. One time we filled a glove with lotion so when people put their hand in it, it was filled with lotion just because you get bored. Or like we drew a lot of pictures and you'd stick them in pilots' lockers. And they open their locker and they are like "What is this?" Just problems, otherwise we were pretty good. Our way out of the building was to drive and get chow, we'd get chow for everybody so that was our way to get out and drive around and go get food. And we'd put our *Now* CD in the truck and *Now* like 29 it is all we listen to because didn't have any radio stations, so memorized like Holiday in the song and that was about it.

Winkler: Did you have people send you the next *Now* album?

Schneider: No, we bought that at the BX, it is all we could do and we'd like drive around to the other side of the base and go to the other BX because you know that was cool.

Winkler: But still the Air Force side?

Schneider: There are like different sections of Army so there may be one Army section closer to us, not sure what they did. And then there was another Army section on the other side of the base and they had another BX. So driving around to the other side of the base is like driving to the other side of the country. It's like a different experience so like you'd go over there sometimes to get away from it.  
[Unintelligible]

Winkler: Were there any people, I don't know; who were just funny. They stood out like goofing off all the time or anything?

Schneider: No, we're pretty calm. I'd say night shift is a little bit goofier because it is all night so it is all dark outside. You feel a little goofy being up only at night time but usually the highest ranking people are sleeping at night time because they go around during the day like usual, or whatever, so--

Winkler: There's not much supervision?

Schneider: No, [laughs] well I mean obviously I shouldn't say only high ranking people because there are a lot of high ranking people all over all the time but it's just, I don't know, night time is just different.

Winkler: So when you're here how often are you doing Air Force stuff?

Schneider: We do it one weekend a month and then two to three weeks a year.

Winkler: And you're just going to school?

Schneider: Yeah and working part-time.

Winkler: That's right where do you work again?

Schneider: I work at the Capitol.

Winkler: Capitol, that's right and you're going to UW for--I mean Madison for your graduate?

Schneider: Uh-huh.

Winkler: Can you tell me anything more about being overseas? It's such a different experience.

Schneider: I don't have too much to say about other people besides myself. Like I said before, I liked it. It was kind of nice just focusing on one thing. I would always hide cereal. I remember because we had day shift and night shift and then no matter how much you like the day shift it becomes a war between night shift and day shift. And I would like hide my cereal; I remember cereal for some reason was this protective food I had. Hide it all over the place so they couldn't find it and eat it. I couldn't get Froot Loops that much but that's what I wanted. We'd hide it all over the place. I'd put signs up on my bananas like "Don't Touch My Bananas!" because it was hard to get good fruit that you'd like. Like I like watermelon, banana and obviously you can't get much watermelon and banana in the desert so I'd put signs on it. And you just know like people mess around with it and I have to throw it away. I'd get so upset.

Winkler: Was there a lot of cereal stealing going on?

Schneider: Yes there was. I wasn't happy about it.

Winkler: What was the hot commodity?

Schneider: Froot Loops, definitely Froot Loops they run out fast so you had to keep them.

Winkler: Nothing healthy just Froot Loops.

Schneider: Froot Loops and French toast, like one of my friends, Steph, that I met in the desert, she and I would go get French toast at three a.m. For some reason that is all that I would eat, I needed French toast at three a.m. and it was amazing. And my supervisor would even know "oh yeah." He's like "I know you need French toast." I'm like "I need it." and he's like "I do too." We still talk about it, know what I can go for? I could go for some French toast from the desert that's what I want. I don't know why but the Air Force has a way with French toast. I could go for basic French toast, I feel for desert French toast.

Winkler: How is it different?

Schneider: I have no idea but it is my favorite French toast in the world. And I want it, same with biscuits and gravy at basic. I can go for biscuits and gravy [laughs].

Winkler: But just at basic?

Schneider: Just at basic. I don't know why they had really good food I think because I was starving. Well you're not starving, but you think you're starving because you only get three meals a day and you can't eat anything else otherwise so you're like oh

my gosh I need food. And you learn to eat in five seconds flat. And that's where the weight gain comes from for people like me. I think I gained fifteen pounds in basic and that was just fat.

Winkler: What was the weather like when you were over there?

Schneider: Um, it was pretty--it was nice, it was like nineties to a hundred but it was a dry heat which I really like so I went to basic in Texas in summer time so I was used to the dry heat. I liked it. We stopped in Qatar which is like the face of the sun along with Kuwait. That is a hot, hot heat, it doesn't matter what temperature it is but in Iraq it was comfy. And then it started to rain and the rainstorms were crazy because it is so dry it will just flood everything. It's just muddy and disgusting. The thunderstorms are scary in the desert.

Winkler: Were your buildings air conditioned or where you--?

Schneider: Yes, they were air conditioned.

Winkler: That's good.

Schneider: Even our tents were air conditioned which was nice.

Winkler: What were you in Kuwait for?

Schneider: We actually got misdirected by accident [laughs] so we ended up in Kuwait for a couple of days before we got our next flight to Qatar.

Winkler: What did you do while you were there?

Schneider: A lot of waiting, we got bedding and head to our tents and they were like "oh your plane is ready." And our plane wasn't actually ready had to get fixed for a second so we just sat and sat and sat and went to McDonald's.

Winkler: They have those over there?

Schneider: Yup and they have Cinnabons and Pizza Huts.

Winkler: Is that just in Kuwait or is that in Iraq too?

Schneider: That's in Iraq too along with Pizza Hut and Subways.

Winkler: Did you get to go to those or were you stuck on base?

Schneider: Those are on base.

Winkler: They are only on base. I was going to say I didn't think they would go for a sub over there. Have you done anything with reunions or anything since you've been back?

Schneider: Well uh-- it was basically me and my sister and Steph who hung out all the time. Of course I still see my sister and Steph has kind of gone around and she actually ended up getting out of the military because she had a baby, but I see her a lot too so.

Winkler: She was one of your good friends in the military?

Schneider: Yeah.

Winkler: Did you meet at boot camp?

Schneider: No, I met her overseas and I met my other friendly Ashley in Boot Camp--well Tech School and she got stationed in Germany which was nice so I and visited her in Germany and had a place to stay.

Winkler: Did you learn German while you were over there?

Schneider: No, it was just my Spring Break. I actually had a roommate in college who was from Germany so just a nice way to go visit both of them. See the American version of Germany and the German version of it.

Winkler: Did you go sightseeing at all when you were over there?

Schneider: Yeah we did a lot, actually the main focus they wanted me to do when I saw my German friends in Germany was go to the commissary because they used to have a military base over there but now they only have a commissary, and you need a military ID to get in and they wanted American food so--I took them grocery shopping so they could get Mountain Dew because they don't have Mountain Dew and Chips Ahoy! cookies. I showed them Toaster Strudels which they thought was hilarious and cakes you only add water to, and they're like "this is ridiculous". We actually visited, when I was with my military friend, we went to Ramstein and we visited a hospital there where a lot of military vets go after they get injured. And we walked around and talked to some of them.

Winkler: How was that?

Schneider: It was sad but I think it was more sad because I was younger. I was just a sophomore then, really hadn't experienced anything. It was more sad just to see that then actually going over there--it's a different mindset when you go over there, but I think it has to be, so it was sad seeing it just as a civilian but in the military, just personally, you know I kind of tune out your emotions because I

mean if you are sad every time a mortar hits, or scared, you'll never get anything done, so.

Winkler: What branches were these veterans from, all of them?

Schneider: A lot of them were Marines and Army because that was in 2007 so it was a pretty bad time so a lot of Army and Marines.

Winkler: Did you talk to them at all?

Schneider: Yeah actually, now my friend's now husband, he was a sniper and one of his friends was in there. So we went to hang out with him for a while but he was a little drugged up so he couldn't quite understand what we were saying.

Winkler: I think that is probably for the better.

Schneider: Yeah.

Winkler: So you said being a woman really didn't have any difference you don't think?

Schneider: Nope, none at all, it really doesn't I mean occasionally I mean I had one woman teacher, who I don't know she had a weird experience, but felt that women needed to stand up a little bit stronger or like nobody could help them do anything but I think that's kind of women you meet everywhere like Police officers people joke about and things like that. But really if you step back you really don't get treated any differently. I think what's different now is that you look at it as people say "grandpa served or my uncle served" things like that, but now it's starting to be like "my mom served, my aunt served and a lot of people aren't putting those two together. They still think of the history of the military is men. So I think--women are trying and they are doing more things. Like we had a women's group where we got together and talked about issues in the military that are being fixed or being worked on, so they are starting to be more aware. And there is more outreach to that type of thing because a lot of women have babies and get pregnant, as a man can usually leave and the woman takes care of kids but what does a woman do when they leaves their kids? So there are more issues that people don't really think about but they are taking care of it pretty well, so. I even hear a rumor that they are going to make body gear to match women better so that's pretty cool.

Winkler: Is that just Air Force or is that going to be Service wide?

Schneider: I think I read it in a magazine somewhere that they were going to try and make body gear that fit women because obviously when you have a chest, when you have a bigger chest especially, it kind of hangs off of you and then it is hard to

shoot a weapon and things like that. So they are going to try to obviously money [Break in Tape] I don't know if the Air Force is different or anything like that but I really didn't have any problems.

Winkler: So in the Air Force they are just really integrated I guess?

Schneider: Yeah, I mean I think especially when you come in now, it is such a young group of people--Because even if you are what's the age like 35, 37 I don't know the cut off, I mean even they're now into this day and age where women are stronger so to speak and have different careers things like that. Usually when you tell a guy you are in the military they get scared of you, which is weird [laughs]. But that's okay; you can be scared if you want. Or you get the looks "oh, you're in the military?" Yes I can have long hair and be in the military. No, usually everyone is pretty okay with it because I think they almost judge you a little bit being in the military. "Oh she can handle it" type of thing so there is no need to do anything like that.

Winkler: Is that the kind of reaction when you are out on the weekend and some guy's like "What do you do?" " Yeah I'm in the military."

Schneider: Yeah I usually don't tend to tell people. It just kind of you know like I said before this day and age you don't really--I'm not one of those people who likes to tell everybody because it is like who do I trust, who do I not trust, especially with everything going on in the world. Though I am proud of it but it is also like my little secret. I just keep it to myself sometimes but usually people come up and look at you differently. "Oh, okay well, you are not like this typical woman that I can just hit on or something."

Winkler: That's kind of a good thing.

Schneider: Yeah exactly it's kind of a good thing.

Winkler: So you said you are proud of your military service but it's kind of secret?

Schneider: Well, it's just that with everything that's been going on in the years and 9/11 and everything with that like it's you know it's good to be proud to be an American everything you know, but I don't recommend--like don't go to Europe and bring your military ID and show everybody, that might not be the best idea. It's kind of what I think, but I mean, I'll use my military backpack to travel because it is easy and it is huge and things like that but I don't know it's just maybe it's just me -- don't rely on people know what I do all the time. They don't need to be involved in things like that so just keep it to myself and tell people that I feel like. It's not like a need-to-know basis because I don't trust everybody but-

Winkler: What made you join in the first place if not for the “look at me I'm in the military”?

Schneider: Well, like we were talking about before, rest of my life really can't see me not doing it; it would be weird to not do it. I re-upped in May and we were talking about that. And I know; my boyfriend --a little-- he approves of it, but sometimes I think he does get scared like "what if we do get married and we have kids and then you leave?" I think that scares him. And what if something happened to me, he'd have to take care of the kids type of a thing. But it's my life that's what was going to happen. It wasn't because my dad said or anything like that. It was just kind of something I knew I was going to do and going to do it. And yet, I mean I can't listen to --what's that song? “Proud To be An American” without crying, which I hate because they always play it while you're in uniform and you are like “come on” like the one time I shouldn't be crying but--I don't know it is just something I want to do. I can't describe it very well. Like my dad even sat me down "I don't think you have to do this", like almost trying to talk me out of it. No, I'm doing it and – like I don't understand –like this is what I'm supposed to do.

Winkler: So with your boyfriend's concerns would your deployments always be ninety days or would they be longer?

Schneider: I think it just depends, I know the Air Force they usually don't last that long. But I also know some people who have gone for six months and things like that, it just depends. But with Air National Guard, it's really nice because it is a voluntary force and you can volunteer. Obviously, I will volunteer because I didn't finalize to sit around but some people might. It just all depends really on the situation and everything that goes on. Now politics, everything that goes on in politics can decide it. Who knows?

Winkler: Are you planning to stay in for like the twenty years?

Schneider: Yeah, might as well [laughs]. I'm in this long.

Winkler: How long you been in?

Schneider: About six and a half years.

Winkler: And is this your first re-up?

Schneider: Yeah.

Winkler: Yeah that's pretty cool. Do you think you'll ever do the Officer Program?

Schneider: Yeah I've been looking for an Officer Job but they are hard and far and few between lately. You race for a job I feel that everybody in the world is racing with the job so you really have to get up there and compete.

Winkler: Do you have to go to Officer School before you can apply for those?

Schneider: You usually take a test, an Officer's test, and then you apply and usually the score on your test helps you get a job or what not. But, yeah afterwards you get the job you have to go to Officer Training School.

Winkler: Do you have to go to Tech School again?

Schneider: If you change jobs yeah.

Winkler: Would you?

Schneider: Yeah.

Winkler: What do you want to do?

Schneider: Well I'd like to be an historian but those are more like Active Duty jobs now so I really don't want to do an Active Duty job and not say like stuck in it but I really like a civilian role too so. I was looking at historian but now probably now a Public Affairs job.

Winkler: What would that entail?

Schneider: Just kind of like who to talk to like if you are doing something like this you call your public affairs person and they talk to you about what you can and cannot say or what to tell the media or they handle the media and things like that.

Winkler: I don't know if you can answer this but how long 'til you talk where you where?

Schneider: I don't know, I'm sure Korean vets, Desert Storm vets can probably talk about where they were, but I guess whenever this ends.

Winkler: Has your perception of it changed--of the whole war in general--since you've been there?

Schneider: I don't know. I really didn't go too far much into the war. I was a freshman in high school when 9/11 happened and I didn't even know what the Twin Towers were so I was like "That's interesting, whoa why'd that happen, that's pretty bad." I don't know I always I guess I always kind of avoided it. I don't know why I personally avoided it. I know a lot of people are hardcore into it because they are in the military, and they want to know every little political decision, but I signed up to follow our governor and then in Active Duty follow our president so I am

going to do it no matter what because I am going to be told "Do it!" so I really haven't decided to get too involved in it.

Winkler: Do you think that will change when you are out?

Schneider: Of the view of the war or the view of the military?

Winkler: Both.

Schneider: Probably not, I don't think so because I mean if anything it would be now that it would change, silly of me, knowing me. If anything, my opinion would change now especially with my job and everything I'm researching and learning and things like that, that it would change now. I'm curious to see how it ends [laughs] now that may change how I think about it but I don't think it will really change. I try to keep my military life separate from my political views.

Winkler: Safe decision, that's really all of my set questions, anything you want to talk about? Experiences you'd like to share?

Schneider: I think I pretty much talked about everything. I was thinking about treating differently in the military--it wasn't in the military it is usually outside of the military. I had my Air Force sweatshirt on one day, I was probably nineteen and we went to Culver's and this woman was like "Oh, is that your boyfriend's sweatshirt?" I was like "No, I don't really want to be talking to you about this." But sometimes you get the little kids who come up to you, and then it is just like I think I want to cry. They are like "Thank You". Or sometimes I'll go to the book store or something after I'm done with drill because I need to pick something up and then they are like--one time there was this little girl just pulling on her dad's arm, she's like "Look!" I know she was trying to whisper so I couldn't hear. "Look over there." And he's like "Why?" Army person. You're an Army person, not a Marine, Air Force, you are an Army person. She's like "look at the Army person." And she kind of walked away staring "Oh my gosh what is that." The little kids are pretty funny.

Winkler: Probably inspired her to join when she is older.

Schneider: Well my friend has a little six year old son and actually so the BX sells a little military uniform for kids so I bought him one for Halloween. He was so excited. He was "I can't wait to show her what I look like in it." He's so cute and I gave him one of those little bracelets—I have a hundred—because I went every day. He got a little bracelet, he's all excited.

Winkler: That's pretty awesome.

Schneider: Yeah so the kids are really cute, I like the kids.

Winkler: What kind of pranks did you pull? You said something about not allowed to have sexual things over there; did that get broken in the pranks at all?

Schneider: No not really, just like picking on it about it, just picking on people like, oh. I think once we draw a pair of boobs and stuck it in somebody's locker [both laugh]. Because we had all men pilots at the time so we'd stick it in their lockers. Just as jokes so when they open up--usually it was the younger Lieutenants we'd stick in there and prank them.

Winkler: You got away doing that to Officers?

Schneider: Like in my job you are around Officers every site. I don't see enlisted people, I usually just see Officers. Obviously, I mean there is still that difference where you're enlisted and you're like "Oh hey, Sir, what's up." You say Sir, but you know, and your courtesies and those types of things, but you're still just people. You have a different kind of friendship but you keep everything still the same.

Winkler: Does that conduct change when you are overseas at all?

Schneider: No, it stays the same. Only difference is you really don't salute that much.

Winkler: Why?

Schneider: It is a war zone.

Winkler: Oh yeah give away who the Officers are. I'm just imagining a young pilot getting ready for his day.

Schneider: They're all excited and I've been in five years and you're like "Okay, buddy." [laughs] Reflector belts were fun too.

Winkler: What?

Schneider: Reflector belts, you had to wear reflector belts. It's pretty much a giant reflector when you are in the military--safety, safety first! So our PT gear has reflectors on it, plus you have to wear belts. The Army kind of wears it like a pageant sash and the Air Force wears it around your waist. So we got a bunch of belts one day and were wrapping them around our arms and stuff. And I wrote Air Crew Flight Equipment Monitor and my friend was writing Air Monitor and wearing them around like karate gear, that kind of stuff. Reflective belts are kind of a running joke with me. And you get used to wearing them, but they are pretty funny. Walking around with giant reflective belts on you when you're dressed up in flak

vests and helmets that you have a reflector belt around you, the camo has a reflective belt. I get it, but the camo may not be working that well but I get it.

Winkler: So since you have been home are there things that bother you, like things that trigger?

Schneider: The ending of a tape you, like, your ears pop up you are like "What is that?" "What is that whizzing noise?" because there are certain things that still sound like them, like mortars. Like that noise and I remember I was at work the other day and there were protestors around the Capitol, and they were making these weird noises and I was like "What is that noise? Does anybody else hear that, what's that noise?" And they all kind of look at you like "whatever" because--I don't want to say people are comfortable with war, but they are used to it. So even if you are a veteran, lots of people are veterans because they don't experience maybe because their family aren't military. They thank you but they don't quite understand it. When you hear things like that, they are like "Whatever, I get it, you are a veteran". You know what I mean; like they don't quite comprehend why you pop up like that. I remember, my sister, we grew up north and heard a siren. And you have mines up there so the siren would go off at noon and she full flung out of her chair sleeping from a dead sleep and hit the ground. And she said "It sounded like an Alarm Red." "It's okay you can get back up, it is okay."

Winkler: What about stuff like fireworks, do fireworks bother you at all?

Schneider: I kind of thought they would. I was excited to see my first fireworks "Yeah what's going to happen." I didn't prepare myself too well for that but, no, they don't really bother me. Like, I am sure they bother some more people who heard more than I did. I felt almost a little safer because we had alarms that went off before they hit, so things like that--I was worried but that was more in the back of your mind. Something happens, something happens. What are you going to do like run away? So you just had to deal with it, so fireworks don't really bother me. Some fireworks like remind me of stuff I've seen, but it doesn't like make me upset or anything, that's just like déjà vu.

Winkler: Anything else to talk about?

Schneider: Nothing I can think of.

Winkler: I really don't have any more questions for you. So you wanna call it a day?

Schneider: Sure.

[End of interview]