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&
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Narrator: TIFFANY LE

Interviewer: Roger Le

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Transcriber: Stephanie Wong

RL: Hi, name is Roger Le and today is November 10, 2010. We are here at Nguoi Viet Newspaper, I am here to interview Miss Tiffany Le. Could you please state your name?

TL: My name is Tiffany Le.

RL: And where were you born and what year?

TL: I was born in Riverside, California, 1984.

RL: Can you tell me more about your family? How many brothers and sisters you have, what your parents do?

TL: My parents immigrated to the U.S. in 1975. My dad was a former air force pilot for the South Vietnamese army until he got discharged for trying to steal one of the planes. My mother was a school teacher for maybe about a year until she had to follow her husband to flee Vietnam. They arrived to Pennsylvania, and afterwards they arrived to California, southern California. I have one older brother, he's four years older than me, and he is – do I talk about what he does too?

RL: Sure.

TL: I have one older brother and he is four years older than me. Right after high school, he had joined the Marine Corps. Right after high school, I joined the Marine Corps because he had convinced me to. And afterwards, I was in the Marine Corps for about 6 years, and I was a combat videographer. And was stationed in Miramar. I worked for Nguoi Viet Daily News as a reporter, and I concentrate, I write on things that deal with the younger generation. Young people pretty much.

RL: We'll cover more of that later, but I'd like to know what it was like for you to grow up in Riverside, California.

TL: Riverside, California is about 45 minutes away from Orange County. It is a low-desert, mostly white and Hispanic population. There's about 300,000 people living there. There's probably about 150 Asian-Americans that live there. I grew up in the suburbs, cookie-cutter homes, cul-de-sacs, moms that were in PTA. Not my mom, well, but my childhood consisted of really staying at home, watching The Simpsons, playing Nintendo. I stayed at home a lot because my mom was a single mom and we didn't have enough, she didn't have enough money for a babysitter. We didn't have any family nearby, so we were home a lot.

RL: Who were your friends in school, like early on in elementary school?

TL: In elementary school, my friends were; my best friend was **Ann Aurora**, she was a Filipino-American, and the two of us were actually the only Asian-Americans in our class. My other best friend came along in about 4th grade, and she was **Melissa Saw**, and she is Chinese and Mexican. So, those were my best friends. They were girls.

RL: So, did they, since you were one of the only Asians in your class – is that correct?

TL: Yes, yes.

RL: Did you feel that they treated you differently, or when did you realize any special treatment or racism when you were younger?

TL: Yes, actually let me go back. In kindergarten, I attended a private Catholic school. My family is not Catholic. And my older brother had already attended that school for quite a while. After attending there for after 4 years, the school administrators realized that we were not going to convert and started giving us a hard time about my enrollment into the next grade level. So, after that, we experienced a lot of hostility every time my mother would visit the school offices. They would question very specifically why we had not attended service, and so, once my mother felt this hostility, then she enrolled us into a public school. At that public school, there weren't many Asian Americans there, and when I first attended class there, I was the only Asian student there. and at the playground, I was made fun of any they asked "Do you speak Chinese? Ching Chongnese" – that was what they would do. And, I was also very tiny, and called me little fried

rice. And of course, it's funny now, but I really felt like I was being bullied back then, especially when they would pull out the race card. I didn't know kids were able to pull out the race card. But yea, as I grew older maybe into the 6th and 7th grade, there was more Asians enrolled in my school, and so the making fun of Asians stopped. And it suddenly became cool to be Asian.

RL: What's one of your fondest childhood memories?

TL: My fondest childhood memory. There's so many. I think my fondest childhood memory was in my backyard, there used to be orange groves, just surround my neighborhood. And again, I lived in the suburbia, and so there was orange groves, like acres and acres of orange groves, and there was a hill; because Riverside is known for its rolling hills. And there's orange groves there, and you know, my brother would always go, do you want to hiking? But really we would just go to the orange groves and we would play hide-n-seek there. Of course, we were trespassing property, but they didn't know that. We would always have like egg hunts and bring like GI Joes whenever to play little battlefields. We would always steal their oranges, but they weren't that good, they were really sour.

RL: So what activities did you do after school in middle school?

TL: Let's see. In middle school, we had to go straight home because my mom was single and while she was working, we had to be home. She would always just randomly stop by and check on us or call us at home. So, after school, we would, I would just watch Power Rangers, of course I would do homework first. I would just watch cartoons and Sabrina the Teenage Witch.

RL: What about high school, what were you involved with then?

TL: In high school, I was in ASB, I was the class vice-president for the freshman class. Afterwards I was involved in cross country, and I was also involved in winter guard, which is like color guard but in the winter. Towards the end of high school I started going on a rough path and not getting involved, more getting involved with friends, and partying and ditching. Ditching was a really big part of my high school life.

RL: Was there any ROTC program at your high school or anything like that?

TL: Yea, there was an ROTC program.

RL: Were you involved in that?

TL: No, certainly not. I - of course not. I was just too consumed at having fun at the time. I didn't even think I was delinquent. I didn't think I was that bad, but I was pretty bad. I almost failed, I almost dropped out of high school. I was very *hỗn láo* [disrespectful], I was very disrespectful with my mom, always sneaking out. We used to live in a two story home, my room was on the second floor and I used to climb out the window, scale down the roof, and jump, just to sneak out. And it really hurt my ankles, but that's what I would do, while my brother was away in the military, she had a really rough time raising me.

RL: So, since your being delinquent in school, not really showing up for classes, what changed? What inspired you to join the military, how did you finish in school?

TL: I finished high school with a very low GPA, it's so low that I was so ashamed of how bad I did. I did not even open my transcripts until 2 or 3 years later, when it came in a sealed wrap. Now, a lot of people ask me why I joined the military, and I have to be truthful – it's not because of September 11th, it's not because pride of my country, it's not because of honor and dignity, it's not because to pay respect to my country, it's because I was so, bad, so hur that when I came home from going out, my brother was on leave from the military, and while I was partying away, my mom and brother had a discussion. I wasn't there, but the discussion was like what are you going to do with Tiffany? And my mother was probably like, give up, I don't know, I'm probably going to kick her out soon. And I come home one night, and, my mom was asleep, and my brother was like, "Hey, what's up?" and I was like, "Yea, what's up?" And I don't know, didn't really want to talk to him, I was under the influence at the time. He asked me, "So, what are you going to do after you graduate from high school?" And I'm like "well, duh, I'm just gonna go to community college and transfer." And he's like "Do you really you can transfer?" And I'm just like, "Ugh, this guy's stupid. Yeah, duh." Which is probably not what was going to happen. I would have probably still gone out a lot, and probably would have gotten impregnated and on welfare. That was probably what was going to happen. So he's like, "Alright, look, what about join the military? You don't even have to go active duty. Like you can just go one weekend a month, it's the reserves." And I'm like "Uhh, I don't know" and he's like "Come on, it's the reserves, you still have your life for 30, 28 days of the month, you only check in one weekend a month, you get paid for it", and this the ultimate selling point, he's like, "Think about

how many female marines there are.” “I think it’s about 6,000.” And he’s like, “Alright, alright, how cool would it be to be an Asian-American female to join the marines?” And I was like, “Yeah, that’d be cool.” And he’s like, “Alright, this is even cooler. Think about how many Vietnamese marines there are.” And I was like, “Oh my god, that’d be so cool.” And I signed up for it the next day. They dragged me to the recruiter’s office 24 hours later just in case I changed my mind. Yeah, that was the reason I joined it.

RL: So, how many months or days passed since you signed up, were you called into training?

TL: I signed up in February, and graduated high school in June. And then I got shipped out to Parris Island, South Carolina for boot camp in August.

RL: Did you reflect on your decision, from when you signed up to the day you shipped out? What were you thinking?

TL: When I arrived, I was in complete culture shock. Complete culture shock. Coming from southern California to South California. Think about it, it was like watching *Gone with the Wind*. These huge plantation homes, and white people, and a lot of southern black people. It was a huge culture shock, I get onto the bus, and there’s this big sergeant. He looked like he could be a professional wrestler. Can I curse? Cause he cursed at us. Anyway, he’s like, he stands on the bus, stampedes on the bus, “Alright, welcome to Parris Island, South Carolina,” no no, he was like “Welcome to Marine Corps recruit depot Parris Island, get off my bus!” And we’re like oh my god, we had to run, and everything we did, we had to run. And we had to stand in line, get in a straight line, shut your face, what are you doing, look straight ahead, stand up straight with your arms to your side. So that was, my first three months there. That was my three months there, I was being yelled at. When we checked into my platoon, we started with 60 girls from all over the United States, mostly from middle America, mostly from red-neck areas. So, we started off with 60 girls and ended up with about 30 girls. Some of them dropped out. My drill instructors were so mean, drill instructor, Staff Sergeant Osbourne, she was like this big African American woman, huge lips that always called us retarded. “You must be high on crack, Le, get down and give me 50 pushups.” And we had Sergeant **Kooza**, we were her first platoon, and she was excited. She was excited to grill us because we were her first platoon. “Shut up Le, you’re doing it wrong, keep your eyes straight,” something like that. And, we were just always have to

stand by our beds, position at attention. And they would just walk up and down, up and down, making sure that we weren't staring at anybody, making sure that we were staring straight, making sure that our uniforms were uniform with everything else. But, it was pretty tough. We had to wake up at 5:00. We didn't even have any clocks there, I didn't even know what time we woke up, but it was really early. Probably it was like 3 am, but surely it was 5 am. Anyway, we had to wake up really early, they would always turn on the light. "Get up, wake the f up now! Get your lazy asses off the rags, what is taking you so long!" And they always counted down from 10, 9, 8, 7, 6, 5, 4, 3, 2, 1, and you had to like hop off your bed, be in your clothes, and ready to exercise, ready to go. And if you weren't, then, well, you get sent to the sand pit, where they made you just do push-ups, like really fast push-ups. It's not like 24 hour fitness where you leisurely pace, they make you do 50 push-ups within 5 minutes. It was horrible. During the toughest times there, I hated the weather. It was so hot and muggy, there's like huge spider mosquito bites that would bite my arm, except I can't scratch them because if you move in your platoon, then you basically killed your whole platoon. So we just had to endure mosquito bites that were worse than platoons. And I had to endure keeping my mouth shut for most of the time, only open to say "Yes, mam, no mam." And we recruits, we couldn't speak in first person. We were not individuals. So, if I wanted to go to the head, which is the restroom, you say, "Recruit Le requests to make a head call." I mean, it seemed like I had no identity there, I was just another of Uncle Sam's number. It was really hard, it was really hard, because when it came to eating, we only had 10 minutes to eat. It was like a big buffet style, except the buffet was kind of preppy food. Once you get the food, it's not like you can pick and choose. You just slap it on your plate, you sit down on the cafeteria table, and whoever's at the table, once the drill instructor says get up, you're done, they have to get up and it's like a domino cycle. The next person gets up, the next person gets up, and I'm just like ugh, I just sat down! Yea, I don't even remember chewing my food there. But, I did regret joining the military. I was like ugh, man, why was I so *hur* [rotten]. I could have been going to college right now like my friends. I could have been at a dorm, and just going to class, I could have been eating Mẹ's phở and bún bò, and just being normal. Why was I so *hur*, why did I ditch so much, and that's when like, that's when I...

RL: Do you want to stop?

TL: So that's when I realized, that's when I realized what kind of hell a first generation, Vietnamese American child had put my mother through. That's when I understood *cái khó khăn của Mẹ* [the difficulties of my mom] And, why it was difficult for her to accept my *hu*. Because first of all, we were one of the very few Vietnamese families in Riverside, California. My friends were Hispanics, most of my friends had very lenient friends. And most of my Hispanic friends are what, third generation, their great-grandparents came here. So, they had a more Americanized view. So, but I'm glad I went through boot camp because without it, I don't think I would be able to appreciate the small things, the freedoms that we have here. I don't think I could appreciate just how lucky I am to be able to actually have, to be afforded the opportunity of being a Marine, and the doors it has opened for me. I mean, I always tell people I joined it because it was really cool for a Vietnamese girl to join, but I really appreciate the opportunity. I'm like redundant, sorry.

RL: No problem. From that first day, you said it was a huge culture shock to you. What motivated you to keep going, because like you were from southern California, all these people yelled at you, cursing at you, to find an opportunity that way, what motivated you internally to keep going?

TL: What motivated me was the, I was just in my head its only 3 months of hell, its only 3 months, I can do this, it's only 3 months. And I also thought about, well if I give up now, I'm gonna be really embarrassed, I would be really embarrassed for not finishing what I started. And, I wouldn't want to, and as much as cliché as it sounds, I didn't want to disappoint my family. I didn't want to disappoint my family, and I just felt that it's only temporary, and it was really all in the mind. That this being verbally abused by complete strangers, being cursed at by people that you've never met at your life, it's fine. It's just how it is at boot camp. Afterwards, I just tried to think about the future. I would always visualize during the toughest times when they really cursed us out, or they made

TL: ...or when the drill instructors made me feel like an idiot, I just visualized on my last day at boot camp, you know, how I would look in uniform. And after that, I won't have to deal with those types of people anymore. Which is untrue, because even when I get out in the fleet, my staff, NCO's, my superiors, they still curse at you. Not as much, but they still tell you what's wrong with you. But you know, you build a tolerance.

RL: Can you verify what NCO stands for.

TL: NCO stands for non-commissioned officer, so they're usually like the leaders of the squad or the platoon. They have a leadership position, authoritative, sometimes dictative, but leadership position.

RL: How do you think you changed in those 3 months at boot camp?

TL: Let's see, I got stronger, and I could run faster. I could carry heavy stuff more. No, I probably changed. I don't know how I changed but friends tell me that, actually my mom tells me that I don't *cãi nhiều* [argue a lot] too much, each time she says something it's like I'm able to keep my bearing. And bearing was something that our drill instructors instilled in is. "Hold your bearing, where the f is your bearing, Le? Give me 50...oh, you can't hold your bearing? Alright then, go to the sand pit." Anyway, it was all about bearing, not arguing back, being able to keep like a straight face. And, which keeping a straight face is really hard for me now. But the bearing, the discipline of being able to be more mindful with what I say, that's probably one of the things I learned. And, being mindful, what I mean by being mindful is what I say, what I mean by that was pre-boot camp was I, just was really *hỗn* [rude or disrespectful] with everybody I came in contact with. I mean, the "f" word, the "s" word, the "b" word, which always came out of my mouth with every sentence that I said. In public, in private, at home, at school, it was just like, anyway that stuff, that explicit language ended through boot camp. Why? Because we couldn't talk that much.

RL: So, did you get close to any of the other recruits there and do you still keep in contact?

TL: Yea, I got pretty close with my bunk mate, she was from Alabama, her name was Lindsey Johnson, and we also had boot camp besties, you know, your best friend in boot camp. One of them was an African-American named Stephanie Ferar, she was from Maryland, but we kind of lost contact. The girls that I do keep in contact with, we recently reconnected on Facebook, maybe about 7 or 8 months ago. One of them is still in the military, one of them just got out of the military and is just going to school using the G.I. bill. Can we go back to the culture shock?

RL: Definitely.

TL: So, one of the biggest culture shocks that I had in boot camp was the other recruits, where the girls had come from. This was the first time I had really been exposed to people that weren't from California. And it had just amazed me, it shocked me actually that they came from so many different backgrounds, that were really rough, really rough background. I mean, I grew up in a cookie cutter home, suburbia, everything was perfect. No, some of these girls, they came from abusive families. One girl, she was in boot camp, she was probably in Parris Island for 5 months because she kept getting injured. When you're injured, you get held back. And, she was about 18. She refused to go back because she had an abusive boyfriend that was waiting for her at home. And she kept telling the staff people like no, I can't go back. We would have some of the other girls, they would tell me. During the night time we had free time, so we would have girl chat. But you know, they would talk to me about their background, one girl she witnessed her dad always hitting her mom, and having to flee her house, run away from her house because her dad was chasing her mom with a shot gun. And I, hear this, and I was in complete shock, these are things I've never heard about, these were things that were on the Ricky Lake show or on T.V. So, their socioeconomic background was completely different from mine, and it was probably the first time I was exposed to girls that were raised in poverty, and girls that came from very extremely broken homes.

RL: So what was your first assignment?

TL: My first assignment was, I'm sorry, I don't understand?

RL: Like, where did you go from there on after?

TL: Oh, okay. So after boot camp, I went to defensive information school in Fort Meade, Maryland. And this school specializes in training, service men, in the field of communications, like public affairs, photography, videography, and graphics. So, my specific job, my MOS, military occupational specialty, was combat videographer. Make movies, like you're making right now.

RL: During your time in the service did you see any other Vietnamese-American female marines aside from yourself?

TL: No, I've never met any other Vietnamese female marines. I've met, there's a number of female Korean marines, but never Vietnamese.

RL: What about other Vietnamese people also in the Marines?

TL: Yea, maybe during my time, maybe about 3 or 4. One I remember was from Minnesota, I think and the others were a little bit older. They kind of looked like former gang members. They looked tough.

RL: So, being a Vietnamese woman in the marines, what perceptions do you think other people had about you?

TL: Oh, gosh, what kind of perceptions they had on me? Well I heard it all from my mom. Once when I went away for boot camp, there were so many people that had gave my mom a hard time. "*Tại sao gái đi lính vậy?*" [Why would a girl join the military?] And it's like, the perceptions from what I understood, from what I understood and from what she told me, I felt, I think the older number of our relatives, especially the older Vietnamese, kind of like looked down on us, looked down at me, looked down at my mom, of sending her only daughter and youngest daughter to the military. I got the feeling that some people thought that we were just ordinary joes, just really not educated, just very like working class. I had a feeling that and I told other Vietnamese people that had joined the military, I could kind of sense, I sometimes felt like there was this fake job. "*Oh, đi lính à,...*" I'm like, because I was so *hur*, okay if I didn't go to *lính*, I wouldn't go to *đại học*. There was a lot of negativity, especially being a female. I think there was a number, a number of my relatives that was in the South Vietnam army, and I remember he made a comment. "*Bên lính Việt Nam, mấy con gái lính Việt Nam nó giống con trai, nó chửi nhiều lắm, nó cũng nhậu nhiều lắm...*" [In Vietnam, many girls in the military are just like the guys, they curse and drink a lot.] And what I got from it was, you're probably like them, which wasn't the case.

RL: What about people inside the military, what kind of perceptions do you think they had?

TL: Well, they certainly thought I was good at math, thought I was smart. "Alright Le, do this math equation, or go figure it out, or just go ask Le, she's smart.." something like that when we would just have to create plans. Being a petite female, there was a number of them that

underestimated my physical ability. They didn't think that...we would always have to go on humps, which is hiking. But it's nothing like Yosemite where you go and take pictures. You have to bring this heavy backpack. It was probably like about 40 pounds, cause you had put your MRE's, your food in there, [RL: meals ready to eat] you had to bring some metal tools like shovels, we would have to carry a rifle, which was an M-16 which probably weighed about 7-10 pounds. I don't know, I need to Wikipedia. That's when I'm really female, I don't know the specifications about my weapons. There was a number of them that thought that I couldn't finish a 15 mile hump. Some of them thought that I couldn't slope a hill. I don't know, do you need help carrying that? Are you sure you got it? Yeah, I got it. But I can understand why they kept asking, you know, there were some other females in the past that weren't able to make it, you know that needed to get out of the training. It was sometimes hard when I needed, when say my staff sergeant would say, "Go ask the sergeant if he needs the humvee's in this location." And so when I would try to access higher authority, it was kind of hard. Because number one, female, small, minority, low rank. "Uh, excuse me sergeant master...Yo, what? Hurry up and finish your sentence Le, I don't have time, I don't have all day...Yeah, staff sergeant wants to know if he needs to..." Exactly like that. Big, in powering men. But, I think there was a lot of fear on my end. Really timid, there, we would always ask, you know being a female in a male society, you know male culture, you're gonna attract a lot of attention in that environment. So, there was a lot of, people, servicemen that would just try to always talk to me. So, where are you from? What nationality are you? Do you want to have dinner tonight? And it's flattering, but, a little I don't know, sometimes flattering, there's sometimes I have to actually for the most time during my service, I had to put my guard up. It seemed as if there was like a, sometimes I envy, I see other marines that they have a sense of commodore, a sense of brotherhood. And it's not like I could be a part of that commodore without fear of people trying to, without fear of 18 year old hormonal young service men trying to get in my pants. I have to put it like that. But, there was a sense of sisterhood, we always bonded together, packed in together, we always looked for our each other.

RL: When you first had weapon training, how did you first feel you know, firing a weapon?

TL: I hated it. It was so heavy. When they first issued our M-16, we had to memorize a serial number. I don't even know if I remember mine. 0963816. Anyway, that thing was with us 25

hours a day, like 8 days a week, slept with it, we were made accountable for it. Anyway, the first time I shot the weapon was during rifle range week, and it sucked, because the thing is like this tall, it's almost as tall as me, and when you have to hold the barrel, and have to hold the pistol, but the thing is so long, like it just felt like holding this piece of machinery that just japed my shoulder, and every time I shot the weapon there was a recoil, so at the end of the day, I would have a big brown, blue, green, bruise on my shoulder. And I was pretty bad at shoulder. But what was my feeling like, I think I missed. Let me try again. What was my feeling like, I was really excited, I was like oh, I've never shot a weapon before. I was really scared because it was really exciting and I was a little scared. The first time I shot my first rounds, I thought, once I shot it, once I really felt the trigger, and squeeze it really slowly, and once I got past the point where it ignites, where it shoots, I was like woah, there's a recoil, oh, it wasn't that loud. It's not that bad, because the recoil doesn't push you that back, but you do it for 2 hours and you know, you don't want to get there. Anyway, that was my feeling... a little excited and scared, the fear that my right ear as gonna go deaf, a little fear that there would be a misfire in my chamber and that my chamber was going to explode, you know, all these crazy things go inside your head.

RL: So, how did you go from shooting an M-16 to shooting video instead?

TL: Oh, well when I first signed up at the recruiter's office, my job was already assigned. So from shooting a M-16 to shooting a video camera, I would certainly say that shooting an M-16 is probably easier. Shooting a video camera, that thing is pretty heavy. At school, actually we probably were using something like your camera but a little bigger, you had to put it on your shoulder for a long period of time. And it's not like I'm that tall, so it's not like I can get big scenery of everything, you know, the whole frame of everything. I don't, that, after boot camp, then I went to the video school, to DINFOS [Defense Information School].

RL: So, since you went to video school, after you trained at that school, where did you go?

TL: After I went DINFOS, for 5 months, I was stationed, my reserve duty station was in Miramar, which is in San Diego. So, after that, then I could commence my service in the fleet, as a reserve. So, I got to go home, and I enrolled in college immediately, because after being surrounded by knuckleheads, jarheads, I was like, I need to get a degree. Number one, military life is pretty good for me, for this contract, I probably won't reenlist. But, so what I did was I

went home, I enrolled into college, and for 6 years, one weekend a month, 2 weeks in the summer, I would check into my reserve duty station in Miramar.

RL: How did it feel to graduate boot camp, and who attended?

TL: Oh, gosh. It was bittersweet, like the last day of my day, we had a graduation ceremony. Actually, it's, this is my mom at the graduation ceremony. Wait, it's not the graduation ceremony, because you're not allowed to have cameras in there. I was really happy. My brother and my mother attended, and she took like a red eye flight, took like 3 flights to get from California to South Carolina. I was very happy to see my family, very happy to think that I was going to be able to eat normal food at a normal pace, I was happy to think that I would be able to eat candy again. It was bittersweet because you know, platoon 4036 became my family for 3 months, they were like my sisters, my drill instructors were like my mom, no matter how much they cursed at me and called me stupid and made me go to the sand pit, it was always done for a reason. It was to teach us to be Marines, to have honor, courage, and commitment. It was to teach us to, they were there to instill us discipline, to instill everything that characterizes a good soldier. So, I was sad to leave, to say bye to them. But, I was really sad actually. There's no but. I was sad.

RL: So, you never got to travel anywhere with the military, is that correct?

TL: No, no, unfortunately it's weird with budgeting, they just don't have certain budgeting for any of us to go anywhere, where sometimes there's a certain need for certain occupations and they can only take a certain amount of people. There was only two videographers in my 250 plus unit, 250 plus people in my unit, and well they chose the other person than me.

RL: So, what did you, where did you go to school and what major did you decide to do?

TL: I attended Cal State Fullerton, and...

TL: ...changed majors so many times, but I finally decided on communications. While I didn't find, I wasn't fit with math or science, I didn't really, I wanted an easy major, bottom line. I didn't really want to go to college, I mean, I knew I had to. When people say college is not for everyone, I applied to that group. But I majored in Communications with an emphasis in Public Relations because I always had a love for writing, but I also had a business background, so I

wanted to incorporate those two. And plus, I've very social, I'm a social butterfly, so what degree could you use to, what degree utilizes social skills a lot. Public Relations. Maybe journalism too, you got to talk to a lot of people, but that's why I'm here at Nguoi Viet, with my communications background.

RL: Did you compare and contrast your experience going through the military and going to college?

TL: Oh yeah, I go to college and students are complaining about, their cell phone service plan, they're complaining about teachers giving them essays, giving pop quizzes, I hear about my classmates complaining about their roommate, their dorm mate, and how the RA was being such a prick for not allowing alcohol in their room, little things, trivial things like that. I'm like, yeah, maybe you should go to boot camp, then I won't have to listen to these complaints.

RL: Who did you associate with while going to college?

TL: In college, I associated with a lot of the older students. I had a pretty, a late start compared to my other friends.

RL: How old were you when you started college?

TL: Actually, I didn't have a late start. I just took forever, sorry. I only, I took a very long time in college, so I only associated with older students, students that, like I said, college was not for me, which is probably why I was not a superb student, so my friends in college were probably in the same, not the same foot in me, but also, older, got a late start, or maybe they had, like my friend Jesse, he had to go, almost flunked out, and I think he did flunk out. And he was coming back. And those are the people that I kind of learned from, because you know, there were times when I really felt like giving up. I didn't give up, I just kind of extended my stay. I almost gave up, I almost flunked out, but I just instead extended my stay. So yeah, older students, not so much Asian-Americans. There's not a lot of Asians in my major, in Communications.

RL: And, what are your fondest college memories then, if you have one?

TL: Fondest college memory...I'll have to skip that question.

RL: Okay, well then, what advice would you give to young Vietnamese girls who'd like to join the military?

TL: For young Vietnamese females who'd like to join the military, do it, don't listen to what other people say. But also, do it with a goal in mind. Why are you joining? What is your intent? Make sure to really research what you're doing before you, make sure to research like the, when you talk to a recruiter, make sure you just research everything that he says. And, don't join because you're angry at your family, don't join because you need to get away from something, join because you want to improve yourself, join because you want to see what other opportunities and potential there is out there. There was a lot times I encountered people who had joined for the wrong reasons, thing that they couldn't handle at home, something that they couldn't handle at home, and you had to run away. Of course, you can't run away when you're broke so you join the military...don't do that, because I saw a number of the marines, they had some, there were like some sad behavior, just lost, because things were so messed up at home and they had to get away. Deal with your family issues first and then join.

RL: What about any advice for the parents of those ladies who want to join?

TL: Oh yeah, don't give them guilt trips. Look, *cha mẹ, bố mẹ* [moms and dads], it's only temporary. Boot camp is only temporary, you're gonna see your son and daughter soon. They're well fed, they're well taken care of. *Có tiền đại học* [There's funding for college] with the G.I. bill, you don't want to pay for their tuition, do you? Military takes care of it. *Đi lính của Mỹ* is way more *suốt hơn* than *đi lính của Việt Nam* [joining the US military is way better than the Vietnamese military]. It's way better than...*Nếu có một số cha mẹ sợ con cái đi hết rồi, sợ ở nhà buồn* [if there are those parents who are afraid that they would be sad when their kids leave], would you rather have your child stay at home, not knowing what do with themselves, living at home until they're 30, when it's too late to join the military, Just, *đi vòng vòng không có gì để sống* [going in circles with no way to make a living]...would you rather have your child live like that, or would you rather just temporarily have them go away for *lính*, have them come back, be disciplined, have opportunities. Okay, alright, *lính* is something I did when I was young, but I think I know what I want in life right now. So, *đừng có ngại* [don't worry or fret].

RL: Is there anything that we haven't talked about that you wanted to touch upon, that you want to mention, any stories, you know, things that you'd like to share?

TL: Let's see. I don't think so. No, well actually I do have to say that my brother played a very important role with a lot of my decisions. And, I think it's because he also, there was something I'd like to add, is that if there's a mentor out there for you that can kind of guide you on your future career options or future decisions with school or military decisions, make sure to nurture that. I was really lucky to have my older brother to be able to guide me through these steps, and, he's just, I just hope that sometime if, cause I'm the youngest, if I could mentor someone younger, I hope to be a positive mentor for them as well. Is that it?

RL: Yea, it's winding down. How much did you miss Vietnamese food while you were in boot camp?

TL: How much did I miss it? I dreamed about it. During my four hours or five hours of sleep, all I dreamed was food and home, but mostly food. Like I could smell it in my dream, and I would wake up and I see like bunk beds like olive green sheets, and I see the fluorescent light, that was my home for 3 months. Yea, especially eating chow hall food, where it's just like powdered scrambled eggs, you know, eggs that was made from powder, and milk water, and eating what do you call that, eating like, what's like American food...like hamburger helper, eating rolls rather than rice, yeah, I really missed Vietnamese food when I was there. They didn't even have soy sauce in the chow hall. Like, that would have been just the minimum to be able to help me get through boot camp, they didn't even have soy sauce. Salt and pepper, mayonnaise.

RL: Well, we can touch a little bit on what you're doing now, and where you plan to go in the future, if you'd like.

TL: Yeah, yeah. Right now, I already covered that part. I'm very happy as a journalist here, especially being able to write about the Vietnamese-American community. Especially writing about young adults around my age that are, being able to write about young adults who go back to Vietnam, *để giúp đỡ mấy người nghèo* [to help the poor], you know, being able to write about different non-profits and charities. I feel so inspired by the work that they do, that sometimes in the next 5 years, within 5 years, I would like to be a media and marketing consultant with a focus on NGOs that are either based in Vietnam or helping Vietnamese communities.

RL: That's all the questions I have.

TL: Okay.

RL: So, thank you very much for your time.