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00:00:00,000 --> 00:00:07,470

...the interview of Brendyn Melugin. This interview is being connected by Lucas Schroeder from the Wright State University Veterans Voices Project.

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00:00:07,470 --> 00:00:16,880

This interview is being recorded at Brendyn Melugin's apartment in Dahlonega, Georgia. It is 9:15 p.m. on 27th of February, 2017.

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00:00:16,880 --> 00:00:20,800

Alright, so where and when were you born?

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00:00:20,800 --> 00:00:26,760

I was born October 8th in 1992 in a really small town of Taylor Mill, Kentucky.

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00:00:26,760 --> 00:00:31,740

Alright, now is that in like the Northern part of Kentucky, whereabouts?

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00:00:31,740 --> 00:00:37,900

Yeah it is, it's in the northern part of Kentucky. It's right as soon as you get...

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00:00:37,900 --> 00:00:46,760

if you're traveling from Ohio, Cincinnati into Kentucky, it's maybe 10 minutes across the Ohio into the Kentucky border. It borders with Covington and Newport.

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00:00:46,760 --> 00:00:54,320

Okay. So who are your parents and what were their occupations or what are their occupations?

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00:00:54,320 --> 00:01:04,300

My father's name is Patrick Melugin and he is a stock broker for Fidelity Investments. My mother's name... maiden name is Lauren Bobbitt.

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00:01:04,300 --> 00:01:13,760

She remarried after divorcing with my father, is now Lauren Neidringhouse and she's been at a job as a financial advisor for insurance companies.

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00:01:13,760 --> 00:01:19,300

Okay. Do you know offhand like what kind of insurance companies that she worked for?

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00:01:19,300 --> 00:01:27,200

Well she used to work -- ironically enough -- she used to work at Fidelity Investments as a financial broker as well and

specialty trading

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00:01:27,200 --> 00:01:34,080

and then she worked for, I believe the company's name is ADP for insurance.

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00:01:34,080 --> 00:01:38,580

Alright, do you have any siblings? If so what do they do?

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00:01:38,580 --> 00:01:52,520

I do have siblings. I'm a one boy of five sisters. All of them except one are students. The one sister that is working, my oldest sister Ferren is managing hotels.

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00:01:52,520 --> 00:01:56,120

She's currently managing the Millennium Hotel in downtown Cincinnati.

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00:01:56,120 --> 00:01:59,740

Okay. What about the other sisters?

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00:01:59,740 --> 00:02:07,460

They're all younger sisters. All of my sisters are half sisters and they're all currently students.

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00:02:07,460 --> 00:02:16,420

The other closest sister in age to myself is my 19 year old sister, Jillian and she's currently living at home with my father, has a baby

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00:02:16,420 --> 00:02:19,530

and is attending college at a local community college.

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00:02:19,530 --> 00:02:23,690

Okay. Has any... has your older sister... did she serve at all?

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00:02:23,690 --> 00:02:36,060

She did not. I'm actually one of the I'm the only.. I'm the only male of my generation of my family to include my cousin's, to serve in the armed forces.

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00:02:36,060 --> 00:02:45,700

However, all other males in my family, in my immediate bloodline besides my father, has served in some form, shape, or aspect including by step grandparents.

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00:02:45,700 --> 00:02:56,080

Okay. Alright, so now what made you actually want to join the military?

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00:02:56,080 --> 00:03:05,260

So it had always been a passion of mine. It's something that I grew up with. I grew up in the lifestyle of hearing the stories of my grandparents talking about World War II

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00:03:05,260 --> 00:03:14,900

and my grandfather was in Pearl Harbor. So hearing all those throughout my life and kind of just being surrounded and very much the culture

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00:03:14,900 --> 00:03:23,160

with not being associated with the military installation made me want to join and I was always told however, you should go and at least try college first.

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00:03:23,160 --> 00:03:32,020

You should try school. You don't want to be enlisted. That's not the route to go. Go try the ROTC and all that which I was sure, leads into the next series of questions

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00:03:32,020 --> 00:03:40,720

you might have as to what I did before I joined. I graduated high school in 2011 and I really wasn't doing a whole lot with my life.

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00:03:40,720 --> 00:03:50,680

I was going to the University of Cincinnati. I had been living in an apartment with a couple of my buddies and I've been working in a downtown restaurant called Nada.

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00:03:50,680 --> 00:03:57,600

And so I had ended up getting so frustrated with school that I dropped out of the University of Cincinnati to go enlist.

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00:03:57,600 --> 00:04:03,720

Okay and which branch military service did you actually enlist into?

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00:04:03,720 --> 00:04:04,420

The Army.

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00:04:04,420 --> 00:04:13,540

Okay. Now where did you train... do your basic training at?

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00:04:13,540 --> 00:04:25,680

So I did my basic training at Fort Leonard Wood. I was originally supposed to be a 13 Fox, a forward observer when I went to MEPS, but as you and anybody watching this video might know by now,

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00:04:25,680 --> 00:04:35,480

you never get we try to go to for MEPS and the guy at MEPS that was helping me came back and said "sorry, the 13

Fox slots are full for the bonus".

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00:04:35,480 --> 00:04:44,760

I said "well if I don't get the bonus I don't want the job". The jobs they offered to me weren't the most exciting jobs that I thought that were around.

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00:04:44,760 --> 00:04:56,660

I was offered the job of a petroleum fuel specialist, chaplains assistant, cable layer, and some other job regardless of scoring in the Alfa zone of my ASVAB.

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00:04:56,660 --> 00:05:04,480

So I told the guy there at MEPS you know, "thank you, have a nice day sir. I appreciate you help me out but I'm not interested in enlisting"

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00:05:04,480 --> 00:05:11,720

and he said what waiting to get you to enlist?" and I said "how about airborne? I want airborne school by contract. I want to be a paratrooper, I want to jump out of planes"

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00:05:11,720 --> 00:05:20,060

and the gentleman left the room and then came back in a few minutes later and said "well son, I got you airborne school, you're contract, you're going to be a paratrooper,

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00:05:20,060 --> 00:05:25,340

but you're going to have to be a military police officer" and that's the day I signed my contract.

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00:05:25,340 --> 00:05:28,880

Alright, so now where did you go to basic training?

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00:05:28,880 --> 00:05:38,860

So I attended basic training at Fort Leonard Wood, Missouri. I was there for approximately 6 months, because I was a holdover for that airborne that I had my contract

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00:05:38,860 --> 00:05:47,180

before going to Fort Benning. I didn't know if you want to talk about potentially, things that happen at Fort Benning as far as my injury is concerned?

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00:05:47,180 --> 00:05:54,720

So now what was your experience at basic training like?

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00:05:54,720 --> 00:06:01,720

My experience at basic training was one that I'm sure every veteran will say, will stick with me the rest of my life.

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00:06:01,720 --> 00:06:11,320

I truly believe I would hit the tail end of what veterans referred to as old Army, consistently. I know that no matter who you talk to,

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00:06:11,320 --> 00:06:23,040

a veteran is always going to say well back in my day. However, smartphones weren't really a huge thing. They were just taking off. So we didn't... we had a lot of old-school mentality drill sergeants with us

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00:06:23,040 --> 00:06:31,159

and especially my platoon, we had our kill hat as our platoon sergeant. We had him and one female as our primary drill sergeants even up until AIT,

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00:06:31,160 --> 00:06:44,160

because our other drill sergeant had been going to ALC, I believe was the school that he was attending. So I had a very on hand experience as to what,

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00:06:44,160 --> 00:06:52,120

I feel infantry went through in their basic trainings, because we had the blue disks drill sergeant going through as our primary drill sergeant.

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00:06:52,120 --> 00:06:58,020

So it's an experience that I'll never forget and I hate that man more than anything, but I've come to respect him more than anybody,

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00:06:58,020 --> 00:07:02,020

because I learned more there than I believed that I did in the four years that I attended high school.

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00:07:02,020 --> 00:07:10,420

So now you said you were in ROTC. Was basic training anything like you expected? Was it anything like ROTC?

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00:07:10,420 --> 00:07:21,940

So I was only at the University of Cincinnati for a quarter and at that time I was taking two ROTC classes and I was doing a little bit of drill and ceremony stuff with them,

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00:07:21,940 --> 00:07:29,240

there at the ROTC department, but I was never contracted as cadet. I was just a tag-along type of cadet.

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00:07:29,240 --> 00:07:36,320

As far as basic training is concerned, I feel everybody should attend a basic enlisted training.

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00:07:36,320 --> 00:07:46,820

Even if they go through Bullock, it's a very eye-opening experience and it's a very humbling experience when you're

sitting out there in the middle of winter

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00:07:46,820 --> 00:07:50,740

in frozen dirt trying to dig a foxhole in the middle of Missouri.

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00:07:50,740 --> 00:08:00,640

So other than the infantry drills learn that you mentioned, was there any other of your drill sergeants that really stuck with you that you might keep in contact with

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00:08:00,640 --> 00:08:05,180

or that had just a big impact on your Army career?

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00:08:05,180 --> 00:08:14,320

So I would say all of my drill sergeants as cliché sounds, had some type of form, way, shape, or impact on me.

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00:08:14,320 --> 00:08:22,820

The infantry drill sergeant, Drill Sergeant Reed, had the biggest impact on me, even after being graduated we were holdovers, influenced me a lot,

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00:08:22,820 --> 00:08:32,540

being the background, the combat infantry airborne personnel he'd spent his whole entire time in the Army at Fort Bragg previously becoming a drill sergeant,

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00:08:32,540 --> 00:08:37,140

but other than that, my other drill sergeants, even my female drill sergeant really inspired me.

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00:08:37,140 --> 00:08:41,940

I know a lot of people are really quick to shut out the female drill sergeants right now around this time.

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00:08:41,940 --> 00:08:53,260

However, I completely believe in equal opportunity and she showed us that females can beat the male standards, that females can compete with males and that's not always the case in active Army,

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00:08:53,260 --> 00:08:59,690

but there in that training environment, she really inspired me to stop those generalizations of females and to give them the same opportunities to meet the standard

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00:08:59,690 --> 00:09:05,040

as the standard and not as the female standard.

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00:09:05,040 --> 00:09:15,940

Okay, so you said your job was a military police officer. What was that like?

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00:09:15,940 --> 00:09:16,440

Being...

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00:09:16,440 --> 00:09:19,640

Like going through the training just like specifically for like military people.

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00:09:19,640 --> 00:09:33,590

Okay, so just the training portion? So the training was different. It was once again you get this notion of bright-eyed bushy-tailed you know,

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00:09:33,590 --> 00:09:41,300

I'm here to uphold law and law and order and you really get to discover what it means to be a law enforcement officer.

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00:09:41,300 --> 00:09:49,250

You know, it's not always the giving warrants and you know sort of serving warrants and kicking in doors and all that stuff.

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00:09:49,250 --> 00:09:59,860

It's the hours of meticulous paperwork, it's the skills of being able to articulate exactly what happened in your reports, the interactions with people in building those relations with the community.

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00:09:59,860 --> 00:10:07,760

That really came out. That was hey, this is part of a job. It may not be in the job description, but if you want to be good at what you do, this is what you have to do.

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00:10:07,760 --> 00:10:10,800

Alright, so you said you went to airborne school?

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00:10:10,800 --> 00:10:11,500

True.

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00:10:11,500 --> 00:10:14,680

Do you want to elaborate on your time and airborne school?

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00:10:14,680 --> 00:10:23,440

My time in airborne school changed me forever. I went from being an adolescent kid not really doing a whole lot with my life, to enlisting in the Army,

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00:10:23,440 --> 00:10:35,980

to learning the core values of the military and when I got over to airborne school was just when they are transitioning

from T-10 and T-11 to T-11 only,

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00:10:35,980 --> 00:10:41,840

which is the types of parachutes. So I thought that was really interesting that we still got to go through all the T-10 training

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00:10:41,840 --> 00:10:51,940

We got to jump with T 10s. Unfortunately, I had an accident on my fifth jump, which is the last required jump to get your jump wings,

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00:10:51,940 --> 00:10:59,720

where the personnel behind me had cross-checked me into the door, because he was riding my parachute or my pack tree too closely

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00:10:59,720 --> 00:11:07,240

and the static line, which opens my parachute wrapped around my arm and I became a toe injury on the plane.

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00:11:07,240 --> 00:11:18,940

So basically after it wrapped around my arm and I had exited the door from getting cross-checked, the cable was tied around my bicep and pulled me against the side of the plane,

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00:11:18,940 --> 00:11:27,740

splitting my bicep in half my left bicep here and basically disabling my arm and I just remember falling to the ground

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00:11:27,740 --> 00:11:39,240

and luckily enough, I was able to land with no parachute malfunctions and I could see the burn mark across my arm and I couldn't move my arm.

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00:11:39,240 --> 00:11:48,740

I had to have surgery on a bicep reconnection surgery and I was told I was going to be chaptered out of the army medically for this injury

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00:11:48,740 --> 00:11:57,420

and that I would never be able to move my arm past 30 degrees again. Fortunately enough for me, was really dedicated, staying in and getting through the physical therapy

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00:11:57,420 --> 00:12:08,060

and the occupational therapy and I was consistently trying to prove the doctors wrong and because I proved the doctor wrong and I was able to move my arm again above the 30 degree mark,

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00:12:08,060 --> 00:12:18,160

I was able to go ahead and stay in the Army in complete Airborne School only after being held there for almost a year before arriving at a unit in Fort Bragg.



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00:12:18,160 --> 00:12:28,440

So now they still gave you completion for airborne school or you just completely held back since the injury?

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00:12:28,440 --> 00:12:34,638

So because it was my fifth jump and I successfully landed on the ground after exiting the aircraft, even after being towed.

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00:12:34,640 --> 00:12:40,560

Luckily enough, we hit a hot air pocket. The plane lifted up and I was able to come undone.

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00:12:40,560 --> 00:12:47,560

After I hit the ground and on the way down I was screaming in pain, but as soon as they hit the ground in a black hat -- or an airborne school instructor --

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00:12:47,560 --> 00:12:53,560

ran over to me the very first question I asked him was "did I get my wings?" and the response was

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00:12:53,560 --> 00:13:05,020

"yes dumbass, you got your wings now shut up and take your top off" and then after that I was able to take my top off very loosely and they're able to start examining the wound.

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00:13:05,020 --> 00:13:16,580

Okay. Other than that was there any other sort of specialized training that you went through, any sort of like special military police schools that you've attended?

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00:13:16,580 --> 00:13:28,840

No, so I've got to do a lot of side certifications not schools per se that you go to. However, I've conducted training with the FBI, I've conducted classes,

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00:13:28,840 --> 00:13:35,720

as far as going and hunting down the felons and bringing them back to justice.

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00:13:35,720 --> 00:13:41,180

Mostly it was AWOL training to go recover AWOL soldiers, a lot of smaller certifications like that.

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00:13:41,180 --> 00:13:46,880

A lot of school shoot houses and things like that but no real type of formal schooling.

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00:13:46,880 --> 00:14:03,130

Okay. So how did you adapt to military life, like i.e., the whole physical part, living in the barracks if you live in the barracks, as well as like food at the DEFEC and as

far as like social life?

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00:14:03,130 --> 00:14:14,960

Okay, so social life wasn't that big of a difference for me. Moving into the barracks, being at Fort Benning after my injury from us that year period --

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00:14:14,960 --> 00:14:24,240

I believe it was about 11 months -- I lived in an open bay barracks with new student classes coming in, consistently in and out and there's no privacy in an open bay barracks.

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00:14:24,240 --> 00:14:32,490

It's a double bunk bed. I had one of the bottom bunks. My locker was here on my left hand side and then it was anybody could see anything, anytime, anywhere,

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00:14:32,490 --> 00:14:40,750

you know, consistent with the other beds. I quickly adapted to that kind. I kind of learned people were going to stare at me even with a cast and then my big bionic

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00:14:40,750 --> 00:14:48,080

arm that they gave me kind of attached after my injury. So that kind of... adapted me to live in that open bay lifestyle.

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00:14:48,080 --> 00:14:55,090

However, when I moved to the barracks at Fort Bragg and I got to the unit there in the 503rd barracks life was easy for me.

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00:14:55,090 --> 00:15:02,380

It was very much being an adult, clean up after yourself, cook, clean, take care of yourself, shower every day.

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00:15:02,380 --> 00:15:08,340

These are basic concepts that I guess more of the 18 year old kids right out of high school had more problems transitioning to,

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00:15:08,340 --> 00:15:13,340

because I had lived on my own and operated on my own before I joined the Army.

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00:15:13,340 --> 00:15:22,619

You want to elaborate a little bit more into like what you did on a day to day basis while you were at Benning, since you obviously couldn't do your job as a note a police officer?

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00:15:22,619 --> 00:15:34,799

Yeah, so interesting enough I got to do a lot of admin work. I know that it sound super exciting, but it grew me a lot. Basically, I was the only... myself and only

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00:15:34,799 --> 00:15:43,529

one other lower list person below the rank of sergeant were in the whole battalion working so I was working alongside with staff sergeant,

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00:15:43,529 --> 00:15:51,660

sergeant first classes every day seeing what a platoon sergeant does, seeing what their job is, literally working at the same desk as them,

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00:15:51,660 --> 00:16:03,149

but on a different computer typing up reports for a battalion, brigade, to report to ranger team brigade once they took over our unit and so it's just a lot of supply,

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00:16:03,149 --> 00:16:11,900

learning how supply tracks everything, how they... all the forms, the administrative stuff that goes with that. So I got a lot of management skills out of it

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00:16:11,900 --> 00:16:18,800

and I got to see both what a good leader consisted of and what a bad leader consisted of and kind of what to stay away from doing.

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00:16:18,800 --> 00:16:24,320

Okay, now so did that experience there carry over to your experience at Fort Bragg?

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00:16:24,400 --> 00:16:33,160

Absolutely, I learned I can even... see I can put a number on how many leadership skills I learned while I was at Benning.

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00:16:33,160 --> 00:16:44,900

Even with my injuries, don't get me wrong, there were days that I was hating life and sucking hard doing more flutter kicks and more bicycle kicks than I can even tell you -- a cyclist,

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00:16:44,900 --> 00:16:55,000

but I learned through those mistakes, I learned being at that infantry unit for so long at Fort Benning, how day to day operations are supposed to work,

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00:16:55,000 --> 00:17:05,300

how op orders are supposed to work, how pre-jump is supposed to be announced and pronounced, and how to do all the airborne nomenclatures

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00:17:05,300 --> 00:17:11,699

So that when I got to my unit at Fort Bragg -- at the time not knowing I would not be allowed to act on airborne status --

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00:17:11,700 --> 00:17:19,480

know how to be a jump master, what it look. I sat in on a lot of jump master classes and I sat in a lot of pathfinder classes,

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00:17:19,480 --> 00:17:23,820

hoping that my receiving unit could send me as soon as I was eligible.

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00:17:23,820 --> 00:17:31,480

So now what was the day-to-day life consists of at Fort Bragg as far as your job consisted of?

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00:17:31,480 --> 00:17:42,820

Fort Bragg was very hit-or-miss as far as the days were concerned, because a military police officer, our schedules were never in sync, inconsistent.

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00:17:42,820 --> 00:17:51,960

It was very much a... we could do a day called platoon duty, which we would go in like a regular army day, we'd be at first formation, conduct physical fitness,

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00:17:51,960 --> 00:17:59,820

go back, shower, eat breakfast in our room. Since we're MPs we don't need the DEFEC, we're given an extra stipend to eat outside and cook our own.

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00:17:59,820 --> 00:18:09,520

And then a report back of working we do the day-to-day army operations such as doing maintenance checks on our trucks, doing inventory, conducting training

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00:18:09,520 --> 00:18:20,880

depending on how many people we have there, and other days could be you're working midnight shift in patrol responding to domestic violence cases,

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00:18:20,900 --> 00:18:28,020

and end up having to work almost two days in a row, because somebody didn't show up on the day shift or on the morning shift for a gate.

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00:18:28,020 --> 00:18:35,420

So instead of turning in you literally jump back in line to go out to one of the gates and unfortunately have to work one of the gates.

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00:18:35,420 --> 00:18:42,780

It was a very hectic life it, was very much a disorganized, because when you think about an Army unit, it's cohesion.

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00:18:42,780 --> 00:18:44,920

Our company, we only have one battalion there

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00:18:44,920 --> 00:18:55,720

Fort Bragg our company is never together, each platoon is separated into each one of these different shifts, so we're never really the same place at the same time together.

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00:18:55,720 --> 00:19:04,220

So it could be anything from seeing your friends, "tonight we're working together" to "I haven't seen you for a week" and it was very consistently like that.

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00:19:04,220 --> 00:19:14,540

So our days were 16 to 20 hour days, easy, between PT, the incidents that you have to deal with when you're on shift as a police officer,

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00:19:14,540 --> 00:19:19,420

and then the meticulous paperwork that has to be exactly correct afterwards.

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00:19:19,420 --> 00:19:27,840

So now do you think that lack of unit cohesion, because of everyone being broken up and doing different things,

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00:19:27,840 --> 00:19:35,560

do you think that affected the way that the unit ran as far as it ran like well or poor in your opinion?

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00:19:35,560 --> 00:19:48,440

So in my opinion and this is something that I've voiced my concern to them a few times and by them I mean my immediate leadership about issues that were kind of out of our control.

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00:19:48,440 --> 00:19:59,660

So like I said before, we had one battalion of MPs there at Fort Bragg. I think because of our job, because of our MOS it has to be like that, it has to be broken up like that.

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00:19:59,660 --> 00:20:06,200

However, I think if there was another battalion of MPs at Fort Bragg it would have been a lot different.

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00:20:06,200 --> 00:20:13,560

It would have been instead of platoons in a company barely making the main requirements on different shifts and having to call people in,

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00:20:13,560 --> 00:20:19,580

we can have one battalion in law enforcement operations and one battalion in training and field cycles

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00:20:19,580 --> 00:20:26,720

and that was something that I brought to Sergeants Major's attention on my out of the Army when he sat down and was asking me what would I improve

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00:20:26,720 --> 00:20:38,580

if I could improve anything. I think that would have made a world of difference because it's hard to send people to promotion boards and soldier boards that you need to get promoted to the non-commissioned officer slots

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00:20:38,580 --> 00:20:50,000

when you're divided between 16 to 20 hour workdays, bouncing your family life you know, without having to make large sacrifices that actually... you know,

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00:20:50,000 --> 00:20:57,770

not just giving up your free time but giving up time with family to proceed.

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00:20:57,770 --> 00:21:06,380

So you were talking about the field, how did you enjoy going out to the field and things of that nature?

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00:21:06,380 --> 00:21:15,740

I enjoyed the field probably more than anything else in the Army. I always had told myself that I was going to go combat arms going into the army,

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00:21:15,740 --> 00:21:26,160

because I want to do the hooah, hooah kick in doors things and the only thing that stopped me from signing a contract without a bonus for like forward observer or infantry,

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00:21:26,160 --> 00:21:33,160

was is that my dad always told me that "you need to take a skill away from the Army". You know you don't know if you're going to get injured,

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00:21:33,160 --> 00:21:39,280

you don't know if you're going to do the whole 20. You need to take away some type of skill you can translate to the civilian world

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00:21:39,280 --> 00:21:48,230

and something that might potentially give you college credit hours on your joint transcripts and so that's why doing MP, ultimately.

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00:21:48,230 --> 00:21:59,820

However, the field cycle was my inner tactician coming out. More often times than not with our OCs watching us, I was making on the spot corrections of squad leaders

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00:21:59,820 --> 00:22:10,100

and team leaders that were in E5 and E6 positions and not so much in a "ha ha, I told you so" immature manor but, it just made me shine,

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00:22:10,100 --> 00:22:17,970

because I was able to go up to an NCO and say "hey sergeant, we're under fire, why don't we do this action instead?" and the sergeant was able to take credit for it

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00:22:17,970 --> 00:22:24,500

and pass it down to me if they were good NCO on the field cycle, but it made me feel really proud that was being useful

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00:22:24,500 --> 00:22:29,300

and that I could have that reactionary consistently response to those scenarios.

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00:22:29,300 --> 00:22:40,580

So now going back to the whole military police officer aspect, were there any certain cases that really stuck with you either for the good or for the bad?

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00:22:40,580 --> 00:22:49,260

There were, there were good cases and there were bad cases like any law enforcement officer military police for civilian police.

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00:22:49,260 --> 00:23:00,220

There were rewarding cases, not to cite names or gain specifically, but there were cases that we were able to take pedophiles and child molesters off the street

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00:23:00,220 --> 00:23:08,360

and prosecute them and there were other cases such as suicide on scene cases you know, that stick with you the rest of your life,

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00:23:08,360 --> 00:23:19,500

but not everything was so bad or good. There is in between funny moments you have too and decided case of that was I showed up at a barracks one night for a call

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00:23:19,500 --> 00:23:27,920

and soldier that knowingly knew that we were there at the door and we were going to come into his barracks room because he was smoking spice,

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00:23:27,920 --> 00:23:37,660

jumped out is the second story of his barracks window high on spice and broke his leg trying to run away from us,

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00:23:37,660 --> 00:23:43,080

but the part that cutting it's the dark humor and a sense of humor, but the kind of in between good and bad comes into play,

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00:23:43,080 --> 00:23:51,920

where he was high on spice so he didn't feel it. The funny part was his actor he jumped out of his window knowing we'd catch him after he broke his leg.

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00:23:51,920 --> 00:23:58,599

He was crawling away in a kind of military low crawl style while screaming "f you" up at the window at us.

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00:23:58,599 --> 00:24:06,339

So that's something that for the good or the bad, has definitely stuck with me. It's still a story I tell today to cadet that my currents at my current university

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00:24:06,339 --> 00:24:08,760

that are trying to branch a military police officer.

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00:24:08,760 --> 00:24:19,920

Is there any other certain police cases that you wish to elaborate on? If you don't it's perfectly normal.

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00:24:19,920 --> 00:24:33,279

Not any that really come to mind. It would be unprofessional of me to go ahead and tell you all these cases and these stories back after back after back.

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00:24:33,280 --> 00:24:43,880

I have plenty of funny stories that I ran into. I've had plenty of a horrible shifts, nightmare things that happened and I've got plenty of rewarding,

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00:24:43,880 --> 00:24:50,540

why being a military police officer was the right choice for me in the first place type of stories.

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00:24:50,540 --> 00:25:03,240

Okay. So now, you said you had the stipend, so you didn't have to eat at the barracks, but did -- at the barracks -- at the DEFEC, did you ever eat at the DEFEC at all though?

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00:25:03,240 --> 00:25:13,060

I did, I did enjoy eating DEFEC that was open to us for a short amount of time. It was a good place for me to takes soldiers to that were new to the unit ,

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00:25:13,060 --> 00:25:23,200

especially if they were in my team or not, just to get him acclimated, sit down and have a type of informal interview with them over breakfast to get to know who they were,

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00:25:23,200 --> 00:25:29,620



what their background was, what they expected out of the Army, what they knew what they wanted to know and kind of sit down with soldiers that we were getting

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00:25:29,620 --> 00:25:36,669

and say "give me two long-term goals and two short-term goals" and it was just a very friendly environment to be in,

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00:25:36,669 --> 00:25:45,100

because here we are surrounded by soldiers you know from all different MOSs and different types of jobs, so we can be open and truly discussing

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00:25:45,100 --> 00:25:47,280

what we want to discuss and not have to watch what we're saying.

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00:25:47,280 --> 00:25:58,620

Alright, before we move on to the next topic, was there any particular leader or team like you know, soldier that was stationed with you

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00:25:58,620 --> 00:26:03,800

that really stuck out that you know, really helped inspire you in any way?

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00:26:03,800 --> 00:26:12,600

So and yes for inspiration, in an inspiration to thrive to be like or an inspiration to not be like and what the wrong example would be?

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00:26:12,600 --> 00:26:13,900

You can use both.

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00:26:13,900 --> 00:26:21,600

Okay, let me give you an example of two leaders and how they're on the exact opposite ends of the spectrum here.

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00:26:21,600 --> 00:26:31,960

First, I'll go ahead and I'll tell you the good. The good leader that I always looked up to, that I always knew had the right answer,

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00:26:31,960 --> 00:26:41,180

even when I had to show that I knew the right answer in front of his soldiers, was a staff sergeant by the name of Staff Sergeant Michael Stupoir.

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00:26:41,180 --> 00:26:51,840

Staff Sergeants Stupoir was an inspiration to me, because he always had an answer for something. He was able to improvise there on the spot

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00:26:51,840 --> 00:27:02,120

If he didn't know he didn't say "I don't know guys you know, it's done, it's over we don't know what to do". I goes back to that kind of reactionary.

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00:27:02,120 --> 00:27:10,500

Of course we had a lot of preventive training in knowledge to prevent things from happening so we wouldn't have to be so reactionary all the time,

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00:27:10,500 --> 00:27:17,780

but even when those holy crap moments happened, whether it being law enforcement in the field however -- and they will happen --

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00:27:17,780 --> 00:27:23,160

there was always a plan of action of "okay, we need to get control the situation, you need to do this, you need to do this"

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00:27:23,160 --> 00:27:30,130

and that was is very inspiring to me. This man always had his paperwork in line, on time, stayed with soldiers as long as he needed,

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00:27:30,130 --> 00:27:38,780

sacrificing time with this family if need be, would meet up on his free time, always had a good block of instruction for soldiers and he wouldn't necessarily

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00:27:38,780 --> 00:27:50,280

always by the rules rules, laws, and regulations, as much as seeing a gray area in between when it was necessary to deal with situations, as far as soldiers infractions.

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00:27:50,280 --> 00:27:59,960

So the soldier committed an inaction, an unlawful order or something that broke regulation, he wouldn't go straight to jumping to

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00:27:59,960 --> 00:28:04,800

"well, we need to give this guy an article 15", which could potentially drop him in rank or chapter him out of the Army.

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00:28:04,800 --> 00:28:13,520

However, we can't let this slide for the good well-being of law and order. So you know, let's do X in between to solve this.

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00:28:13,520 --> 00:28:22,040

You know, let's go ahead and we're going to make you put on full kit and you know, I'm going to make you run and run and run with me and you'll learn your lesson that way,

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00:28:22,040 --> 00:28:29,440

which is very much sometimes how you need to reach out and touch soldiers in order to get lessons instilled into their head .

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00:28:29,440 --> 00:28:37,480

And then we have in the opposite end of the spectrum an old platoon sergeant by the name of Sergeant First Class Anthony Cassetta.

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00:28:37,480 --> 00:28:53,900

Now Anthony Cassetta was the... is the not only worst NCO and soldier I've met my life, just an overall bad person who left really big marked in my career.

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00:28:53,900 --> 00:29:05,670

For instance, this platoon sergeant was promoting the wrong idea of leadership inside our platoon.

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00:29:05,670 --> 00:29:12,020

A few examples, I'm not going to make this into just a big hate fest on a soldier, but a few examples of what showed me not to be this type of leader

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00:29:12,020 --> 00:29:24,460

was that he was openly hitting on and potential sleeping with the soldier under his command and the soldier was showing her phone and the text messages of him

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00:29:24,460 --> 00:29:33,630

that he sent around openly to the point where it came to the first sergeants level and this platoon sergeant blamed the soldier

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00:29:33,630 --> 00:29:43,780

and said the soldier was coming on to him and that she went into his office and supposedly showed the text messages of what was actually going on

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00:29:43,780 --> 00:29:51,740

and just made it for really poisonous environment, whether or not, regardless of whether it happened or not, whether or not the accusations were true.

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00:29:51,740 --> 00:29:58,590

It made for a really poisonous environment to afterwards, while he was being investigated, not being relieved of his command.

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00:29:58,590 --> 00:30:13,020

And then all of a sudden she was making military police investigators school and the able to leave the unit willingly and freely to go pursue higher positions

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00:30:13,040 --> 00:30:19,600

in the military police world right after this event happened. So it kind of just made a very bad taste in everybody's mouth about this

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00:30:19,600 --> 00:30:28,980

and kind of was the first red flag of this is who I don't want to be like and there are many other examples of this NCO promoting just bad things in the workplace,

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00:30:28,980 --> 00:30:39,840

saying that certain soldiers can't be leaders and can't.. he was really breaking equal-opportunity policy in the Army by saying if you're not an airborne status anymore,

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00:30:39,860 --> 00:30:49,820

which I wasn't since I injured my arm, I can't send you to the promotion board to become an E5, because how would that look for me as an airborne leader,

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00:30:49,820 --> 00:30:57,720

sending somebody who just has their wings and isn't on status in an airborne unit to go proceed to get that rank higher?

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00:30:57,720 --> 00:31:03,920

So it really inspired me of more or less what not to be and what not to do in the military.

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00:31:03,920 --> 00:31:21,080

Alright, so now transitioning, when you were about ready to leave your Fort Bragg to transition out of the military, what kind of feelings were you going through your body?

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00:31:21,080 --> 00:31:30,840

Well at first it was very bitter, bitter. I was very mad about it. What ended up happening was is that platoon sergeant that I named before,

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00:31:30,840 --> 00:31:40,400

The couple years that I'd been at Fort Bragg, had told me I can't go to a promotion board, because they had to promote diversity in the workplace

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00:31:40,400 --> 00:31:47,540

and we already had too many white male and NCOs. I was told I couldn't go do schools that I wanted and other activities.

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00:31:47,540 --> 00:31:55,420

I couldn't pursue, really to move anywhere and my argument was is that I had no negative counselings in my counseling packets,

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00:31:55,420 --> 00:32:03,720

no bad actions against me, no... I never broke any regs or anything like that and I looked very good on paper and in PT

wise.

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00:32:03,740 --> 00:32:13,200

Besides the push-up that I couldn't perform within the PT world that I was exempt from, I scored perfect scores every single time,

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00:32:13,200 --> 00:32:22,060

100% on my runs and my sit-ups. So my argument was is that I needed to be able to grow and pursue. So once I found out that I couldn't move

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00:32:22,060 --> 00:32:29,840

and I was very much in a lateral position and then I was not going to advance, that's when I started talking about doctors about,

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00:32:29,840 --> 00:32:39,970

they had already targeted me for we call it MEB or Med Board Chapter paper package. So I had fought the Med board twice before where the Army said

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00:32:39,970 --> 00:32:49,240

"you're getting kicked out of the Army, because your arm's messed up" and I was able to fight it twice and stay in and this third time they were kind of...

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00:32:49,240 --> 00:32:57,900

everybody on post was being reviewed by Womack Army Hospital that was on some type of permanent profile, which was a piece of paper stating that I couldn't jump

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00:32:57,900 --> 00:33:05,920

and I couldn't do push-ups, because my arm being messed up and they were automatically being reviewed in my case had come up positive for an MEB chapter.

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00:33:05,920 --> 00:33:18,840

So I got called in to Womack to talk to them and discuss potentially being chaptered and at that point, I decided not to fight it and just let them decide whether or not I was going to get chaptered.

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00:33:18,840 --> 00:33:34,380

In the end they decided yes, because of this I was awarded a combat-related injury again a fire because it was on an airborne operation for my owner that had been going on.

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00:33:34,380 --> 00:33:44,420

Alright, so how did you end up returning home? Did you know, you were still here stateside so did you have to fly home, did you drive?

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00:33:44,420 --> 00:33:53,620

So what I ended up doing was making the state of Georgia my new home. I had been going to school and living in Cincinnati Ohio for most of my life

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00:33:53,620 --> 00:34:00,720

and my girlfriend of three years at the time had been going to the University of North Georgia

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00:34:00,720 --> 00:34:09,710

and I had a battle buddy from OSIT training that also been going to University of North Georgia. So I had been very familiar with the area.

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00:34:09,740 --> 00:34:14,300

She was just about to finish her bachelor's degree and she did and so at the time she was in her last semester,

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00:34:14,300 --> 00:34:25,240

So I decided it would be best if I moved to Dahlonega, Georgia at the University of North Georgia and spend my time transitioning to here.

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00:34:25,240 --> 00:34:35,119

The day that I left Fort Bragg I was staying at a friend's house, because I had to clear my barracks room, I packed my four-door sedan completely full,

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00:34:35,119 --> 00:34:41,119

completely full. There was zero space in that sedan even really for me to drive

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00:34:41,120 --> 00:34:50,300

and I ended up packed my car completely and even downloading the items I couldn't fit and driving off to Dahlonega, Georgia.

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00:34:50,300 --> 00:34:56,700

So now, what did your family feel about you know you coming down here instead of moving back home?

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00:34:56,700 --> 00:35:09,560

Well so my father's opinions on this was that if it's what's best for me and that's what I you need to do. He'd understood, he had originally lived in California,

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00:35:09,560 --> 00:35:17,960

in Southern California and moved here to Kentucky or to Kentucky and Cincinnati area. And so he had told me

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00:35:17,960 --> 00:35:21,240

"if this is what's best for you then that's what you need to do",

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00:35:21,280 --> 00:35:29,620

which I felt and do still feel was the best move for me, transitioning into a military-like college like I did

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00:35:29,620 --> 00:35:40,420

My mother on the other hand of course, was not happy about it whatsoever and wanted me to... has always wanted me to move home to the area of Cincinnati and Kentucky again

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00:35:40,420 --> 00:35:46,720

and pursue higher education there and wasn't happy in the first place about me leaving for the Army.

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00:35:46,720 --> 00:36:00,480

Okay, so now with that being said, how about the community around? So you said it's a very military friendly community.

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00:36:00,480 --> 00:36:09,380

Have they done anything for you since you've been back or is it just you kind of fell back in line and just kind of put it all on the past?

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00:36:09,380 --> 00:36:17,319

So my good and bad experiences in Army going back to the platoon sergeant, my injury, and the connections I made in the Army,

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00:36:17,320 --> 00:36:24,100

with the good leaders and my friends and all that, really matured me and allowed me to grow a lot while I was in.

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00:36:24,100 --> 00:36:30,160

I've used every skill most -- besides combat skills -- that I've learned in the army since I've transitioned out.

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00:36:30,160 --> 00:36:38,840

The community's been very open and welcomed. Right down the street from us, here in Dahlonega, Georgia is a Ranger Camp, Camp Merrill,

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00:36:38,840 --> 00:36:45,009

which is the mountain phase of Ranger School. So this community is very heavily oriented on military.

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00:36:45,009 --> 00:36:56,099

This community is either really for the most part Rangers, retired Rangers and military, or the cadets and students up here at the University of North Georgia.

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00:36:56,100 --> 00:37:04,020

Immediately as soon as I got here I've got involved with veteran groups and activities and I immediately, my first semester here,

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00:37:04,020 --> 00:37:11,800

last semester in the fall of 2016, became the Vice President of our SVA or Student Veterans of America program that's here

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00:37:11,800 --> 00:37:20,640

and I'm now still currently the vice president and I'm the president-elect for our next semester. So I've been very active as far as getting out

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00:37:20,640 --> 00:37:28,780

and reaching out to the community here. We did a project where we did yard work for a disabled veteran retired veteran here in the community

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00:37:28,780 --> 00:37:33,820

and it's just very rewarding to be able to do that and to spend time with those veterans and hear their stories

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00:37:33,820 --> 00:37:40,060

and hear their tales about the wars that they were involved with or what they did in Garrison.

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00:37:40,060 --> 00:37:46,130

So how are you adjusting to civilian life?

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00:37:46,130 --> 00:37:57,119

I would say almost excellently. I was very nervous transitioning, very much a social butterfly, I love people, I love my buddies, didn't want to leave them behind.

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00:37:57,119 --> 00:38:07,319

I very much felt like when I was getting the medical chapter, even though I had served three and a half years, I was leaving my friends behind.

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00:38:07,320 --> 00:38:16,280

So that was something that really bothered me for a while. However, once I got out and started to kind of...

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00:38:16,280 --> 00:38:22,720

I had a summer to adjust doing some side jobs here and there as far as yard work and things go.

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00:38:22,720 --> 00:38:32,360

Once I got into school I loved it. It was almost a 180 from high school. Not to say that I wasn't a good student in high school, it's over, it's just I cared more.

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00:38:32,360 --> 00:38:38,969

I was very much more focused and oriented on my education and learning and bothering my professors outside of class



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00:38:38,969 --> 00:38:45,180

and the university's small enough where all my professors know me by first name. So it's very easy to leave a good impression on my professors

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00:38:45,180 --> 00:38:55,229

that I'm this enthusiastic about learning and picking up new skills, that allows me to have research opportunities and things along those lines.

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00:38:55,229 --> 00:39:01,000

Now do you remain in contact with people that you were stationed with?

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00:39:01,000 --> 00:39:09,989

Absolutely, although a lot of us are in different parts of the world. The few that I considered to be my very good friends while I was in

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00:39:09,989 --> 00:39:17,260

even if they were a different companies. I still keep in contact with my buddy Scott Kerber who went through OSIT training with me,

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00:39:17,260 --> 00:39:24,880

served at Fort Bragg with me in a different company. He's currently stationed overseas right now. We still keep in very good contact.

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00:39:24,880 --> 00:39:38,260

My friend Lucas Schroeder, him and I keep in almost bi-daily contact with each other and really keep each other's spirits up high when we have those hard or rough periods of adjustment.

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00:39:38,260 --> 00:39:43,270

It's you know, we can talk to each other and say hey you know this is how I got some of this I experienced the same thing

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00:39:43,270 --> 00:39:51,370

The same thing with my friend Tate Deulim, he's still currently serving at Fort Bragg. He's planning on getting out, staying locally in that area.

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00:39:51,370 --> 00:39:59,960

We're still in very good contact. Old squad leaders, old leaders, old platoon leaders, old commanders that had PCSed and gone on to different installations

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00:39:59,960 --> 00:40:06,180

around the country, I'm still very much in contact with and still I'm held in high regards with them.

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00:40:06,180 --> 00:40:18,840

So you said you were doing some you know, minor work before you started school, but other than school, was there anything you've done since separating from the military?

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00:40:18,840 --> 00:40:30,940

Well since my separation was recently, it's not even a year ago, I would say accomplishments mine have just been my activities associated with school.

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00:40:30,940 --> 00:40:38,540

I was able to go ahead and hit the ground running per se and make above a 3.0 my first semester back

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00:40:38,540 --> 00:40:48,540

and I currently have all A's here in my second semester of my freshman year my first year and I've been involved with groups such as the Psychology Club,

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00:40:48,540 --> 00:40:58,100

the Student Veterans of America where I'm actually leading the fight to have the school open up a honors veterans fraternity here

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00:40:58,100 --> 00:41:07,240

and other veteran friendly programs. I'm looking to really make a 180 impact on a school here on the way that it views and treats its veterans.

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00:41:07,240 --> 00:41:13,440

Okay, other than the SVA, are you currently any member of any other veterans association?

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00:41:13,440 --> 00:41:22,100

Yeah, so we're looking at starting a Northeast Atlanta chapter of Red, White, and Blue, which is a spin-off of Vetslanta.

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00:41:22,100 --> 00:41:31,900

What they do is they organize a lot of fundraiser events and charity events for veterans in the community locally here in Georgia

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00:41:31,900 --> 00:41:40,980

and what they focus really on is doing like a 5k, 10k ruck marches and runs in order to raise the funds to support these veterans.

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00:41:40,980 --> 00:41:48,220

So it's not anything like a sales pitch or a private company or anything like that, it's very much a charitable organization

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00:41:48,220 --> 00:41:56,340

and I'm actually looking to try to start that as the president and not the founder, but the leader of our chapter here in

Northeast Georgia.

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00:41:56,340 --> 00:42:03,720

Okay. So what were some of your life lessons that the military has taught you?

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00:42:03,720 --> 00:42:18,460

Oh military taught me a lot, actually. To keep it shorter, the military taught me the leadership skills I referred to earlier about what to do, what not to do,

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00:42:18,460 --> 00:42:23,340

what makes a good leader, what makes not a good leader. It really taught me to take initiative.

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00:42:23,340 --> 00:42:30,180

That's something that I've noticed since I've been out working with a lot of civilians and even with other veterans who are in the National Guard and the Reserves

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00:42:30,180 --> 00:42:38,580

and didn't have that day to day initiative checks, almost why they're in the Army or in the military regardless of branch,

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00:42:38,580 --> 00:42:45,060

was is that in put towards situations where people don't want to make decisions or can't make decisions,

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00:42:45,060 --> 00:42:54,630

whether it's a split decision moment or a week-long way of "how are we get a handle situation?" I'm very much able to step up and say

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00:42:54,630 --> 00:43:02,000

"you know what, not to be the guy to bully everybody and say this is what we're doing, but let's take part of your idea one's take part your idea to take part of my idea

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00:43:02,000 --> 00:43:09,520

and we'll combine them into something and I'll move forward with it, I'll go talk to you we need to get talked to, I'll step four and I'll take that that leadership position".

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00:43:09,520 --> 00:43:16,480

And responsibility and patience, a lot of patience with paperwork.

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00:43:16,520 --> 00:43:26,260

So now how has your military service impacted your feelings about war or the military in general?

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00:43:26,260 --> 00:43:41,240

My experiences in the military are very biased in the fact that I was interacting with very many wide variety of people, right.

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00:43:41,240 --> 00:43:53,270

So day to day military police operations I could be working with anybody from a green beret in group you know, what's going on in that police call

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00:43:53,270 --> 00:44:05,060

to 44th Medical to anybody. So I have a lot of positive experiences in networking with people that I met and learning off of them.

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00:44:05,060 --> 00:44:11,960

However, I mean...

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00:44:11,960 --> 00:44:17,500

I mean, so how has it just you know, changed your perspective on the military from before you went?

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00:44:17,500 --> 00:44:33,560

Yeah, as I said before, it's very biased and it's hard for me to openly say this, but amongst a lot of veterans and amongst a lot of service members when I was still in,

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00:44:33,560 --> 00:44:43,180

it was often discussed that even in the short amount of time that I was in the the Army, three and a half years, things were definitely getting a little too politically correct.

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00:44:43,180 --> 00:44:53,160

People were passing their own standards and not the standard is that the Army traditionally sets forth for certain schools, jobs, and such forth

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00:44:53,160 --> 00:45:03,240

and I saw a lot of favoritism going in. I went into it with the Hollywood mindset of like what you see in Band of Brothers and you know, other documentaries

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00:45:03,240 --> 00:45:12,140

and HBO series and things like that and talking the previous veterans of how things are. So not just the Hollywood aspect, but all your story some of these veterans.

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00:45:12,140 --> 00:45:19,760

And then just seeing how easy it was, even from a time that I am the easier that it got and just the favoritism.

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00:45:19,760 --> 00:45:31,220

Didn't entirely ruin my aspect or my view of the military as a whole. By no means am I saying the military or Army as a

whole is a bunch of Care Bears and ACUs.

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00:45:31,220 --> 00:45:43,320

However, I would like to say that in very many aspects it's like America right now in 2017, that a lot of things are very political

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00:45:43,320 --> 00:45:53,520

and it was no matter where you go things are going to be political in workplaces, in schools and in all that, but it was much more political than I thought it was going to be.

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00:45:53,520 --> 00:46:04,479

Now a what message would you like to leave for future generations who view or hear your interview?

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00:46:04,479 --> 00:46:17,920

Go forward with a clear mind. Be able to hear the opposition's side of the argument. Do not just be entirely one-sided or else there will be no progression's ever going to be made.

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00:46:17,920 --> 00:46:26,600

Nobody's ever going to put their foot forward if you and another party or another idea are just at an impasse there.

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00:46:26,600 --> 00:46:36,620

So I would say looking forward, be yourself, shut up and listen, even if you think you know what the answer is.

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00:46:36,620 --> 00:46:49,420

Take in as much information as you can. Reflect on yourself and try to network and build yourself and always try to become a bigger and better asset.

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00:46:49,420 --> 00:46:56,220

There's always room to improve, there's always you know, I'm really strong in this area, I'm really poor in this area, and I'm working on this area,

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00:46:56,220 --> 00:47:03,040

but don't let that area you're good and go down as well. You know, you have to maintain and very many skills are perishable.

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00:47:03,040 --> 00:47:11,160

So if there's a skill that's important that you need to retain, you consistently need to be using it in practice. That's what I would say.

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00:47:11,160 --> 00:47:16,560

Is there anything you feel that we haven't discussed or that you wish to add to the interview?

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00:47:16,560 --> 00:47:25,100

Absolutely not, I think we covered all the bases here and thank you very much for making the journey down here and conducting this interview with me.

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00:47:25,100 --> 00:47:27,660

Alright, thank you for your time.