

Interviewer:

Good afternoon. Today is January 11, 2016 and I'm here in the Center for Oral History with Cadet Coe. How are you today?

Valerie Coe:

I'm doing well, sir.

Interviewer:

So tell me a little bit about yourself. Where are you from and what was your life like growing up?

Valerie Coe:

I'm from Chatfield, Minnesota, which is a pretty small town in southeastern Minnesota, and growing up I was just really active in sports and a bunch of activities at school. I worked at the grocery store. And I have a younger sister, so we were pretty close growing up 'cause she's about 18 months younger than me.

Interviewer:

Okay. All right. And what did your parents do?

Valerie Coe

My mom is the financial director and city planner for my hometown and then my dad's owned his own business and worked at a couple other places as I grew up.

Interviewer:

Okay. And then after high school you joined the Army, correct?

Valerie Coe:

After high school I actually went to college for a year.

Interviewer:

Okay.

Valerie Coe:

Where I did ROTC, but I really had no idea what I was doing or where I was going. I thought I was pre pharmacy, which sounded great and I actually did pretty well but I didn't know if that was actually what I wanted to do. I had tried to enlist in the Reserves my senior year of high school to be, like, simultaneous military program in ROTC, but I had to wait a year because I had been really sick and I needed a waiver. So then when I went to enlist the second - after that year was up, my freshman year in college, the recruiter had convinced me that I could do college full time and be on active duty, so I was basically like, why not? Like at this point - I worked two jobs, I went to school, I did ROTC; life was pretty busy. And I kind of wanted a change of pace at that point, so I enlisted.

Interviewer:

Okay.

Valerie Coe:

And went to Fort Sill for basic training and then Fort Sam for AIT for medics.

Interviewer:

Okay, and where did you go to college?

Valerie Coe:

I went to the University of Minnesota.

Interviewer:

Okay, and what year did you enlist?

Valerie Coe:

In 2010.

Interviewer:

Okay, and so how was basic training for you?

Valerie Coe:

Basic training was good. I was relatively good at following instructions so it wasn't anything too difficult. It was definitely kind of a culture shock at first but you adjust pretty quickly.

Interviewer:

Okay, and so what was the biggest culture shock for you?

Valerie Coe:

I don't know. I think it was just different. Like I'd been in ROTC but even in ROTC I didn't understand, like, how the Army ran or the rank structure completely or anything like that, so just like getting Army life down was kind of tough at first.

Interviewer:

Okay, and tell me about AIT.

Valerie Coe:

I did AIT down in Fort Sam in Texas, so it was beautiful, but it's pretty long for medics. It's like - I was there from November to April, so it's a decent amount of time and it's broken down in like three phases, like a red, white and blue phase where you gain privileges as you go on as long as you're proficient at everything. So we got to explore San Antonio and you do a civilian EMT certification first and once you pass that then they take you on to the Whiskey phase or like the military side of the training -

Interviewer:

Okay.

Valerie Coe:

-to do more of the combat-related training.

Interviewer:

Did you enjoy it?

Valerie Coe:

I did; I absolutely loved being a medic.

Interviewer:

Okay. And where was your first assignment then after Fort Sam?

Valerie Coe:

I was at Fort Stewart, Georgia.

Interviewer:

Okay. And who were you with?

Valerie Coe:

I was with Fourth Brigade, the only Light Brigade at Fort Stewart.

Interviewer:

Okay. And what did you do while you were at Fort Stewart?

Valerie Coe:

So I got there when they were on rear - they were deployed.

Interviewer:

Okay.

Valerie Coe:

And so I was put on rear D. They had about three months left of their deployment when I got there.

Interviewer:

Where were they deployed to?

Valerie Coe:

Iraq.

Interviewer:

Okay. And what year was this?

Valerie Coe:

2011, like Spring of 2011.

Interviewer:

Okay.

Valerie Coe:

So it was kind of a - they didn't know how many - most of my AIT class had actually gone to Fort Stewart, and there was probably five of us that were all in the same company so they were trying to figure out if they were gonna send any of us down range or if they

were gonna keep all of there for when everybody got back, 'cause so many people were PCS'ing. Everybody else got put in the S3 shop and got to do, like, normal taskings, but I had gotten put in the S1 shop 'cause they had no one in the S1 shop. So that's what I did on rear D, is I got really good at personnel and actions and finance forms for about the first three months and then I spent all my weeks at the ADIG when they were coming back for all their different chalks to in-process everybody.

Interviewer:

Okay.

Valerie Coe:

But

Interviewer:

So you were the one handling all the paperwork -

Valerie Coe:

Yeah.

Interviewer:

-when they got off the planes and everything like that?

Valerie Coe:

Yeah.

Interviewer:

And how was that?

Valerie Coe:

It was definitely a different experience. I liked it, especially to see, like - we got to see them before anybody else saw them coming back, so it was kind of neat to - I got to meet some of the people from, like, the company I was going to and everything like that as soon as they were getting off the plane. They were trying to figure out where everybody was going and stuff when they got back.

Interviewer:

And how long did you stay at Fort Stewart?

Valerie Coe:

I was there until June of 2012.

Interviewer:

So a little over a year?

Valerie Coe:

A little over a year, yeah.

Interviewer:

Okay. And so once everybody got back and in processed you went down to a company, right? You got out of the S1 shop?

Valerie Coe:

Yes. Then I went down to the Charlie med and I was in treatment platoon at first for a while and I'd been looking at a couple different things too, put packets in for. So I'd looked at putting a packet in for cultural support team selection at Fort Bragg but I needed a little bit more time in service and stuff to get that put in, and then I had put in my West Point application. My first sergeant at basic training pulled about 10 of us out of basic training one day and said, 'Hey, you guys all meet the prerequisites and I just want to let you know that West Point's an option available for you if you ever think about commissioning,' which I was thinking about because I had come out of ROTC and I didn't really understand the Army at all so I didn't understand completely, like, how unreasonable it was for me to take anywhere from 12 to 15 credits actually being at a unit, 'cause that wasn't gonna happen.

I could maybe take one or two classes at a time but that was about it. So I did my whole application by the end of AIT but my DoDMERB physical had gotten lost. So then my application was late and I couldn't apply to the class of 2015, but then I just got to my unit and I was, like, looking at things like culture support teams and other options that were out there, and West Point actually called and asked if I wanted to reopen my application.

And this was probably July, and I was like, uh, I don't know. I'm doing really well where I'm at; do I really want to go through the whole application process again? But I asked how much I had to redo and they just told me to write my essays and go get a new physical. So that was pretty simple and I was like, okay, why not? So I went and did that and within the next month I had gotten my appointment certificate.

Interviewer:

Wow.

Valerie Coe:

So as soon as - and I didn't really tell anybody; I didn't tell my CO, I didn't tell my platoon sergeants, 'cause all the paperwork had been done in AIT. So my company didn't really know that I had a West Point application in but as soon as my company commander found he basically told me that West Point was too big of an opportunity to choose to go to cultural support. He's like, "You can do that as a commissioned officer. Don't waste this opportunity." So I stopped trying to do any cultural support team packets or anything like that. But they had figured out that I was on rear D S1 and that I was good with paperwork, so then once they figured out I was going to West Point and had been S1 on rear D they made me, like, our company training officer so I did all our school's packets and my company commander had me in every training meeting and doing slides and sitting with the XO and memorizing the eight steps to an op ward, everything like that.

So they were pretty helpful but -

Interviewer:

Okay.

Valerie Coe:

And supportive - but

Interviewer:

Now do you remember who your basic training first sergeant was that recommended you first put in a West Point packet?

Valerie Coe:

Yes. He was First Sergeant Levine.

Interviewer:

Okay. And who was your company commander that was trying to give you a leg up?

Valerie Coe:

Captain Garrett John.

Interviewer:

Okay. Did he attend West Point?

Valerie Coe:

He didn't. He was actually at OCS.

Interviewer:

Okay.

Valerie Coe:

He had been enlisted before too and then went to OCS.

Interviewer:

Oh, very good.

Valerie Coe:

Yeah.

Interviewer:

Okay. So now you're doing all sorts of training room stuff and things like that.

Valerie Coe:

Yeah.

Interviewer:

And so how's everything else going for you?

Valerie Coe:

It went pretty well. My unit was actually really great soâ€¦| Yeah, we definitely - it was interesting. I learned a lot for sure butâ€¦|

Interviewer:

So I guess around July - or correction - June of 2012, is that when you left Stewart?

Valerie Coe:

Thatâ€™s when I left and came to West Point, yes.

Interviewer:

Okay. And so you didnâ€™t do prep school, right?

Valerie Coe:

I didnâ€™t, and so it was a little rough just that school mentality. It had been two-and-a-half, three years since I had been in school. So just getting back in the swing of things was tough that first semester, plebe year.

Interviewer:

Yeah. And what was cadet basic training like for you having already gone through army basic? What was cadet basic training like?

Valerie Coe:

It was just a completely different experience than - like itâ€™s hard to compare cadet basic and, like, army basic just because cadet basic is more like the West Point skills. Like I knew nothing about West Point, so the prepsters were really helpful with that kind of stuff, where like in my squad it was weird, we had three prepsters and three priors and only two kids that came straight out of high school. So our squad was pretty, pretty squared away most of the time.

Interviewer:

Pretty proficient, huh?

Valerie Coe:

Yeah. We were good at - so if there was somebody that was struggling in something there was definitely somebody in our squad that could help you out, so that was nice. But, yeah, Beast was - it was just that element of West Point where itâ€™s like thereâ€™s always something to do and I think the time here was even more crunch than it was - at basic you normally had a little bit more time between things, so that was definitely the thing that took the most getting used to was all that, and the uniforms. I had no idea how to wear anything but ACUs, like the as-for-class and white over gray and everything like that was all new. Luckily, plebe year you have, like, no rank or anything to worry about figuring how to put on, but just figuring out what all the uniforms were took a little bit, too.

Interviewer:

And then you got into academics, and how did the academics at West Point compare to the - your freshman year at college?

Valerie Coe:

It was completely different, like having the really set schedule here. Like my freshman year at the U of M I had 18 credits I think. So the credit load was, like, pretty comparable but because of the program I was in I took, like, orgo and stats and bio and like anat and phys, so I didnâ€™t have as many, like, gen ed courses. I had like a sociology class andâ€¦| I canâ€™t remember what other classes. But there was a lot more, like, I guess the breadth of things that we had to take, like, I had taken AP classes in high school but my AP scores were too old so I couldnâ€™t send any of them in, and so things like US History was probably, like, the hardest class I took plebe year and that was second semester, but I couldnâ€™t figure out why, and soâ€¦| Here I didnâ€™t think classes were harder. I struggled a little bit more.

I think classes were probably actually harder at the U of M just because the instructors here were so available and I wasnâ€™t used to the small class sizes and everything like that, but our free time here is so micro managed. So finding the time to actually do the amount of work you have here is a lot harder than it was there because once I was done with school or done with work that was actually my time where here thatâ€™s not really the case. Your barracks room is your office and everything else. Especially as a plebe you

have people coming in telling you to do duties and your door has to be open for ESP and all that kind of stuff, so it was - I think it was both the adjustment and then just the way that everything runs here. It was a little tougher.

Interviewer:

Yeah. Now what do you do here at the Academy? Did you do any sports or any intramurals or clubs?

Valerie Coe:

I was on Sandhurst my plebe year.

Interviewer:

Okay. Can you describe that a little bit for our viewers?

Valerie Coe:

So it's like a military competition similar to like ROTC's Ranger Challenge Teams where you go through and do a bunch of, like, lanes essentially, all with different purposes and tasks and you go through in like a squad-size element. And here it's a two-day competition in April, but that was definitely pretty physically demanding but it was fun because I had a great group of people in my plebe year company that I did that with and -

Interviewer:

What company?

Valerie Coe:

I was in H4 plebe year.

Interviewer:

Okay.

Valerie Coe:

So we just had a good time and I think they'd asked because I had been a medic, so I knew all the medical way and stuff but, yeah, that was a blast. And then I actually ended up breaking my ankle plebe year and having surgery, but I ended up being the medic for the jump team for all of yuk year and then I did IMs all of cow year -

Interviewer:

Okay.

Valerie Coe:

-and this past year.

Interviewer:

So intramurals for two years.

Valerie Coe:

Yeah.

Interviewer:

Okay. And so you started out in H4 and what company did you end up in?

Valerie Coe:

I'm in B3 now.

Interviewer:

Okay.

Valerie Coe:

So I switched to third reg but!

Interviewer:

And as you progressed from a plebe through - to your Firstie year - how have academics gone for you?

Valerie Coe:

Yuk year was by far the most difficult for me at the Academy, just - I'm not sure why - and then cow year I got myself in a little trouble so I had the brigade board. So first semester cow year was a little rough, but academics overall have been pretty consistent, I guess. It's definitely one of those things where we have the opportunities here, it's just not always easy to make yourself use all the time that you have and the resources just because sometimes you just want to relax a little bit. But I've definitely enjoyed classes

here and I've probably taken things because of some of the mandatory classes that I might not have thought about, but I've definitely enjoyed that about West Point, is having some of those core classes, I guess.

Interviewer:

Sure. Now what have you done over the summers?

Valerie Coe:

So plebe year, right after Sandhurst, I broke my ankle and I was supposed to go to air assault school and my TAC NCO tried to help me out in that last week because you need an AIAD as a graduation requirement - or a IAD, some kind of individual development, and so I had air assault scheduled. I couldn't go to air assault because I had surgery during grad week, and he had a slot for the SHARP MIAD that was coming to West Point and there was no part of me that wanted to do that at all but -

Interviewer:

Okay.

Valerie Coe:

-by doing that I was here for all my followup appointments and I got that MIAD, that military development opportunity, like, out of the way plebe year for graduation. So he put me in that and I went through the 80-hour block of SHARP training that summer and

Interviewer:

Okay.

Valerie Coe:

And then I've done a couple of AIADs after plebe year and this past year but

Interviewer:

So for our viewers, will you please explain what SHARP is?

Valerie Coe:

Okay. SHARP is the Army's Sexual Harassment Assault Response Program. So it's all the training both for soldiers and officers on what sexual harassment and assault is and then also, like, how to file a report and where to go to - for the resources that provide those things.

Interviewer:

Okay. And so since that was an Army program, the - a MIAD is a Military Individual Advance Development, right?

Valerie Coe:

I believe so.

Interviewer:

Okay.

Valerie Coe:

I can't remember that A and the D completely off the top of my head but it's - yeah.

Interviewer:

Close enough, right?

Valerie Coe:

Something close to that.

Interviewer:

Did that give you an identifier, a skill identifier?

Valerie Coe:

Yes.

Interviewer:

Okay.

Valerie Coe:

Not while we're here at the Academy. Like you have to be on orders. So I have the certificate, I have the 80-hour block of training, but unless you're on orders for, like, being a VA or a SARC or a specific job, I can't, like, use any of that as a - any kind of like restrictive reporting source or anything like that.

Interviewer:

Sure. So now a VA is victim assistant, right?

Valerie Coe:

Victim advocate.

Interviewer:

Victim advocate. And what is SARC?

Valerie Coe:

The sexual assault response coordinator. So normally, like, there's one per brigade in the Army. We have one for cadet command here and one for USMA. So there's a couple throughout the post, normally.

Interviewer:

Okay. And your job right now is the - tell us what your job is.

Valerie Coe:

Okay. Right now it's the brigade CASHA, which is Cadets Against Sexual Harassment and Assault, and it's the XO for that program at the brigade level.

Interviewer:

Okay. And what does your program do? Tell us about that.

Valerie Coe:

CASHA is in charge of all of the cadets' sexual harassment and assault training, basically. We get the SHARP training once a year by the Army, but CASHA was founded by, like, a group of cadets that saw an issue within the corps, more on a cultural level. So CASHA focuses on the prevention and the cultural factors that lead to sexual harassment and assault rather than just responding once something happens, because those resources that the SHARP program gives us are great but this group of cadets started it about four years ago because they saw more of a cultural trend in the way we're doing things. So we looked at how can we provide education curriculums to the corps to try and prevent these things from even happening in the first place and look some of the precursors.

Interviewer:

Okay. So this is kind of a bottom-up or a grassroots sort of things to identify and fix a problem.

Valerie Coe:

Yes, sir.

Interviewer:

Okay. And have you all been successful?

Valerie Coe:

So it's really grown over the past - like I remember my plebe year CASHA had just barely started and we would do a class here and there but it wasn't incorporated, there weren't, like, designated reps - or representatives. Some companies had it and some companies didn't, but then yuk year it started to kind of get incorporated more and my company knew that I had gone to the SHARP MIAD so they asked if I would help with training a little bit because they didn't have as much knowledge base and I had a little bit more after that MIAD. And then cow year I was made my company rep and then I was the regimental rep second semester of cow year and then this semester it's on brigade, but we've really seen both a change and - we used to have to fight tooth and nail to get reps from companies because no one wanted to do that job. I didn't even want the job when I first got it, but then - like now we have people volunteering or asking how they can get involved in the program.

And we went from not having anything to we have, like, a Google drive or a share drive full of all our lesson plans and everything like that that we use for - and each class has a lesson plan tailored to them when they meet twice a semester so

Interviewer:

So it seems like it's gaining momentum.

Valerie Coe:

Definitely.

Interviewer:

Have you - have you all been successful in helping cadets?

Valerie Coe:

Yeah. So our - we do both the victim advocacy part of it where we help any cadets that need help getting to the resources that they need and we do that education piece. So it's been really interesting because people have said, like, what a difference it's made and how much more they understand now, but we've seen it in the increase in numbers in our DOD surveys. We've had a huge increase in sexual assault reports in the last couple years, and we look at that as both a good and a bad thing. It's bad that it's happening but our culture has changed enough that people feel comfortable coming forward, because a lot of the time it's - a lot of those reports are from years ago where people have, like, finally said, like, "Okay. I feel comfortable talking about this now." So when we get a lot of questions, the numbers aren't always the best representative. You can take statistics and make them look however you want.

But I know our staff likes to see that more people are reporting, and hopefully we'll get to that point where it levels off and there's less assault and less reports but

Interviewer:

Sure. Do you have any sense that the culture is changing around here?

Valerie Coe:

Oh, definitely. People talk, like, about this stuff a lot more than they used to. Like at our lunch tables, like after we'll have a kind of controversial CASHA discussion, and they're roundtable discussions, they're like groups of four to six people. We keep the discussion groups really small, and then you'll hear people talking about it at lunch and stuff and that's just kind of cool to me to hear people talk about it when it used to be kind of a taboo subject, like you don't bring that up, so

Interviewer:

So the climate's changing, the corps is changing, and it seems like it's improving.

Valerie Coe:

Yeah. Definitely.

Interviewer:

Now what's your campaign called? Is it the It's on Us?

Valerie Coe:

So we team with It's on Us Campaign -

Interviewer:

Okay.

Valerie Coe:

-because that was started by President Obama.

Interviewer:

Sure.

Valerie Coe:

So we definitely team with that, but CASHA itself doesn't have, like, a separate campaign.

Interviewer:

Okay.

Valerie Coe:

We just do the training and then in April we'll have a bunch of events for sexual assault awareness month, but other than that we don't have, like, our own campaign.

Interviewer:

Okay. And why is this important to you?

Valerie Coe:

It's important to me - so like I said before, I really didn't want to do that SHARP MIAD my plebe year.

Interviewer:

Right.

Valerie Coe:

â€œCause my TAC NCO was like, â€œOkay, go the SHARP MIAD,â€ and I was like - I hated SHARP training when I was enlisted just â€œcause it was - it was one of the check-the-box things. Sometimes senior leadership wasnâ€™t there. So it was like why do I have to go to this, like, every quarter and sign off on the thing that I was there for, like, four-and-a-half hours some morning when someone just clicks through a PowerPoint when no one else is here? Or it just seemed like one of those things we were running through, and it was the same training every time, so it was just something I never looked forward to. And like personally, when I was enlisted I had been sexually assaulted. So when I was on rear D I had just gotten to Fort Stewart and I didnâ€™t really know anyone, and all of us on - it was a small group of people on rear D so we just would go to formation in the morning. I was the only medic in S1 and it was such a small shop that it was like I had one NCO and then an officer over me.

But my roommate and I got there at the same time in April, got to our unit, and we all shared one barracks building. It was all - the whole brigade basically in like these two barracks buildings that are side-by-side, and so we had, like, neighbors above us, neighbors below us that were in all the different infantry battalions and the FA battalion in our brigade, but we got to know everybody pretty well and people - we had a basketball court outside so weâ€™d go play basketball after work and stuff. And one day I was outside playing basketball with my roommate and one of the guys from one of the battalions, like, asked if I wanted to go to dinner, which wasnâ€™t that abnormal. Like we saw each other every day after work, he lived right downstairs. So I was like, okay, sure. We can go to dinner. It was like a Wednesday night. We went to the DFAC and just, like, oh, where are you from; like, got to know each other, pretty typical stuff.

And then it was probably - it was early, like 7:00 or something and I had just turned 20. So I was not of age, but I guess, like, lâ€™m not perfect, like most soldiers, I guess. He was like, â€œDo you want to go grab a couple beers and we can watch a movie?â€ And I was like, â€œOkay, lâ€™ve got sick call in the morning,â€ so I had to be up for sick call duty at, like, 5:00. And so he went to the shoppette, we grabbed some beer, sat two chairs down in his room and then started watching a movie. And we actually ended up like - the barracks rooms were really small. They were old at that point â€œcause our brigade was moving, but we sat on his bed, like, backs against the wall, just talking and had a couple beers. I got up to go to the bathroom and then I came back out and heâ€™s like - and he had just gotten selected. He had made it through selection for special forces. So we were like two of the people on rear D who werenâ€™t, like, disciplinary problems and every -

â€œCause rear D is kind of a weird mix of people. So he was somebody else that had, like, some kind of motivation, and so he was like, â€œWhy donâ€™t we celebrate you making it to West Point and me making it through selection?â€ And he was like, â€œWhy donâ€™t we take a shot?â€ And I was like, â€œUh, lâ€™ve gotta be to work at 5:00 for sick call, so letâ€™s not,â€ but heâ€™d already poured them when I was in the bathroom, so I was like, okay, and I took the shot. And I had known him for a little while so I didnâ€™t think twice at all, but thatâ€™s the last thing I remember at all. And then, yeah, so we had been sitting on his bed, like - it was all made and everything, but I woke up in the morning - or I woke up - I had no idea when it was - I woke up in the morning on a completely stripped mattress on my back and I had no idea what happened. It was like an out-of-body experience, basically.

I had no clothes on except for my socks and the mattress was completely bare and, like, my hands and arms were out to my side. It was like if you laid down like a figure on, like, a movie in a crime scene, like thatâ€™s how I was laying on this bed. So I didnâ€™t know what to say or do really at all at that point and as soon as I got up, like he realized I was awake and he was sitting in a chair, like, completely dressed at the end of the bed. So it just like - it - really awkward feeling, and I didnâ€™t know what to say or do but I had no

idea where my clothes were. And he was like, "Oh, let me grab your clothes for you," and grabbed my clothes off the top of the refrigerator, and I was just like this is strange, and I just threw all my clothes on. And I still felt like - I was, like, in a haze, like I didn't know if I was drunk or under the influence of something, but I remember running upstairs - like I don't know how I woke up.

I just happened to wake up and it was, like, 4:45. So I ran right back upstairs to my room. I was, like, bumping into walls and my roommate was like, "You're gonna be late for work," and all I kept repeating is, "I don't know what happened, I don't know what happened." She's like, "Val, you're gonna be late for work," and I was like, "Okay, I'm going." So I put my uniform on, I got in the car and I drove to work because I was the only medic on duty that morning for sick call, and I just remember sitting there and, like, hoping! [crying].

Interviewer:

It's okay.

Valerie Coe:

I just sat there and, like, hoped that no one was gonna come in that morning because I knew if I saw someone that I would probably start to cry or say something. So I just put my head down on the desk and no one came in to sick call that morning because on rear D - well, that was a Thursday too, so it was a ruck - we had like sergeant time training and everything like that. So people got to come in at 7:00. No one wanted to come to sick call at 6:30 if they could just come do the ruck at 7:00 and be on time like normal. But, like, I guess like I knew I probably should go to the hospital, but even then at that point I didn't know what to say. So I wrote myself a sick call slip because on a rear D no one checked on us, so I wrote myself a sick call slip, went back to my room and I just laid down and waited until 9:00 work call.

And then I went into work and it was like, okay, I don't know what happened last night so I'm just gonna not think about it. So that's - like that's basically what I did for the next, like, year-and-a-half, 'cause that was right when I got there. And so I was glad when we had gotten off rear D because then I didn't see him anymore, like, on a daily basis, 'cause then we were separated out by battalion for barracks. But - and like I had tried to talk to him a couple times after that, 'cause I was like, maybe I can just asked what happened, like, maybe - you know? So I was like - I had tried to, like, be friends with him and that was really awkward and I'd, like, try to convince myself - or I guess I didn't - I just pretended like, okay, I don't know what happened and I don't remember anything so how can I say anything happened? That was basically the mentality I was under, especially with the way the culture of the Army was then.

Like, any female who reported anything was pretty highly scrutinized, and I was like I don't want to be that girl, especially in my unit, 'cause my unit had had an issue down range, so it's like coming back everybody knew about what had happened. So I was like, oh, I don't want that to be me. So I didn't say anything, I just pretended like everything was fine. I actually did really well at my unit, like I went and got my EFMB before I left and nobody there ever knew. So, like, people ask if it was my leadership or anything like that. I definitely wouldn't say it was a, like, failure on my leadership's fault - or part - because they never knew and I guess I probably never gave them any indication that anything was going on. But I always told myself, I was like, okay, when I get to West Point I'll report it, at least make a restricted report just to kind of get it off my chest. But I didn't 'cause once I got here I was like, oh, I'm away, I'm fine, like I don't have to think about this at all anymore.

And then when my TAC told me that I was going to the SHARP MIAD that was like a - it hit me in the stomach, 'cause I was like I have to sit and listen to this stuff for 80 hours, and so that was like - every day I was like thinking about it. I was like, okay, maybe I should say something. I emailed the SARC, like, two or three times and then I would just never show up at her office because I didn't know if I wanted to do it. And then when I was a company rep that helped out my yuk year, sometimes I'd be like, uh, maybe I should

say something, but that feeling always went away and I was always fine. And then cow year I was my actual company rep instead of just helping and I was like, okay, like I'm telling all of these people to trust the system and that things work and, like, telling everybody everything I know, but couldn't really figure out, like, how to reconcile it. I'm like, okay, so should I say something? Cause I felt kind of like a hypocrite telling everyone to trust the system. So I emailed our new SARC and I was like, "Sir, can I sit down and talk with you," and I think he assumed it was just stuff about me being a CASHA rep, but I sat down and I told him I wanted to file an unrestricted report. I was like I might as well make it unrestricted at this point and then I can talk about it once everything's done, they'll do an investigation, and I remember that being, like, one of the hardest days that I've ever had at the Academy, and that was the day that we took ID pictures, so now whenever I see my ID picture [laughs] it's like - people are like, "Oh, your ID picture is terrible," and I was like, "That was, like, the worst day of my life." But we get knew ones soon so! [Laughs] But Major! His name escapes me right now.

Interviewer:

Sure.

Valerie Coe:

The SARC.

Interviewer:

Right.

Valerie Coe:

He - I worked all last year with him, but he took me to the MP station and CID and the CID questioning was probably the hardest thing because I hadn't actually said out loud, like, what had happened or answered the questions that they asked, cause they asked things such - in such depth that it's just like - it - yeah, it hit me hard. And then they made me draw pictures of, like, what the barracks room was laid out like and where I was in, like, relation to everything. And so that was a - that was just a really tough day and I didn't realize, like - I guess I realized at that moment, like, how much I had never processed anything, and so - then this had been, like, three years. So I wasn't - I thought I was fine that whole time, but when they made me start talking about everything, I was just like, oh man, this is gonna be a lot rougher than I thought it was gonna be because I didn't realize.

So then cow year, that's kind of when I started going through and processing everything that I hadn't processed for three-plus years. So that was tough cause I started to have nightmares and I didn't know if it was, like, things that I maybe remembered that I had, like, repressed or if they were just nightmares. But that was like a pretty awful couple months and just cause I'd never - like I had never experienced anything like that, but that and, like, telling my parents was [crying]!

Interviewer:

Yeah.

Valerie Coe:

That was hard because it's tough to tell people that, you know, care about you, like, more than anything that something like that happened because every - that was the thing, is everyone was so supportive, but it's like - it almost - you can see it hurt them almost more than it seems like it's hurting you because they want to be able to do something for you and they can't. But, yeah, telling my parents and my sister was tough, especially cause it was over the phone, but! Yeah, that was - I guess that was the surprising thing for me is how supportive people were, just because people don't always know what to do, but like I had a roommate that would just sit there, and I was like, "Just sit here while I cry, like, pretend like nothing's going on," but like I would just not want to be in my room alone or anything like that sometimes.

So I had a couple really good friends that would just sit in there and they'd do their

homework or do whatever they had to do, but just having someone else there was huge. Yeah, it was just - I guess - I don't know. I went through all of - like all of the feelings, like the denial and then I, like, blamed myself for a while, but when you kind of realize, like, okay, like there's nothing I did. And I guess one of the questions that was hard for me to answer for CID - CID asked what did I want to get out of reporting? And even - Major Moretti, that was his name - the SARC - he asked me that when I made my report too. He said, "What do you want to get out of this," and I was like - "cause he had asked me for his name and if I knew if he was still in the Army, and I said, "I don't know if he's still in the Army," but he looked him up right then and he was at that point in time. And I was like, "Well, I don't -"

I was like, "I haven't talked to him. I don't -" I was like, "Personally, I don't really care what happens to him." I was like, "I just wanted to do this for me," which was good 'cause then I was able to process everything and - but I didn't expect it - I didn't expect them to find anything on the investigation because it had been three years, I never said anything at Fort Stewart, I didn't go to the hospital. There was no, like, safe exam, the forensic exam they do, done, so I was like there's probably literally zero evidence of anything occurring. I remember calling my roommate after going to CID and just telling her that - I was like, "The CID from Fort Stewart probably gonna contact you. There's an investigation open," and she's like, "I remember that morning." She's like, "You just kept repeating that you didn't know what happened," and so that was, like - she was about the only person that could say anything.

But the investigation took, like, six, eight months, some - I don't know. It was like April of last year that I got a notification from CID that the case had been found on charges of aggravated sexual assault, 'cause there's a whole spectrum of sexual assault charges, from, like, minimal to rape and rape is really hard to prove without forensic evidence. But when it was found, it was like - almost as shocking to me I think as anyone else because - not that I didn't believe myself, but the fact that somehow, someway, CID did what they do and was able to - found an investigation was really shocking to me and it made me feel like - okay, I was like, okay, I wasn't making this up the whole time, 'cause you kind of drive yourself nuts and wonder if you're crazy or anything like that when it's all going on.

'Cause you're like I don't remember anything; how do I even say something happened? And so that was interesting to me, 'cause I expected an unfound investigation, which would've been fine because that's one of the biggest, like, myths we try to dispel here too, is like an unfounded investigation doesn't mean nothing happens. It just means there's no evidence either way, for or against the case. So that was until about last April, but it was just a really long process. There - I think I felt like every emotion possible to feel in that whole span of time, and I still do sometimes but it's definitely gotten better. So! And working with CASHA has kind of - that's what - but that's why I didn't want to do it, is I didn't want to - I guess for me it was I didn't want to deal with anything that had happened to me personally and I didn't trust the system.

But after going through all that, it's like CID does their job. It's not for us to decide whether or not something happens, that's for CID to figure out, and I definitely trust the system. And people that do report, generally the statistics say, like, less than 2 percent are false reports. So I can't imagine putting yourself through that voluntarily, 'cause I know, like, from what I went through - and it's different for every person, but I wouldn't voluntarily go through all of that at all, the - it's really invasive, it's really time-consuming, it's emotional and stressful. And I remember my instructors were all really - I didn't tell them everything but I told them that I had things going on and they were all really supportive, but it's just, like, it affects every aspect of your life once you kind of start to deal with it and you don't realize, like, how it's gonna affect everything until you're already, like, there.

So that was - yeah, definitely a process.

Interviewer:

What happened on the backside of it all? Do you know what it - if anything happened to the -

Valerie Coe:

I have no idea.

Interviewer:

And itâ€™

Valerie Coe:

I - so at one point in the investigation he - it had been about four years from my enlistment date so I knew his was probably about there too, and I know at one point I got a call from CID saying that he had not been flagged, that he was under investigation, he was on PCS leave in California, so they didnâ€™t know what they were gonna do. So he had essentially gotten out of the Army while he was under investigation, which wasnâ€™t supposed to happen, and the supe had told - Major Moretti- to pull me into the office and let me know that, and so then it was kind of a - were they gonna send it to civilian jurisdiction and have him processed that way or were they gonna pull him back on active duty to possibly do a court-martial? We didnâ€™t end up going to court-martial because you have to have like - with these kind of cases they donâ€™t go to court-martial a lot of the time unless they can definitely prove it.

So I donâ€™t know exactly what happened to him, like, administratively and everything.

Interviewer:

Sure.

Valerie Coe:

But when they asked me before, theyâ€™re like, do - did - I didnâ€™t particularly want to, like, have to testify in front of him or anything. So I donâ€™t know. I donâ€™t really care what happened to him.

Interviewer:

Sure.

Valerie Coe:

But they just told me that the case had been found and Iâ€™m sure heâ€™s - I donâ€™t know what heâ€™s doing now butâ€™

Interviewer:

Now earlier you said, â€œI donâ€™t remember what happened so how could I say anything happened,â€ but having reported it and having a found investigation, what would you tell another person who feels the same way that you felt?

Valerie Coe:

I guess trust yourself, â€œcause I knew that morning when I woke up, like, something abnormal had happened. I - you know your body pretty well normally. So like when CID asked me to describe, like, what I felt or if I could tell that something had happened, I was like - I had to explain everything, and so, yeah, I guess itâ€™s trusting that gut feeling, and thatâ€™s so much easier to say than it is to do because you question everything and at the time, like, I wasnâ€™t sure what to say or who to do go. That was another big thing, is because I was on rear D I had no idea - other than the hospital, I had no idea where to go, but being a medic everybody knows everybody so I didnâ€™t want to go to the hospital. So, yeah, just - itâ€™s a - you have to trust yourself and be sure of yourself because everybody -

I mean everybody else might question you anyway, but thatâ€™s not for them to really decide, and if you donâ€™t know then CID could figure it out. Thatâ€™s - I guess thatâ€™s what I learned. But I wish I wouldâ€™ve trusted myself sooner â€œcause it definitely took a lot to go through that process, but now I would definitely say if thereâ€™s any doubt, like - and then saying it out loud and, like, when I had to say out loud like what had happened for the first time, somebody was like, â€œThatâ€™s completely nor normal

and thatâ€™s not okay.â€ So I was like - even if nothing happened, even if all my clothes just disappeared, I was laying on that bed, thatâ€™s not okay. So itâ€™s just that you have to - being able to trust yourself enough to say something is the hardest part soâ€

Interviewer:

Had it - has the whole experience of reporting and the investigation and everything, has that made you a better rep for other people?

Valerie Coe:

I donâ€™t know if itâ€™s made me a better rep necessarily, but I definitely think Iâ€™m more empathetic now. I canâ€™t say, like, my situation or my case is how every case is -

Interviewer:

Sure.

Valerie Coe:

-by any means, â€™cause every person processes things differently and then every case is so different, but I normally have - Iâ€™ve really tried to keep my case out of everything, especially CASHA related because I didnâ€™t want, like, it to become, oh, she only does CASHA because this happened to her or it to become, like, CASHAâ€™s the platform for you to share your story, â€™cause thatâ€™s not the case at all either way.

Interviewer:

Sure.

Valerie Coe:

But I definitely think it makes me more empathetic being able to listen to different peopleâ€™s stories and situations and things when we do help people or just present a different side of an argument sometimes than people hear, â€™cause - yeah, everybodyâ€™s so different and I went through the whole - all the phases of denying, then finally accepting it and everything.

Interviewer:

So what does your future hold for you?

Valerie Coe:

Well, in May we graduate.

Interviewer:

Right.

Valerie Coe:

So weâ€™re almost there now, and Iâ€™m gonna be a transportation officer and then - I guess in about two-and-a-half weeks we find out where weâ€™re going, so thatâ€™ll be exciting.

Interviewer:

Where do you hope to go?

Valerie Coe:

Hopefully to Bragg or Campbell, Iâ€™m not sure.

Interviewer:

Okay. And what did you major in?

Valerie Coe:

Iâ€™m a GIS major, so geospatial information science.

Interviewer:

Okay. So Bragg or Campbell.

Valerie Coe:

Yes, sir.

Interviewer:

Very good. What does West Point mean to you?

Valerie Coe:

West Point means a lot to me, honestly. The opportunities and experiences here have definitely helped me grow, both as a person and as, like, a future officer. The leadership challenges that this place gives you just based on the time commitments and academics and the military side of things and just balancing it all have been definitely opportunities for

growth in and of themselves. And then I think the biggest thing that West Point means or has given me, it's the connections and the people, the instructors we have, my classmates and the underclassmen even; the people here are some of the best people, highest caliber people I've ever met. So that's definitely been something that I'll cherish, and that network of people that you can fall back on and go to for anything and everything is huge.

Interviewer:

Where do you see yourself in five years?

Valerie Coe:

In five years, hopefully company command. I don't know exactly - I haven't completely thought about that. I've honestly thought about maybe dropping a civil affairs packet or trying to do cultural support team stuff. So we'll see kind of where the Army takes me.

Interviewer:

All right. Is there anything I haven't asked you that you'd like to say?

Valerie Coe:

Not that I can think of.

Interviewer:

Well, this has been an incredible interview and I thank you so much for coming in here to share your story with us, and I'm sure many people will benefit from hearing your story.

Valerie Coe:

Thanks.