

S2,Ep 9: A Mother's Airborne Legacy- Michelle Hughes and Valerie Nostrant





Joe sits down with Michelle Hughes and Valerie Nostrant, a mother and daughter who share a legacy of service in the Army's 82nd Airborne Division. The pair discusses their outlook on leadership and life in the Army and what it's like for them to share the bond of service. Don't miss their Afghan reading list below!

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Reading List

[*The Punishment of Virtue: Inside Afghanistan After the Taliban*](#) by Sarah Chayes (2006)

Valerie: Chayes provides an eye-opening account of four years on the ground of Afghanistan after the Taliban. This book resonated with me in the comparing the parallels between our experiences forging relationships across Afghanistan and in the hard lessons we both learned about the nature of this type of war. It is also a unique perspective of a female conflict correspondent not typically seen in books about the Afghan war.

[*The Sewing Circles of Herat: A Personal Voyage Through Afghanistan*](#) by Christina Lamb (2004)

Michelle: The title sounds like chick lit; the book is anything but. Lamb is a seasoned foreign correspondent who started covering Afghanistan during the Soviet occupation and continued doing so for the next 27 years. I sent this book to Valerie because I wanted her to understand the decades of conflict that had preceded her tour through the eyes of the people who had lived it, and would continue to live with the consequences after she had gone.

[*The Bookseller of Kabul*](#) by Asne Seierstad (2003)

Valerie: Seierstad, an experienced war correspondent, lived in Kabul with an Afghan family for three months in early 2002. Her goal (which I think she accomplishes in a book that's hard to put down) was to capture the story of the transition from life under the Taliban for ordinary Afghans who, while struggling to emerge from three decades of continuous conflict, also had to contend with immense societal change. The "Shah M Book Co," whose owner is the subject of the book, is a rare success story as it has become Afghanistan's largest independent publisher. I wasn't able to see it during my tour, but my Mom had shopped there in 2014.

[*Advancing the Rule of Law Abroad: Next Generation Reform*](#) by Rachel Kleinfeld (2012)

Michelle: This book, as well as Kleinfeld's 2018 follow-up, *A Savage Order: How the World's Deadliest Countries Can Forge a Path to Security*, are all about the endgame. Kleinfeld is an academic who "gets" operational imperatives, and her books contain some of the best, most realistic analysis of the role of power structures, politics, and culture in the transition from conflict to stabilization and rule of law of any on the market. Her answers are not always right, but her questions are spot on and her analysis is clear-eyed and makes intuitive sense.

About Michelle and Valerie

Michelle Hughes is a human rights lawyer and educator, whose work focuses on rule of law, security, and governance in post-conflict countries, fragile states, and states in transition. She is the Founder, President, and Chief Executive Officer of VALRAC Innovation, LLC, a company dedicated to preparing the next generation to restore and strengthen the rule of law at home and abroad; a Fellow with the Center for Advanced Defense Studies; and a Senior Fellow with the National Defense University Joint Forces Staff College.

Ms. Hughes has field experience in 21 foreign countries, to include 13 active conflicts and a succession of deployments to Afghanistan where her role was to advise Senior Military Commanders on how to connect security force development to governance and justice. From December 2010 to December 2011, she was the Senior Rule of Law Advisor to the NATO Police Training Mission in Afghanistan, and was subsequently Special Adviser for Rule of Law to the Commander of all NATO Special Operations forces.

Originally from Buffalo, New York, Ms. Hughes graduated from the University of Florida in 1979 where she obtained a BA in English and was commissioned as a 2nd Lieutenant in the United States Army. As a Military Intelligence Officer, Ms. Hughes was one of the first women to serve in the elite 82nd Airborne Division, and the only woman officer to perform with the Army's Parachute Demonstration Team, "The Golden Knights." She was honored by President Reagan as one of the "Top 10 Working Women of 1985" and subsequently served in combat in Panama. Prior to leaving active duty as a Major, Ms. Hughes led the U.S. Counternarcotics Intelligence Support Team in Bogotá, Colombia during the operations covered in seasons 1 and 2 of the Netflix series, "Narcos."

Ms. Hughes holds a Juris Doctor, summa cum laude, from Regent University School of Law, and Master of Laws, with distinction, from the London School of Economics. She has practiced complex civil litigation, prosecution, and criminal defense in 14 State and Federal jurisdictions. She has special expertise in real property law, alternative dispute resolution, and government and military structures, and has served on drafting committees for uniform commercial codes.

Immediately following 9/11, as a Reserve Lieutenant Colonel, Ms. Hughes was recalled to active duty in support of Operation Enduring Freedom. During that time, she served as the Chief of Intelligence Production for the U.S. European Command where she was responsible for the strategic design and implementation of U.S. military intelligence production within

the European Theater of Operations.

Captain Valerie Nostrant commissioned as an active duty Field Artillery Officer in May 2015 through Army ROTC from Pennsylvania State University. She earned a Bachelor of Science in Kinesiology-Movement Science with a minor in Military Studies. After graduating FA BOLC out of Fort Sill, Oklahoma she reported to 3rd Brigade Combat Team, 82nd Airborne Division at Fort Bragg, North Carolina.

Valerie served as the Fire Support Officer for Bravo Troop, 5-73 CAV. She then went on to be a Fire Direction Officer and Platoon Leader in Charlie Battery, 1-319th AFAR. Valerie then served as the Battalion Air Operations for 1-319th AFAR where she coordinated both personal and equipment airborne operations.

In 2019, Valerie deployed with 3rd BCT, 82nd as the Fire Support Officer for the Resolute Support Headquarters in support of Operation Freedom's Sentinel in Afghanistan. Most recently following graduation from FA CCC, Valerie is currently assigned to the 173rd Airborne BCT in Grafenwöhr, Germany. She is also continuing her education by pursuing a Master of Science in Applied Nutrition from Virginia Tech.

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