

I joined the Military in 2002. I was **INSPIRED** to serve my country in the wake of 9/11. I began my service as an Aviation Electrician. It felt clear to **ME** that my obligation as an **AMERICAN** – and from **MY** point of view, my obligation to **GOD** -- was to help make our nation stronger in any way I could. My desire to make a positive **DIFFERENCE** is the reason I have received **MULTIPLE** awards for service.

I was young and idealistic when I signed up. And **DESPITE** what has happened to me, I **REMAIN** idealistic. I **CONTINUE** to believe in our country ... our democracy ... and the **VALUE** that **WE** place on doing the **RIGHT** thing.

I **DO** realize that we have **PROGRESSED** as a nation ... increasingly living up to our own **IDEALS** -- like the spirit of **EQUALITY** in our Declaration of Independence.

Helping our Military system live up to American values ... and creating an environment where military personnel

RESPECT and SUPPORT each other ... can ONLY make us STRONGER!

It was not easy for ME to come forward and tell my story.

Ultimately I determined I NEEDED to help do justice for so MANY survivors who've endured the same pain as myself.

So here it is: during my time in service, I was repeatedly assaulted – verbally, physically, sexually.

I was RAPED THREE TIMES ... I was considered fair GAME since there were no CONSEQUENCES for the rapists. Not even a slap on the wrist. That was the CULTURE. That was the REALITY I had JOINED in order to help my country.

The reaction of my command was always to consider ME a troublemaker while neglecting the perpetrators of what obviously is a CRIME ... and, EQUALLY obviously, does

NOT work to build a strong and cohesive military TEAM built on mutual support.

Instead of supporting me in any way, my Command Master Chief – whose name is David Orso, and who ironically is now working for the VA as an executive – told upper enlisted personnel to keep an eye on me ...but to ensure that I didn't (quote/unquote) "make trouble."

Allowing rape to go un-addressed in a 21st century world is BARBARIC, in itself. Certainly, that neglect and injustice does NOT build loyalty or respect.

But I was the victim of OTHER crimes, too, which the Command laughed off and covered up. For example ...

In October, 2004, as part of VF-32, I was deployed on the USS Harry S. Truman to support "Operation Enduring Freedom." At one point, I learned that my brother had been shot in the face.

On top of the stress I was ALREADY feeling as a woman in constant jeopardy under a male Command that didn't seem to CARE ... this news about my brother was extremely unsettling. The medical team put me on a mild SEDATIVE to help me deal temporarily with the anxiety and depression over his INJURY.

As a RESULT of the sedative, I fell ASLEEP on a chair during a message to us all from the ship's Captain over the communications system. Upper and lower enlisted personnel decided they would make the choice to spray my entire body with aircraft cleaner. I woke engulfed in FLAMES – I had actually been set on FIRE! That so-called PRANK could have cost my LIFE. I ran to Medical right away and am fortunate not to have been physically scarred forever but still live with nightmares to this day.

When I complained about this dangerous treatment, Senior Chief Pena Cruz told me just to be quiet and not to over-react.

What happens in CIVILIAN life if one person sets another on fire? A lot more than laughter!

AFTER this incident, my command moved me to Corrosion Control, where my direct supervisor in aviation maintenance was AM1 Attey. During the first WEEK of working under his supervision, he came up to me, grabbed my breast and said, “if you were in my country, Ghana, we would cut your clit off because women don’t deserve pleasure.”

Would you consider THAT appropriate supervision?

Attey continued to make unwanted advances and threatening comments for about two more weeks. My parents taught me to speak UP if I see injustice, so I COMPLAINED ... but to no avail.

Did my Command give Attey GUIDANCE on becoming a better manager? NO. They simply changed my shift and

gave me NO sign of caring and NO support at all.

While forced to STAY in Corrosion, I did everything in my power to SWITCH shops, jobs or commands.

Following this incident, Chief Petty Officer Darby came up to me on the flight deck and CHOKED me until I couldn't breathe. I ran from the flight deck and told Lieutenant Commander Lauderbaugh. His response – by now, not surprising – was just to drop it ... that he didn't care.

Ultimately I called a Captain's Mast in November, 2004. I spoke about the abuse I had been enduring with the entire command, including by the MEDICAL staff whose JOB is to protect their PATIENTS.

Lieutenant Commander Porter was the ship's psychologist. I had been seeing him about the incidents that occurred while I was deployed. Porter broke trust by telling my Command about our private conversations.

As part of what has now been revealed as a shameful and widespread PATTERN of military COVER-ups, HE diagnosed me with Borderline Personality Disorder ... while continuing to say I was FIT for full duty.

After voicing my concerns at the Captain's Mast, I was told very simply:

“NOW you need to say that you're satisfied. Otherwise, YOU will be punished. You're only making things harder on yourself by complaining.”

In January 2005 I was processed off the ship due to a so-called “mental defect.” I defy ANY of you not have mental consequences if YOU were raped and harassed repeatedly, and even set on fire, while management looked the other way and just LAUGHED.

Thank you for your time.