



**TRANSCRIPT: INTERVIEW WITH
GUADALUPE ALEXANDER
16 NOVEMBER 2012**

QUESTION: What is your title?

GUADALUPE ALEXANDER: My title, I'm a training developer for the MOS 92 Alpha, which is an automated logistical specialist. We create lessons plans, the critical tasks that the Soldiers need to know out on the forefront. We constantly update lessons and then shoot it out to the force.

QUESTION: Why did you join the Army?

GUADALUPE ALEXANDER: To be honest with you, I joined the Army because of my child. I felt like I couldn't provide for him [CRYING] like I wanted to, and this was the only way to go. I don't want to cry, I'm not going to cry, [LAUGHS] and like, I ended up crying. It just seemed like a better life for him. For him to see that my mom did something good, and my mom is doing something great for me. And to this day, he believes that. And I'm grateful that he does.

QUESTION: It's emotional stuff.

GUADALUPE ALEXANDER: Yes, it is, who would ever thought. To be honest with you, when I first enlisted I was like, I'm only going to do the six years that the Army told me to do. Before you know it, my six years were up and I was back two more, put me at eight, next thing I know, two more, put me at ten. Now I'm sitting at 20. I would a never have thought that in a million years.

QUESTION: Are you happy that you did that?

GUADALUPE ALEXANDER: Yes, being in the military has been one of the most gratifying experiences that I've had. I've met people that have humbled me, I've met people that have turned my hair gray [LAUGHS] when I was like 20-years-old. I've met people that are in the same positions I am, you know, I've been able to mentor people. My husband always tells me, you're more like a mother instead of a leader. And it's true. I try to do both, be the leader but also be the mom, because some of these kids will come in the Army and they don't have no parents, they don't have no structure, where you can just be able to sit down with them; they could cry to you, they could talk to you, and that's what they want. That's what they need. And I do that.

QUESTION: The typical image of a Sergeant in the Army is a grizzled guy.

GUADALUPE ALEXANDER: Pointing in your face, and [LAUGHS] I tend not to do that. I've gotten to a point where I've had to do that before with other Soldiers. But, after I do that, you know, they'll come back and they'll be like, Sergeant Alex, thanks. I needed that. I said, I know you needed that. And you know, they become better. They become better leaders.

QUESTION: What kind of obstacles did you encounter when you joined the military, and how did you overcome them?

GUADALUPE ALEXANDER: Most of them were more like, well, you can't do that. I worked at a warehouse my second duty station, and it just seemed like anything that was there that

needed to be picked up, they'd be like, no, no, no, I got it. And I would be like, no. And at first they would be like, no? And I would be like, no. Until you see me struggling, or I ask you for help, then you come help me. And that's been my motto ever since.

QUESTION: What overseas deployments have you had?

GUADALUPE ALEXANDER: I have two Iraq, one 2003-2004, when the war originally broke out. Then we came back, then I went back 2006-2007, Iraq, and then I have Afghanistan, 2009-2010.

QUESTION: So you were there at the beginning.

GUADALUPE ALEXANDER: Yes, at the beginning. It was weird because it was one day I was packing, and I was saying goodbye to my mom and my kids, and next thing you know I was in the desert. I was like, oh my God. [LAUGHS] Am I here? Really? It was more surreal than anything. I remember because I worked at the motor pool at the time. And the guys were fixing vehicles, making sure everything was good to go because they didn't want to have a vehicle go over the border and it breaks down. So they were going over their checks. So, it was a little surreal. But once we got on the ground, you know, set to the battle rhythm, it was pretty okay. We jumped [moved] a few times, that was interesting moving from point to point. But we made it work. We made it work.

QUESTION: How do you deal with the psychological trauma of being in a combat zone?

GUADALUPE ALEXANDER: The first time it was hard. I remember when I came back from the first deployment it was a few days before Halloween. My kids were all excited, they're like, oh, Halloween! So of course I took them out. They had these little popper things. That was the worst feeling in the world. All I could do was just duck, and I had to kind of look around, and my daughter was like, mom, you're embarrassing me and I was, I'm sorry [LAUGHS]. Then a few days later they had a range going on and you heard the artillery, just the whistle sound, and I'm telling my kids, duck, duck! And they're like, what is wrong with you, there is nothing going on. I'm running out the door, looking out trying to figure out where's it coming from. Even to this day when I take my daughter to the mall, it's hurry up, hurry up. I hate that, but it's just part of everyday life now.

QUESTION: Tell me about the world in which you worked over there.

GUADALUPE ALEXANDER: The first deployment, like I said, we jumped around a lot. We had humvees with the soft shell doors. So the first deployment, it was, if it's not bigger than you, run over it. The second deployment was, okay, if it's not bigger than you, just kind of like scoot over to the side, but just make sure you watch for the sides [LAUGHS]. It's difficult to know that somebody that you don't even know and that you're, in your perspective, trying to help, is trying to kill you. I remember my second deployment we were out on a mission and next thing you know there was like gunfire everywhere. And all you heard was this pop pop pop pop pop, and you're like what is going on? I was stationed at Fort Lewis where we had Strikers. So I dug back into the Striker and the gunner was, you know, you could get up and shoot. And I was like [LAUGHS] I didn't know if I could or not. So I got up and I interacted with the guys, but it felt like a video game until I actually saw the explosions of the buildings where they were shooting the grenades, trying to figure out where the shooting was coming from, because we had buildings all around us. And it's like you want to shoot at this building, but then it might be that building.

Or it might be that building right here. So, it's kind of difficult to realize that hey, people are trying to kill you. Why, because you're trying to help them? That sank heavy in my heart I guess you could say.

QUESTION: How often did that happen?

GUADALUPE ALEXANDER: It happened more on my second tour. It was more like once to twice a week. My first tour wasn't too bad. We would get mortared every once in awhile, but never really got shot at like I did my second deployment. My third deployment was just quiet. I didn't deal with any of that stuff.

QUESTION: You say "I got shot at" kind of casually. That would stay with me.

GUADALUPE ALEXANDER: Well, it does. I remember that big firefight we had and it was weird because I was augmented to an infantry unit and, those guys, I love those guys, they were great. I would do it again in a heartbeat. If they told me you're going out with the same crew, I would do it all over again. It was the best experience of my military career. After everything was quiet and we got them, they said, oh, we got them, you know, they were all excited. I'm still standing there with a weapon and I'm like what just happened? [LAUGHS]. The gunner came down and he was like, you did great. I don't even know if I shot at anything, I said I was just shooting. And he was like, you did great. You got high fives from all the guys and I was okay. So I just kept with the flow. People take vacations, I do deployments.

QUESTION: Women aren't supposed to be in combat but they are. What does that say about where women have come in the military?

GUADALUPE ALEXANDER: I think now society doesn't see us as just wives, mothers and homemakers, you know, now they see that we can make careers, that we're stronger than what they thought we were. We're not little weaklings that hope this doesn't come out wrong, need a man to do anything. There are some people out there that still say, oh, they can't handle themselves. But there's plenty of women out there that have handled themselves pretty doggone well.

QUESTION: What was your parents' reaction to your deployment to Iraq?

GUADALUPE ALEXANDER: My dad was the typical man. Okay, be careful. You're making me proud. I was like, okay [LAUGHS]. My mom, on the other hand, was oh my God, why are they sending you, can't they send somebody else, why do you have to go, you have kids, you're married. And I was like, I'm a Soldier. I said, regardless of if I want to go or not, I've got to go. So she prayed to God and saints. If you ask her now she'll say she did it all just to make sure that I came home in one piece.

QUESTION: How did your husband deal with it?

GUADALUPE ALEXANDER: My husband's a Soldier too. So when we go, we go together. The first two times we were in separate places. So I guess you could say it was harder. More harder on me than it was on him because I would email him, and I wouldn't hear anything back and I would be like, what's going on, you guys okay. I would worry, I'm thinking maybe they got attacked, and the worst thing happened, and nobody has come over here and told me. My husband was like, oh, I'm fine. But when I would go out and he wouldn't hear from me, he would be like, where are you, why haven't you emailed me? Are you okay? Are you alive?

Word always got around to him, oh yeah, she's fine, nothing's happened. So, it's different. It's different.

QUESTION: In some ways the instant communication makes it more difficult?

GUADALUPE ALEXANDER: It is because, like I said, at times I would email him and their internet would be down. Or I would email him and a mortar came in and destroyed the satellite, so now they're trying to get another satellite to get the internet running again, it could be anything. And just up to, I believe, this last deployment in 2009-2010 is when they started really letting us buy the cell phones, so you know, we could call and communicate with each other. Even those still aren't really secure, but you got to use what you can to stay in touch.

QUESTION: Tell me about your children and how they reacted when you deployed?

GUADALUPE ALEXANDER: My first two deployments my daughter really didn't understand. She was like you're leaving me. I remember calling back home and she would just have nothing to do with me [LAUGHS]. My little boy, he's not little anymore, was more understanding. He understood what I was doing. My second deployment both of them were like, yeah, my mom's in the Army, and she's out there fighting and doing whatever, even though they didn't know what I was actually doing. They just thought I was sitting on a FOB. My last deployment they were, of course, older and I had a little baby. My youngest had just turned one when I went to Afghanistan. So I missed a lot of milestones. But my kids are great. They are understanding. Up to this day my daughter still says, well, I'm not joining the Army or the Air Force or the Navy or the Marine Corps. She was like, I'm not going to be away from my family. I was, okay, you act like I had a choice. She just laughs with me now. They're great. They're great. I can tell you that they've matured a lot for their ages. Luckily I do have a very strong family support system that at any time they can take them with no questions asked, and they're in good hands and they get taught pretty good lessons.

QUESTION: Tell me what you see your fellow female Soldiers doing over there?

GUADALUPE ALEXANDER: When I was there they did just about everything from cooking, to running the showers, doing our laundry, fixing vehicles and they have opened up so much stuff for us now. I know today we can actually say that there's an actual recon, I don't even think it's called a recon team, but now that's a specific MOS, or a job title for them. And that makes me, as a woman, really proud. They're actually out there getting dirty with the guys and kicking in doors and searching people, doing what I was doing on my second deployment when they said that it was impossible for a woman to do it. We proved them wrong.

QUESTION: Can you talk about the challenges that women serving in forward positions face that their male counterparts don't face?

GUADALUPE ALEXANDER: Using the bathroom, that is the worst. Our first deployment, I don't want to sound rude, they're called piss tubes where they have these long long tubes made out of metal, and they put them in these big mounds of dirt, and they just stick them in there, and the guys go to them and do their business. When we first got there I was like what is this, and they're, oh, that's where we go pee. I was like, what is going on? They didn't have porta potties. I was the only female on the maintenance team. So what they did is they put up a table [LAUGHS]. This sounds gross. They dug a hole and it was like five or six feet deep and I had a little opening where I could just spread my legs out and just use the bathroom. When you're

finished just put a little bit of dirt in there. Oh my goodness. Well what if I have to use the other bathroom? Same thing, I was like I am not [LAUGHS] going to the bathroom in a tent with a hole. It just so happened that one day I went there in the middle of the night and I slipped in the hole. This is when we would have to take showers every three days, so I was what am I going to do now? Luckily there was nothing in there, so I just landed on dirt, but just the thought of it. It was hilarious. I can say that's the biggest obstacle that you can actually ever think of, trying to use the bathroom.

QUESTION: Women are suffering more combat injuries than ever before. What are your thoughts on that?

GUADALUPE ALEXANDER: That's hard. I don't know. Luckily, thank God, I've never been injured. I've been close, but I've never been injured. But I've seen women that actually had to come out of operations because they got hurt, you know, being shot at, or laid up in a hospital somewhere because they were doing what their country asked them to do or doing their job. My heart goes out to them and my mom hates when I say this, but if I could trade places with them, just to have them, you know, feel a sense of comfort, I would. I would. That's just me though.

QUESTION: How aware are you of those who've gone before you?

GUADALUPE ALEXANDER: I'm pretty aware I guess. I try to come over here at least once a week and just walk around. My Soldier's on that screen right there where the dog tags are, so, I come in there and I just come look at her for a minute. But I didn't even know this museum existed until I came in the Army. Knowing what they've done to pave where we are at now, that's enormous. That's gratifying.

QUESTION: What can we as a Nation do better to recognize the service of women?

GUADALUPE ALEXANDER: I think they should erect some statues to us, too. I mean, we had the first Quartermaster General, female, she just left about a month or two months ago, Brigadier General [Gwen] Bingham. That was like, wow. Before I came here, you'd hear them talking, oh, General Bingham, and the other women Generals. But when you actually see them, that's empowering. If she can do it, I can do it to. Maybe I could become Sergeant Major of the Army. She became one of the first women Generals, why can't I do it? So I really do agree that they need to see outside the box. Male generals, male officers, male NCOs, male enlisted aren't the only ones that have broken through those cracks. The women have also done it. They may need to pick up a book here and there and actually see what we have done since the beginning of time.

QUESTION: Women have had to fight for the right to fight. What does that struggle say about their determination?

GUADALUPE ALEXANDER: It just means that we don't give up. We don't. I always, even to this day, teach my daughter, regardless of what anybody tells you, you can do it. And that's how I feel. They're telling you no now, keep on doing it anyways, because regardless, it's going to happen. And it's happening.