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00:00:00,000 --> 00:00:08,560

We're recording the interview of Dan Semsel. This interview is being conducted by Adrian Hill and John Granada from Wright State University Veterans' Voices Project.

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00:00:08,560 --> 00:00:13,600

This interview is being recorded at VFW Post 3283 in Huber Heights, Ohio.

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00:00:13,600 --> 00:00:22,660

It is 4 p.m. on July 28, 2014. Alright, to start out we'll go over some biographical information. Where and when were you born?

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00:00:22,660 --> 00:00:27,220

I was born in Bangor, Maine in September of 1966.

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00:00:27,220 --> 00:00:31,620

Okay, who were your parents and what were their occupations?

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00:00:31,620 --> 00:00:39,260

My father is George Semsel, who is a professor at Ohio University who taught script writing and filmmaking.

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00:00:39,260 --> 00:00:50,140

My mother was a homemaker, Rosemary Semsel. She passed away in 1998 and my dad from Stamford, Connecticut, my mother was Arlington Heights, Illinois.

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00:00:50,140 --> 00:00:53,300

Okay, did you have any siblings?

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00:00:53,300 --> 00:00:58,540

I've got one brother, his name's Thaddeus, he's a chef at Jackie O's restaurant in Athens, Ohio.

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00:00:58,540 --> 00:01:02,540

Okay, did he have any... did any of your close family have military service?

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00:01:02,540 --> 00:01:15,760

My father served, obtained the rank of corporal in the Army Guard back in the -- I want to say -- the 50's maybe early 60's. I'm not sure what time of frame that was.

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00:01:15,760 --> 00:01:19,240

Okay, what year did you enter the service?

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00:01:19,240 --> 00:01:22,580

I came in on active duty in January of 1989

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00:01:22,580 --> 00:01:24,660

And what we're doing it time before you joined?

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00:01:24,660 --> 00:01:31,740

I just graduated from Ohio University after completing the Air Force ROTC program and finishing my degree.

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00:01:31,740 --> 00:01:34,660

Okay and what branch did you serve?

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00:01:34,660 --> 00:01:37,420

I served in the United States Air Force for 25 years.

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00:01:37,420 --> 00:01:44,700

Okay and you did officer training, so you did not enlist, but you signed a contract with the RTC then?

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00:01:44,700 --> 00:01:57,360

That's correct, I did the 4 year program. So after 2 years I signed the contract obligating myself to complete the ROTC program or enlisting in the Air Force as the alternative.

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00:01:57,360 --> 00:02:00,640

Okay and why did you choose the Air Force?

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00:02:00,640 --> 00:02:09,000

I honestly chose it, because a friend of mine did not have a means to pay for college and was trying to get a scholarship trying to get a scholarship through Air Force ROTC

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00:02:09,020 --> 00:02:14,220

and I thought by showing up and signing up, that it might help his chances getting a scholarship.

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00:02:14,220 --> 00:02:24,260

He did 4 years and separated, a little bit over 4 years and separated and I and I did it pretty much almost as a whim and 25 years later, retired.

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00:02:24,260 --> 00:02:37,040

Alright, so what... your training after ROTC, after you got out of that program and went into the actual Air Force, what were the first stages of your training?

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00:02:37,040 --> 00:02:38,800

I guess you didn't go to OCS, did you?

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00:02:38,800 --> 00:02:50,840

No, I did, while in ROTC in 1986, yeah the summer of 1986 I did my field training during the summer in Plattsburgh Air Force Base in upstate New York.

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00:02:50,840 --> 00:02:59,220

It's the only base that I think during the summer training periods that actually has to use their wool blankets that they issue.

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00:02:59,220 --> 00:03:09,960

I completed that program and upon graduation from college, I went straight to a technical school down at Keesler Air Force Base in Mississippi for 5 weeks,

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00:03:09,960 --> 00:03:20,080

technical training and information management and information systems. Then I reported to my first duty station at Tinker Air Force Base, Oklahoma in March of 1989.

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00:03:20,080 --> 00:03:23,540

Okay, so that was all your initial training then?

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00:03:23,540 --> 00:03:24,560

That was initial training.

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00:03:24,580 --> 00:03:30,540

Okay, do you have any memories from that or remember what it was like, what it felt like getting into that military lifestyle?

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00:03:30,580 --> 00:03:35,720

It was... transitioning from a civilian lifestyle to a military was interesting.

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00:03:35,720 --> 00:03:47,400

ROTC prepared me to some degree, but it was a whole different thing putting on a uniform once a week for ROTC versus making that your career.

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00:03:47,400 --> 00:03:56,860

And I remember very distinctly, the base itself, Keesler Air Force Base where did my training, was a training base for a lot junior enlisted folks.

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00:03:56,860 --> 00:04:11,440

In our barracks, the new junior officer enlisted barracks was right next to one of the junior enlisted dining halls and your arm would wear out saluting the just hordes of young airmen as they came out of the dining hall

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00:04:11,440 --> 00:04:15,980

and realized they were about to run over a lieutenant who was trying to get back to his dorm room.

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00:04:15,980 --> 00:04:29,560

It was was complicated when I blew my ankle out doing PT and my dorm room was on 3rd floor, no elevators. So I'd have to hop up 3 floors on crutches with books and

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00:04:29,560 --> 00:04:38,600

the appropriate training material. So

inevitably, the drill sergeants would yell at one of the young airman to grab my books and take them up to the 3rd floor for me,

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00:04:38,600 --> 00:04:48,160

which was appreciated, but also very awkward for a brand new lieutenant with less than a month of service time.

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00:04:48,180 --> 00:05:05,240

It was... Mississippi was pretty much as advertised. It was hot, it was humid, the day I signed in was the day the Bengals kind of dropping the Super Bowl to the 49ers for the second time,

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00:05:05,240 --> 00:05:14,780

which was a little bit depressing coming from Ohio, but it was funny, because I showed up on base with a whole host of other brand new trainees, young officers

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00:05:14,780 --> 00:05:20,040

and we all kind of gravitate to the first person to successfully found the Super Bowl on their TV.

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00:05:20,040 --> 00:05:28,640

Ended up going to that person's room and sitting back and watching the game with a bunch of strangers.

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00:05:28,640 --> 00:05:38,420

It was 5 good weeks and for me it was a chance to reshape my mind little bit, about what I just gotten into.

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00:05:38,420 --> 00:05:51,120

Okay, so how did you adapt to it once you got to your regular duty station and you went from that putting on a uniform once a week to doing it every day?

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00:05:51,140 --> 00:05:55,700

I mean to the food, the barracks, the social life, think you think you adjusted pretty well?

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00:05:55,700 --> 00:06:07,420

I think it came along pretty good, but I had... on the average, an Air Force officer should move every three years. I was screwing that average up for everybody else.

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00:06:07,440 --> 00:06:16,300

I did my first PCS with 16 months time on station in Oklahoma and I had the virtue of my first couple of assignments of having some non-commissioned office

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00:06:16,320 --> 00:06:29,260

that did a very nice job of helping understand how the Air Force worked. The master sergeant Jim Dillman was my NCOSC at my second assignment,

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00:06:29,260 --> 00:06:39,820

taught me a lot about the career fields and about how to lead. He showed me some fantastic examples through the way he conducted himself

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00:06:39,820 --> 00:06:50,240

that I carried with me through my career. It's one of those things as a young officers, if you've got that mentor, that experience individual

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00:06:50,240 --> 00:07:02,920

that can really kind of show you how things operated. It makes it so much easier to transition. The first assignment in Oklahoma was learning a lot about what it was to be in the military.

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00:07:02,920 --> 00:07:11,640

By the time I got to Nevada and the second assignment, it was 16 months after I had gotten to Oklahoma I got a chance to work with Sergeant Dilmer in Nevada

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00:07:11,640 --> 00:07:20,860

It was honing my skills and learning that my ego was not needed in the Air Force.

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00:07:20,860 --> 00:07:33,160

What kind of leadership skills did you learn from him or just picked up as you went throughout your first couple years of being a you know, a new lieutenant?

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00:07:33,160 --> 00:07:42,979

Well Jim was great at basically show me how to manage time, how to basically focus on the objective at hand.

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00:07:42,980 --> 00:07:50,280

What is the job that we're really trying to accomplish and looking at every small piece that goes into that.

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00:07:50,280 --> 00:08:02,160

Where does that fall into the objective of the squadron? Whether it's something as mundane as performance over whether it's the scheduling of the weekly rotators.

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00:08:02,160 --> 00:08:11,220

The job I had in Nevada, we flew to work on Tuesday, we flew home on Friday every single week. So it was like being on a short remote assignment,

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00:08:11,220 --> 00:08:20,300

a week long remote assignment every week, but he found a way to basically show how every piece stuck together.

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00:08:20,300 --> 00:08:27,220

I think the lesson I took from him the most was to realize that every job out there ties into the Air Force mission and

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00:08:27,220 --> 00:08:35,640

and sometimes you have to stretch a little to see what the connections are, but he broke it down to make it very simple and that really paid off for me down the road,

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00:08:35,640 --> 00:08:42,260

because I could look at what I was doing and try to figure out how to eat the elephant one bit at a time as a result.

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00:08:42,260 --> 00:08:51,040

It wasn't looking at trying to do the entire deployment from start to finish in 30 minutes, it was figuring out what's the first step to take, what's the second step to take.

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00:08:51,040 --> 00:09:05,720

Okay, alright. So let's go to your wartime experiences abroad. Where did you serve? You listed them earlier.

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00:09:05,720 --> 00:09:18,260

I served in Desert Storm in Saudi Arabia at Al-Kharj, which was at the time, the asset reconstitution unit for the Air Force.

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00:09:18,260 --> 00:09:32,100

We took all the stuff left over after the fighting ceased and tried to put it all back together, primarily the bare base deployment packages from New Mexico.

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00:09:32,100 --> 00:09:40,480

We tried to take all the spare parts that had been used to assemble these bases and repackage them and send them back for reuse.

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00:09:40,480 --> 00:09:43,400

That was post-Desert Storm.

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00:09:43,400 --> 00:09:55,720

And then deployment was to Al Dhafra in the UAE with KC-10 tankers. I went over there as the director of logistics

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00:09:55,740 --> 00:10:05,440

and our job there was to launch tankers in support of the Operation Southern Watch missions. That was 1997, right after my daughter had been born.

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00:10:05,440 --> 00:10:12,820

I deployed two weeks after she was born. What made the first deployment, the desert storm one a little more interesting,

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00:10:12,820 --> 00:10:23,620

was I had just come back from a one-year remote in Iceland. So in theory, I was supposed to be untouchable for being sent on another remote,

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00:10:23,620 --> 00:10:30,820

but a tasking came down and look at all the available people that could fill the tasking, it turned out I was the most eligible to deploy.

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00:10:30,820 --> 00:10:38,160

So nine months after I came back from remote and three months after, my wife and I found out we were pregnant.

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00:10:38,160 --> 00:10:43,720

The I'm heading over to the desert and telling my wife that I may not be back when the baby is a born.

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00:10:43,720 --> 00:10:51,380

So there was a direct correlation between the desert deployments and daughters in my household.

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00:10:51,420 --> 00:11:01,580

My third deployment was to Panama and that lead to follow on trips to El Salvador and Columbia, when I was stationed in Arizona.

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00:11:01,580 --> 00:11:02,660

What year was that?

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00:11:02,660 --> 00:11:09,940

That was in 1999. I closed Howard Air Force Base in 1999. I had a gift for closing installations.

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00:11:09,980 --> 00:11:20,060

I've been involved with base closures and unit closures in the past, so they deployed me panama to help shut down that base.

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00:11:20,060 --> 00:11:25,460

and I was one of the last 10 people to walk off before it was turned over to Panamanians.

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00:11:25,460 --> 00:11:36,480

Following that trip I was sent to El Salvador and Columbia to do partnership initiatives with their air forces and

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00:11:36,480 --> 00:11:45,740

that was the first time that I really got to see what it was like to be in a real high threat environment, operating in Columbia.

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00:11:45,760 --> 00:11:56,640

And then followed that in 2004 with a deployments to Iraq Freedom, to Baghdad with Task-Force Rio as the operations officer.

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00:11:56,640 --> 00:12:03,740

As a career Air Force fuels officer you expect to spend most of your lives running air bases.

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00:12:03,740 --> 00:12:12,220

Apparently I made the mistake of saying stop being saying "hooah" at a staff meeting. So I deployed with the 1st Cav, we were attached to the 1st Cav,

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00:12:12,220 --> 00:12:23,520

an Army unit out of Texas and I spent my deployment in OIF on convoy with the Army, which for a career Air Force fuels guy

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00:12:23,520 --> 00:12:35,460

who had gone in learning how to shoot paper targets and clean a 9 mil, it was an eye opening experience to learn how to be a combat effective soldier,

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00:12:35,460 --> 00:12:47,540

to be able to go out on his convoy operations. And then my final deployment was 2008. I went to Kandahar, Afghanistan as the deputy commander

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00:12:47,560 --> 00:13:02,580

for an expeditionary group doing basically, medivac and air rescue missions and doing UAV operations in support of the, primarily the Afghanistan theater,

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00:13:02,800 --> 00:13:12,080

but in particular with the Princess Patricia's Royal Canadian Lite Infantry operations in Southern Afghanistan at the the time.

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00:13:12,080 --> 00:13:14,540

What base were on in Kandahar?

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00:13:14,540 --> 00:13:25,080

I was on Kandahar proper. I was... our unit was based out of Camp Sammick, which was on the Kandahar Air Base, named for an Air Force PJ that lost his life, I believe.

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00:13:25,080 --> 00:13:32,600

Okay. Alright, now when you were overseas for any of these deployments, did you see any combat when you were over there?

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00:13:32,600 --> 00:13:39,180

Yes, particularly with... when I was with the 1st Cav. We were outside the wire four days of the week.

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00:13:39,180 --> 00:13:40,240

Okay.

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00:13:40,240 --> 00:13:57,180

And we took pot shots probably every other time we were outside. I survived an IED strike on my convoy. I was a regular event, unfortunately too regular.

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00:13:57,180 --> 00:14:09,160

When the Blackwater contractors were ambushed on one of the main supply routes our convoy happened to be south of Baghdad

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00:14:09,160 --> 00:14:20,560

and they put us into a blocking position to try and engage the guys who had ambushed the Blackwater guards and the bad guys never did come to us,

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00:14:20,560 --> 00:14:30,960

but it's kind chilling again, to be an Air Force guy from... stuck behind a fence line and then rear based most of the time

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00:14:30,960 --> 00:14:41,940

to suddenly being told by our convoy commander "get out, we're going to be moving real quick to this location. If you see these vehicles, engage on site".

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00:14:41,940 --> 00:14:50,700

It was, you know, I'll give the Army a rash of crap every chance I get, but god bless them for knowing what they know.

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00:14:50,700 --> 00:14:55,780

They taught me how to be at least, not just baggage.

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00:14:55,780 --> 00:15:01,780

Yeah. Did you... what was your rank at the time of that last point you were talking about?

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00:15:01,780 --> 00:15:12,860

In Iraq I was a major. I got a major promotable to lieutenant colonel. What was kind of funny about that was there was two majors promotable.

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00:15:12,860 --> 00:15:24,260

So we had to compare dates for HANK and the most senior person would be the unit deputy and the other guy had me by two months, date and rank.

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00:15:24,260 --> 00:15:34,560

So he became the deputy, he was an Army O4 and as Air Force O4, being the junior of the two, I became the operations officer.

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00:15:34,560 --> 00:15:40,340

So the guy with the Army skills was not going out with the Army unit.

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00:15:40,340 --> 00:15:40,980

Yeah.

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00:15:40,980 --> 00:15:46,100

[clearing throat] Which we both found kind of comical from time to time.

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00:15:46,100 --> 00:16:00,520

Yeah. [laughing] Alright, so what were your regular duties? Let's see, we covered the Iraq one, what about... you said you broke down bases in South America?

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00:16:00,520 --> 00:16:02,520

That was pretty much your duty there, was to break down bases.

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00:16:02,520 --> 00:16:03,880

Closed up Howard Air Force Base.

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00:16:03,880 --> 00:16:06,880

Okay and then what about in Kandahar? You said it was UAV?

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00:16:06,880 --> 00:16:14,240

Kandahar we did the UAV operations, supporting the [inaudible] operations, supporting the real-time surveillance

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00:16:14,240 --> 00:16:29,840

and as the forward location, we'd make sure the birds got up in the air, so the guys that were flying those birds and doing the intel and and doing the appropriate surveillance operations had them ready to go.

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00:16:29,840 --> 00:16:38,180

And then we also, our group was kind of a patchwork group of all the Air Force assets at the location at the time.

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00:16:38,220 --> 00:16:50,080

So we also had the Pave Hawk rescue choppers. So the para-rescue guys and the medi-vac rescue also fell under us.

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00:16:50,080 --> 00:16:58,040

And those guys would do the operations to bring in the casualties direct out of combat, straight to the hospital.

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00:16:58,040 --> 00:17:02,840

Okay, so what was your specific job, were you were just in charge around there?

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00:17:02,840 --> 00:17:04,340

I was the deputy commander out there...

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00:17:04,340 --> 00:17:04,840

Okay.

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00:17:04,840 --> 00:17:10,020

and it was oversight, back up the commander that oversaw all of the operations.

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00:17:10,020 --> 00:17:10,900

Okay.

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00:17:10,900 --> 00:17:23,780

And again, not a standard job for a career supply fuels type. Just happened that I had the skill set and I was deployable at the time when they needed somebody to cover that operation.

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00:17:23,780 --> 00:17:27,480

So, took me out of my comfort zone, had to learn on the fly again.

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00:17:27,480 --> 00:17:37,020

Yeah, going back to that deployment to Iraq. Now you said you went on a lot of convoys. What was the purpose of that? Like where were you?

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00:17:37,020 --> 00:17:46,260

We were doing... We're basically overseeing the Iraqi humanitarian fuel importation mission.

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00:17:46,260 --> 00:17:56,380

We had set up contracts, because under Saddam, no one could have cars. So the Iraqi controlling could handle the demand,

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00:17:56,380 --> 00:18:00,960

producing enough refined product for Saddam and his henchmen and people weren't allowed to have cars.

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00:18:00,960 --> 00:18:09,940

After Saddam was gone, everybody in the country seemed to develop a need to have a car and they did a fantastic job patch-working some things together

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00:18:09,940 --> 00:18:19,260

that would not come close passing any road standards in the US, but now they're going through fuel faster than the refiners could produce it.

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00:18:19,260 --> 00:18:27,160

So Iraq has a great crude oil capability, but they need to figure out how to get enough fuel in to support their economy as it was growing.

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00:18:27,160 --> 00:18:35,500

So we basically arranged contracts, pipelines, trucks to bring in refined fuel products to to Iraq.

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00:18:35,500 --> 00:18:45,640

My role was to go out and directly engage with the senior folks at the various refineries and the various distribution hubs,

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00:18:45,640 --> 00:18:55,920

to make sure that they had what they needed to bring the steel into the country and try to meet the ambassadors goal of - I want to say it was --

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00:18:55,920 --> 00:19:11,880

15 days supply of gasoline and diesel for the entire country. So it's a lot of... I drank a lot of coffee with the folks that were involved in the Iraqi oil industry.

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00:19:11,880 --> 00:19:25,140

And we also did evaluation of the capability of their refineries to receive trucks, we did assessments of their industrial capacity, their storage capacity,

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00:19:25,140 --> 00:19:43,140

and we helped develop ways to make it more comfortable and more, I guess more viable for the drivers to want to drive in from Turkey or Jordan or Kuwait to bring fuel into the country.

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00:19:43,140 --> 00:19:52,980

And the ultimate mission was to transition the entire operation back to the Iraqi government, to the Ministry of Oil, but it had to be built first.

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00:19:52,980 --> 00:19:58,680

Yeah, so do capacity for them, new capability for them. So that's why it was brought in.

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00:19:58,680 --> 00:20:10,820

Now, being Air Force and I guess not expecting maybe, to be in a combat environment or at least outside the wire to a prospective,

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00:20:10,840 --> 00:20:19,740

what was your initial reaction when you found out that was going to be your assignment and what was your reaction the first time you actually were engaged?

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00:20:19,740 --> 00:20:31,740

I think I had no idea what I was getting into. The reality came to pass when I sent to Fort Bliss for the pre-deployment training with the Army,

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00:20:31,740 --> 00:20:39,080

as opposed to going through Air Force pre-deployment training, which was a whole different world for me.

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00:20:39,100 --> 00:20:48,420

It was learning how to move and shoot and a lot of the combat skills that we just did at the time, did not teach in the Air Force.

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00:20:48,420 --> 00:20:55,420

We changed that up. Some of the guys who worked for me at a later assignment were part of the guys who built the combat convoy courses,

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00:20:55,420 --> 00:21:09,040

when Air Force drivers started taking this convoys on. It was eye-opening. My reality was changed when I wasn't just cleaning a 9 mil and shooting paper targets,

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00:21:09,040 --> 00:21:23,880

when I was actually having to move forward and engage pop-up targets on an Army range and getting lectures from experienced Army civilians and senior NCOs on the impact of the training.

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00:21:23,880 --> 00:21:38,500

And first time I heard shots fired in anger. You know, the adventure goes out really, really fast when somebody says "by the way, their shooting at us".

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00:21:38,500 --> 00:21:46,240

Until you hear the sound of a bullet going by you, you don't know what it sounds like and that was eye-opening.

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00:21:46,240 --> 00:21:56,180

When we got hit with the IED, that was you know, it's an understatement to say that was a significant emotional event.

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00:21:56,180 --> 00:22:04,480

I came back in that day completely wired. I mean the adrenaline coursing through my body.

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00:22:04,480 --> 00:22:14,120

We got out lucky; we got shaken up, but nobody hurt, nobody killed. Superficial damage.

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00:22:14,120 --> 00:22:27,820

Finished our mission, came back in, and about 6 hours later the adrenaline all wore off and I slept like a baby, but the next day I woke up and I was a wreck

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00:22:27,820 --> 00:22:34,260

and my boss could see it. He kicked me out of the office and told em to spend some time with the chaplain.

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00:22:34,260 --> 00:22:55,740

So it changes your perspective. I never, ever would've imagined being put in that position and it was, well, a big difference between hearing bullets going by and hearing the bomb go off.

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00:22:55,740 --> 00:23:02,220

Alright, how did you stay in touch with your family and friends on your deployments, respectively?

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00:23:02,220 --> 00:23:15,240

You know, my kids when I went to Baghdad were very young, elementary school and we used traditional paper letters.

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00:23:15,240 --> 00:23:24,580

I think it's kind of funny, because my younger daughter is very quiet, she doesn't talk as much as her older sister talks all the time,

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00:23:24,580 --> 00:23:33,840

but she liked to draw pictures. So she would send pictures rather than writing out sentences. I think she was kindergarten maybe first grade, that time frame

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00:23:33,840 --> 00:23:49,500

and she sent some just absolutely adorable drawings she did. One of them was, it was kind of funny, it was a card she did and cover was little girls crying.

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00:23:49,500 --> 00:23:58,060

I've got two daughters and I'm sitting there thinking "that's just just kind of a kick in the morale junk right there", but I kept those.

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00:23:58,060 --> 00:24:15,960

And then one of the neatest things was when I came home, the day I got back I was very jet lagged after flying from Iraq to Kuwait to Germany to Fort Bliss to go through their reintegration program.

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00:24:15,960 --> 00:24:25,680

Then from Fort Bliss to Dallas to Hawaii. I had no idea what day it was, what time it was when I hit the bay. I was probably about 3:30 in the afternoon.

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00:24:25,680 --> 00:24:34,960

I didn't get up until the next morning, when I woke up. I went downstairs and my younger daughter had drawn a little picture that I've still got.

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00:24:34,960 --> 00:24:50,720

It was just a girl with a big smiling face and just wrote on top of it "Daddy's home". Yeah, I've still got that one. That was tough, but we did traditional letters.

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00:24:50,720 --> 00:25:01,320

But I didn't want to use electronic media at that point for OBSEC reasons. I didn't want to talk about what I was doing.

171

00:25:01,320 --> 00:25:14,340

I emailed my wife on a regular basis, but the kids were too young for email. That changed when we got to Afghanistan and the kids had their own email accounts and it was a daily ritual,

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00:25:14,340 --> 00:25:28,360

I'd go in an hour before work and email the family. They all got an individual daily update from me. I just let them know I was doing okay and that everything was fine.

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00:25:28,360 --> 00:25:41,020

Okay, now we're going to kind of come to the coming part. After each deployment, any of them especially memorable to you?

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00:25:41,020 --> 00:25:48,400

Like I said, the events of my younger daughter. The picture she drew for me is one that I'll cherish for the rest of my life.

175

00:25:48,400 --> 00:26:00,860

That's one that I keep with many of my military keepsakes that it meant about as much as anything could.

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00:26:00,860 --> 00:26:12,800

Again, they knew I was off fighting bad guys, was about the extent of it. We were in D.C. on 9/11. I was part of the first response team to the pentagon

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00:26:12,800 --> 00:26:27,220

and for probably a few days afterwards, my older daughter would get visibly upset when planes flew over after that.

178

00:26:27,220 --> 00:26:38,660

That was... they didn't fully understand what happened when I went down to the Pentagon. I ran down there, the boss said "Dan, grab your gear your taking the team".

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00:26:38,660 --> 00:26:46,720

And so I went down there, ran into the house, grabbed my go bag and told my wife "I'm going to the Pentagon, I don't know when I'll be home".

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00:26:46,720 --> 00:26:54,840

And that was a significant event for the girls, but they understood that the bad guys were trying to do bad things

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00:26:54,840 --> 00:27:09,360

and that I was going to do my best to stop it. Afghanistan was a little different. The girls were in junior high and I was able to -- when I came home they were at school.

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00:27:09,360 --> 00:27:21,880

So I met them at the bus came off. It was a typical Missouri day in the fall with a lot of rain, but there was nothing that was going to stop me from standing up there at that bus stop.

183

00:27:21,880 --> 00:27:38,480

It made it worth it. It's kind of funny, because it took a long time for us, I think as a military, to understand how to bring people back the right way.

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00:27:38,480 --> 00:27:50,240

I made a commission, I had a very good master sergeant I worked with in Missouri, that he and I believed that we needed to talk to everybody when they came home.

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00:27:50,240 --> 00:28:02,080

So we'd find a way to catch every reintegration briefing and talk to them about, I mean the Army motto's like "Army strong", "be all you can be", and "aim high".

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00:28:02,080 --> 00:28:11,000

That's all really good, but I wanted them to hear from two people who had been there, who'd seen some of the ugliest that you could see,

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00:28:11,000 --> 00:28:20,720

that it took a huge amount of cojones to be able to say hey, I need help when I come home.

188

00:28:20,720 --> 00:28:31,460

I saw the impact of deployments, of multiple deployments. My career field on the enlisted side and not on the officer side, I was one of the heaviest deployed in the Air Force.

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00:28:31,460 --> 00:28:42,380

We did do the convoy operations. I would match any of my convoy teams, any of my transportation drivers, I've

matched their combat records just about any flyer

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00:28:42,380 --> 00:28:55,000

and I'll tell you that the people with more combat time are my drivers, but we didn't get it at first, we didn't get properly how to bring people back

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00:28:55,000 --> 00:29:02,720

and listen to what was being said or what wasn't being said when they came back through a deployment line.

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00:29:02,720 --> 00:29:13,440

Everybody knows how to... everybody knows the answers to give when you walk back in, but getting people to where they're willing to say

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00:29:13,440 --> 00:29:19,880

"hey, I've got a problem. I need help". That's tough, that's very tough.

194

00:29:19,880 --> 00:29:20,440

Yeah.

195

00:29:20,440 --> 00:29:30,300

And its... having watched it, having lived it, if I didn't do it for the people I served with then I wasn't doing them a justice.

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00:29:30,300 --> 00:29:41,400

So but, between Chief Rare and I, we caught every single mission. When I was in North Dakota there's three planes that came in and out every day to North Dakota.

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00:29:41,400 --> 00:29:51,160

My deployers were on those commercial airlines and I met every single plane. I saw them all leave, I saw them all come home. I stood with their families.

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00:29:51,160 --> 00:29:58,060

I wanted to make sure they understood as soon as they got off that plane that we were there and that we were going to be there for them.

199

00:29:58,060 --> 00:30:07,480

Okay. Did you have any, like how were you received by your family and community when you got back from your deployment?

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00:30:07,480 --> 00:30:19,520

That was tough on the family. My wife and I talked when I got back from Iraq. I asked her upfront the day that I got home, "do you want to know what I did?"

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00:30:19,520 --> 00:30:33,420

and she said "no" and so she didn't know. She found out once some folks came to present me with a decoration and then....

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00:30:33,440 --> 00:30:34,920

What decoration was that?

203

00:30:34,920 --> 00:30:36,920

Joint Service Accommodation, Metal for Valor.

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00:30:36,920 --> 00:30:39,680

Okay.

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00:30:39,680 --> 00:30:50,480

When the problem was my commander Iraq was my commander at home station and he elaborated

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00:30:50,480 --> 00:30:55,220

He expanded on what was on the citation. So my wife knew all the details.

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00:30:55,220 --> 00:30:58,380

And what was that citation for specifically?

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00:30:58,380 --> 00:31:13,100

That was the IED hit, it was... well, I got kicked out of the office that day. The senior officer who came out, took a look at my wives face

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00:31:13,100 --> 00:31:24,720

and as my commanding officer was expanding on what happened and talking more about it, she had just gone white as a sheet.

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00:31:24,720 --> 00:31:32,600

And the senior officer looked at her and told my boss "Dan's done for the day". They kicked us out.

211

00:31:32,600 --> 00:31:33,100

Yeah.

212

00:31:33,100 --> 00:31:46,420

So I got a half-day off with my wife, but that's the first time she heard that and the good and the bad part was there's a lot she'll never know.

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00:31:46,420 --> 00:31:48,800

Yeah.

214

00:31:48,800 --> 00:32:00,380

The community, every place I've been has been amazingly supportive of the military. That side of it was easy.

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00:32:00,380 --> 00:32:13,180

The family side, that was the tough part. If my kids ask me I know what I'm going to tell them.

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00:32:13,180 --> 00:32:25,520

I've told people, I've told friends that I did not have a normal career and some of them understand what it means.

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00:32:25,520 --> 00:32:33,960

Alright, I've kind of come and we're going to focus on coming out of the military now. SO how did you readjust, you've only been here now, you said?

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00:32:33,960 --> 00:32:34,680

Umhmm.

219

00:32:34,680 --> 00:32:42,580

Okay, how have you so far readjusted to civilian life? Going for 25 years, you know, that's a lot.

220

00:32:42,580 --> 00:32:54,860

Wow, I told people my to-do-list. I retired on the 22nd of May, 2013. That was -- a few people caught on -- that was the day my mom died, the 22nd of May

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00:32:54,860 --> 00:33:05,340

and she had died 15 years prior and it was significant for that reason.

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00:33:05,340 --> 00:33:12,020

I put down a to-do-list for the day after my retirement that says "Dan sleeps in and doesn't shave"

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00:33:12,020 --> 00:33:25,760

and I'm very proud to say that about at 12:30 in the afternoon, right afternoon, when I finally got out of bed, I refused to look at my razor and I went and said "yep, checklist done".

224

00:33:25,760 --> 00:33:40,080

Adjusting to life after military, that's been a whole new adventure. I didn't know what I wanted to do when I grew up, I finally figured that out.

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00:33:40,080 --> 00:33:58,420

It took a little while. I did, I got licensed to do financial counseling, investment advising, and insurance sales and did that for three months and did quite well at it,

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00:33:58,420 --> 00:34:10,760

but it just didn't feel as satisfying as I really wanted to feel after my career and I got an opportunity to work with the veterans and help give back

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00:34:10,760 --> 00:34:22,820

by finding employment opportunities for veterans in the Miami Valley and I joked with my boss a couple times that I can't believe they pay me to do this, this is amazing.

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00:34:22,820 --> 00:34:31,780

I can get up every day and know that something I'm doing is having an impact on a veteran, whether it's somebody that's been out of the military for 20 years

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00:34:31,780 --> 00:34:40,500

or whether it's somebody who's been out of the military for 20 days. I can do something to help them find what they want to do when they grow up.

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00:34:40,500 --> 00:34:46,080

And it's extremely satisfying to work with the veterans in this community.

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00:34:46,080 --> 00:34:49,520

Okay, that's your full time job now?

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00:34:49,520 --> 00:34:56,420

Full time job, it's program manager of the Veterans Employers Connection through Goodwill-Easter Seals, Miami Valley.

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00:34:56,420 --> 00:34:58,000

Okay.

234

00:34:58,000 --> 00:35:01,440

Working to build a network to help veterans find employment.

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00:35:01,440 --> 00:35:09,060

Okay. Have you stayed in contact with any of your... you know, the fellow veterans that you deployed with or that you were in the military a long time with?

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00:35:09,060 --> 00:35:11,320

Kept in touch with them?

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00:35:11,320 --> 00:35:20,980

I stayed in touch with a few. I learned early in my career that when you send out email addresses and phone numbers

and stuff like that, that you tend to throw it away after time.

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00:35:20,980 --> 00:35:32,840

It gradually fades out. I'm still in touch with a few folks that I served with, some previous bosses, some friends that served alongside.

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00:35:32,840 --> 00:35:46,720

It's kind of funny that one of my senior civilians, who is a retired Air Force master sergeant down in Panama, he and I are still in contact through Facebook and through email.

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00:35:46,720 --> 00:35:54,740

Some of the folks that I served with in other deployments and other operations, other assignments the same.

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00:35:54,740 --> 00:36:01,860

It's funny, some of the folks are still there very much on the radar, some of them aren't.

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00:36:01,860 --> 00:36:08,940

Okay, so we'll just kind of go into some reflections here about your military experience.

243

00:36:08,940 --> 00:36:17,040

How has like your military and your combat deployments and things like that, how has that affected your life in general?

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00:36:17,040 --> 00:36:29,120

Well, I've face a lot of of interesting challenges. I've had cancer for 13 years. I've fought hard to get...

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00:36:29,120 --> 00:36:37,200

It's funny, because the Air Force wouldn't deploy me, they wouldn't send me overseas. The Army had no problems when I was in a joint unit.

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00:36:37,200 --> 00:36:47,700

That's how I ended up in Iraq. They said "that's all?" Okay, you're deployed". I found running to be my sanity.

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00:36:47,700 --> 00:37:02,920

That's been my escape and my means of dealing with everything. I was challenged by a buddy of mine after my second cancer surgery to run a marathon

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00:37:02,920 --> 00:37:16,440

and then I did so. And then when I was in Iraq, that would be when I come back off convoy, the first thing I would do after we got back and did you debrief,

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00:37:16,480 --> 00:37:21,480

once that was all done and we were dismissed, was I did the gym and I'd get on the treadmill

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00:37:21,480 --> 00:37:31,780

and after swearing I'd never run another marathon my life, I went out and did it again and then I found out just how therapeutic it was for me.

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00:37:31,780 --> 00:37:49,840

I can go out, particularly on the trails and just escaped. The bad days aren't bad anymore. Running is it for me. I run 50 miles a week, I've tried to find new ways to push myself.

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00:37:49,840 --> 00:38:07,080

I'm running 100 miles in a single race this weekend. It's a way I can go and I can personally control the volume of what goes on in my head and I love it.

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00:38:07,080 --> 00:38:09,600

And that's helped you get helped you get through everything that..?

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00:38:09,600 --> 00:38:27,940

That's been for me, I can go out by myself and just listen to the trees, talk to the trees, I can go out with a group and just focus on the run and the way it just charges me up.

255

00:38:27,940 --> 00:38:41,500

And good run can completely change my day, even if it's from having a rough day, I can get out there and burn away frustration, I can burn away anger, I can burn away fatigue.

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00:38:41,500 --> 00:38:58,920

Running has become my means to an end for keeping everything in balance. It's been a huge help for me. I don't get any faster as I get older, but at least think I'm getting better looking.

257

00:38:58,920 --> 00:39:05,380

[laughing] Alright, what are some lessons then that you learned from your military experience overall?

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00:39:05,380 --> 00:39:14,840

That the one thing like is every day is a gift. We get 24 hours, but everyday that we can never get back.

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00:39:14,840 --> 00:39:21,520

It's amazing, 24 golden hours and if you don't make the most of those 24 hours, you're missing out.

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00:39:21,520 --> 00:39:25,760

Every day has got to be celebrated for what it is, because you don't know if you're going to get another one.

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00:39:25,760 --> 00:39:36,020

So enjoy the moment and make the most out of it and it's the small things that make it worthwhile.

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00:39:36,020 --> 00:39:48,040

I guess the thing that I took from it more than anything else and the second most powerful is, there's nothing you can't accomplish if you've got a good team with you.

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00:39:48,040 --> 00:39:55,140

If you're focused, if you know where each other's coming from, a good team can make miracles happen.

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00:39:55,140 --> 00:40:00,680

And that's I think, the two lessons that for me strike home the most.

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00:40:00,680 --> 00:40:10,340

Okay, now how is your military service impacted your feeling towards the military in general?

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00:40:10,340 --> 00:40:27,240

I'm very glad I did it. If my kids join the military, I fully support them. I think there's just too many mistakes made by the media in the way they portray us.

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00:40:27,240 --> 00:40:37,360

They're too free to try and categorize the members of the military. I look at military as, it's shaped me

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00:40:37,360 --> 00:40:43,980

and I can look at specific events and see where those events, by themselves, have shaped me.

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00:40:43,980 --> 00:40:53,980

It's a decision that started with a whim to help a friend get a scholarship and 25 years later I have no regrets about anything I did.

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00:40:53,980 --> 00:41:01,920

I got a chance to work with some of America's finest and what could get better than that?

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00:41:01,920 --> 00:41:04,620

Okay. Do you have something you want to add?

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00:41:04,620 --> 00:41:12,700

Yeah, being able to you know, talk to you, because you were a finished office of vice commander at Wright-Patt, correct?

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00:41:12,700 --> 00:41:17,240

That's correct, I was the vice commander for the 88th Airbase Wing at Wright-Patterson when I retired.

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00:41:17,240 --> 00:41:19,240

And you were a... what was your final rank?

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00:41:19,240 --> 00:41:19,820

I was a colonel.

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00:41:19,820 --> 00:41:20,460

Okay.

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00:41:20,460 --> 00:41:22,460

O6.

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00:41:22,460 --> 00:41:35,840

I guess you know, coming from an enlisted standpoint, what would you say -- because we had a lot of officers and what not, especially at Dyess and who...

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00:41:35,840 --> 00:41:45,700

it seemed like they were kind of going with just a speech, like it was kind of like a canned "hey, here's to get you excited". What would you do like,

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00:41:45,700 --> 00:41:55,540

if you really had to tell your guys, not only just to get them pumped up, but really how to succeed in life and succeed in their lives as a whole and a future

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00:41:55,540 --> 00:42:08,340

and with their families. I mean did you have anything that you took pride the fact that you know, you said something and you wanted affect change in everyone's life that you came across,

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00:42:08,340 --> 00:42:15,240

because that's a high position that you were in and very respectable and I'm sure a lot of guys listen to you.

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00:42:15,240 --> 00:42:32,080

One thing I told people -- and it's funny, it's a lesson I still use now, I coach a running club in Kettering -- I tell people trust your training and I've been using that philosophy for ages.

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00:42:32,080 --> 00:42:38,460

Folks, nobody goes out to do a poor job. Not everybody's going to achieve the same level of excellence,

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00:42:38,480 --> 00:42:44,880

but I'll be just as happy watching a person take a bigger step than they've taken before,

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00:42:44,880 --> 00:42:50,120

whether it comes to where they served, were they one of my airmen or whether it was....

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00:42:50,120 --> 00:43:03,720

I think one of the moments that strikes home with me quite a bit, particularly given today's political climate, was when one of my young airmen basically ran to me into my office

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00:43:03,720 --> 00:43:18,940

to tell me he had just become a US citizen. He was from Central America and I don't know the full background, but the day that he got his citizenship was significant enough for him running out of the warehouse,

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00:43:18,940 --> 00:43:30,300

down the hall to tell me "I did it" and it was just one of those things just to be able to celebrate with him, just those little steps.

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00:43:30,300 --> 00:43:42,840

People know when you're feeding them a line and I've tried to always lead from my heart. It's, I mean, there's times and places for the cheerleader to come out.

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00:43:42,840 --> 00:43:51,900

There's times and places to sugar coat it, but the long and short is people know when you're feeding them a line and I figured it was best to just be myself,

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00:43:51,900 --> 00:44:03,880

let them see me being myself. My deputy in North Dakota caught on real quick. You can't embarrass me. You can put a pie in my face, you can hit me in a dunk tank,

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00:44:03,880 --> 00:44:14,120

you can try and prank me, but you're not going to embarrass me, because I'm willing to do that for just because.

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00:44:14,120 --> 00:44:25,000

I your yourself as a leader, if you be yourself and you let people see you comfortable with who you are and if you trust them to do what they've been trained to do

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00:44:25,000 --> 00:44:34,840

and let them learn how to do it, let them not be afraid to make a mistake, if you get them set up that way, they're going to some amazing things for you.

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00:44:34,840 --> 00:44:42,740

It's the strength of a team. If they believe in what they can do as a team they'll make miracles happen.

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00:44:42,740 --> 00:44:52,200

Most people don't need someone giving them direct step A, step B, step C, they can read and follow the directions. They

need someone there who's got their back

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00:44:52,200 --> 00:44:54,740

and that' the way I always tried to lead.

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00:44:54,740 --> 00:45:04,420

That awesome. Okay, is there anything you'd like to leave for future generations who will view or hear this interview?

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00:45:04,420 --> 00:45:16,740

Never underestimate the value of service to your country. It doesn't necessarily have to be military service, be all, we enjoy some amazing freedoms in the United States of America.

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00:45:16,740 --> 00:45:25,760

Find a way to give it back and pay it back. It doesn't take a lot. For military service, it's right for some people, it's not right for others,

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00:45:25,760 --> 00:45:31,360

but if you don't find a way to something for the greater good, on way or the other, you're missing out.

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00:45:31,360 --> 00:45:42,040

You're selling yourself short and you're selling your country short. My message is find what that passion is and give it, find a way to give back.

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00:45:42,040 --> 00:45:47,940

Okay and this there anything else you feel that we haven't discussed or you wanted to elaborate on?

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00:45:47,940 --> 00:45:54,020

No I think we got it. I think you got enough to be able to cover what you need to.

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00:45:54,020 --> 00:45:56,780

[laughing] Alright, well thank you very much and thank you for your service.

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00:45:56,780 --> 00:45:58,840

Not a problem, thank you very much for your service.