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## Tiki Challenge

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Jessica Olson  
Logan, Utah  
November 30, 2018

**“Tiki Challenge”**  
**Customs/Material Culture**

**Informant:**

Jessica Olson is a captain in the United States Air Force. She is the recruiting officer for the AFROTC (Air Force Reserve Officer Training Corps) at Utah State University. She graduated from USU in 2010 and was a cadet in ROTC while attending school. She is now in the Utah Air National Guard and has a 7 month old baby.

**Context:**

Jessica works in the same office (in the military science building) on campus as my husband (Damon) so she knew of my collection project for my folklore class (English 2210: Introduction to Folklore). I asked if she would be willing to tell a story about one of her coins as she has several direct ties to USU and would fit nicely into my collection project (stories, legends, and traditions pertaining to USU).

Military challenge coins are a long-standing tradition of carrying a coin that symbolizes unit identity and recognition. Each piece usually bears unique unit symbols or mottos that identify the group in which they represent, and are often traded, presented, and collected between unit members. A military member is always expected to have a coin on their person - if they are challenged as to if they are carrying one and they aren't, they have to buy beers for everyone. If they are challenged and they do have one, the person who issued the challenge has to buy beers for everyone.

Jessica talks about a flight, a unit, and a group; those words are all interchangeable and she is speaking about the same organization each time.

**Text:**

RS: Ok, this is uhh 11/29 and I'm with-

DS: [unclear] Bear River by the way [said while barging into Jessica's office].

RS: DAMON! [shouted with exasperation] [JO: laughing] STOP! I'm recording! [JO: more laughing]

DS: [whispering] I forgot. [JO: laughing and now clapping her hands]

RS: Now this is in it [JO: still laughing]. Oh my gosh [whispered].

JO: [laughing while talking] We need to just start over [unintelligible because of laughter].

RS: This is 11/29 and I'm with Jessica Olson. [pause] Have at it.

JO: Ahh, so I'm talking about my one of my favorite military coins. Military challenge coins that that I have. Ahh it's a tradition in the military that you you get these coins for every unit that you've been with or for different places that you visited. Ahh so my favorite challenge coin is actually not an Air Force coin I'm in the Air Force my favorite coin is one that I traded with a sailor who was stationed on the USS Constitution umm in Boston it's the longest [pause] I don't know exactly how to say this so this is going to be fun to transcribe [laughs] umm but it's the oldest still commissioned like still working ship in the US Navy. It started with the war of 1812, it's called "Old Ironsides" even though it was a wooden ship because the cannonballs just bounced off its so it's still a ship that ahh you can can still visit get tours on in Boston Harbor umm so I I was chatting with one of the sailors ahh when I was an ROTC cadet and I traded my my detachment coin for his USS Constitution coin umm and so that's just a fun memory that I have of Boston and my time there and and talking with the sailor.



RS: And so, you have, you have how many coins here 25, 30?

JO: Yeah probably about that.

RS: And, and that's of all that's your favorite because its different and because it's-

JO: Yeah because it's different there's- like I have coins from all the units I've ever been part of or like a couple from ROTC umm different trainings I've been too umm it was more- I bought

a lot of them like this one I traded with the sailor and had that person to person contact of the conversation though.

RS: That's awesome. The ones that have umm beer bottle openers [JO: laughing] those [laughing while talking] crack me up!

JO: [laughing while talking] That is because you're supposed to always carry a coin with you [RS: yeah] so then it's like you just always have your bottle opener with you [laughing]. That is, that is kind of a tradition in the military too cause yeah there's quite a few maybe not quite a few but a good handful.

RS: I can see two at least [JO: yeah] the spartan one and the that one. Is that one from Hawaii?

JO: No, so when I was active duty stationed in Virginia I was the flight commander of what's called a special access program umm which that's basically [laughing while talking] all I can say about it [RS: laughing] it's super super classified umm and so nobody was allowed into the room except people that were in that flight and so just because we needed a name for it other than that super-secret place [laughs] we called it the tiki bar and so people who were in the unit knew what the tiki bar was and so that's why this coin doesn't have anything on it other than a number so a lot of the coins have a serial number and they keep track of who was given what coin- and then just the tiki bar on the front and that's why it doesn't have any words about what unit it is or what we did or anything so...



RS: That's great! When- I don't even know what Damon was doing but people [laughing while talking] would be like 'what does your husband do' and I'd say 'I don't know [JO: laughs] it's a secret' [both laughing] [JO: yeah]. So this is great.

**Texture:**

My husband barging into Jessica's office to tell her something, not knowing we had already started recording, set the tone for the entire interview. Jessica was very relaxed and we laughed a lot while we were talking. The atmosphere in her office was of two friends talking rather than one person interviewing another person.

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Introduction to Folklore  
Professor Lynne S. McNeill, PhD  
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