

Summary of Oral History Transcript
Student, Citizen, Soldier: Oral History and Student Veterans

Bernardo, Alexander

US Air Force, Senior Airman, Nuclear Weapons Specialist

Interviewer:

Interview conducted by Ms. Sara McDonald, Salem State College, on 11/26/2007

Summary of transcript:

Alexander Bernardo served as a Senior Airman and Nuclear Weapons Specialist in the U.S. Air Force from 1999 to 2005, including stints Lackland, Sheppard, and Kirtland Air Forces Bases. Bernardo was raised in a family that stressed education, but in part due to the influence and positive role model of his stepfather, he entered the Air Force before pursuing a college education. Bernardo recounts some of the life and occupational skills he believes he received from the military. He gives his views on military culture and life after the Air Force, and in particular he paints a picture of what life is like for him at Salem State. Bernardo stresses a number of his political views such as the importance of protecting the individual rights of citizens, but he also encourages listeners to know what is going on in the world in a political, military and social sense. He urges listeners to exercise their rights and vote, and he further urges them to consider mandatory two year military or volunteer service to give back to their country.

Alexander Bernardo
Narrator

Sara McDonald
Salem State College
Interviewer

November 26th, 2007
at Salem State College
Salem, Massachusetts

Sara MacDonald: Okay, my name is Sara MacDonald. I'm a senior and an English major at Salem State College. It's November 26, 2007. I'm joined here today by Alexander Bernardo. He's a junior and an accounting major, and I just wanted to thank you for coming and joining us today.

Alexander Bernardo: You're welcome again (*laughing*). (*A previous interview was lost due to technical problems.*)

SM: All right. Let's start. I am going to start at the beginning again. I see, you know, that you grew up in this area. Tell me a little about your experiences.

AB: You're right. I did grow up in this area. I grew up in Peabody and Lynn. Peabody until I was about in first grade, I moved to Lynn and back to Peabody. I went to Our Lady of the Assumption, and I went to Bishop Fenwick High School. I've always liked New England ever since growing up here. I liked the political climate. I like—not so much the actual climate sometimes, but I like—I like that there is the ocean and so many different things that you can do. It's very nice beautiful here. I really like it.

SM: (*laughing*) I also see that your mother was a high school teacher. Was getting a college education important in your family?

AB: Most certainly. My mom's an alum from Salem. She—that was always pushed from her because it was pushed from her mother. My sister has her degree from Saint Mike's up in Vermont. She's a high school teacher as well at Peabody. That was the—everytime—everytime I saw my grandmother it was, "Make sure you do good in school. Make sure you do good in school. Make sure you do good in school." It was exceptionally important. Even my father who has like a seventh grade education effectively, he immigrated when he was sixteen—He even said it's his biggest mistake was not getting a higher education. So it's always been very, very big in my family to become educated, learn some sort of trade, you know, make something of yourself. It's how it's always been— always been said.

SM: Well, you know education was very important in your family, so what inspired you to join the military?

AB: The—well, like I said I—as a child I always wanted to be in the military. I was always playing with the GI Joes. It was kind of one of those big drives for me. The main reason—two main reasons is, one, my stepfather was a Marine for three years during Vietnam, and he always said, “It is an unbelievable opportunity. You get so much out of it. You know, you should really think about it.” And the other really big reason was because of me being first generation American on my father’s side, second on my mom’s side, it was, you know, you get to see what you come from—and then when you know your family immigrates over here, what this country can do for a family if they are willing to work hard and make something of themselves. All my aunts and uncles have been successful in their lives. My father’s been exceptionally successful. He has his own business. It’s—it really—it’s amazing because I got to see, you know, I’ve been to Portugal a bunch of times. I got to see where my father’s side of the family came from. It’s poverty, and it’s not poverty like we have over here. It’s poor, you know, eating cabbage soup because you can’t afford meat. Those type of things, and there’s no real welfare system over there, so it was, you know, do it on your own or you don’t. Not doing it means you don’t live any more, so it’s seeing what this country has done for people like that. And I’ve seen it hundreds of times with people immigrating here, and it makes me have a strong love for my country, and that is one of the big reasons I joined is because I do love my country a lot, and it’s seeing the example from my stepfather and what it can do for you is really the big reasons that I joined.

SM: Yeah, so your family was very supportive of joining—your joining the military?

AB: Most certainly. My mother was always—when I came home on leave I had to wear my uniform. I had to go to her school and talk to her kids. When she got married, I had to walk her down the aisle in my uniform. When my grandmother died, I had to wear my uniform at her funeral. It was always—I’d come home, and she’s like, “Why aren’t you in your uniform?” I’m like, “Mom, I’m on leave. I don’t have to wear my uniform.” She always wanted me in uniform because she wanted to show me off—effectively that people would see, you know, and she’s just beaming a big smile across her face. When we’d walk through the halls of her school, just, you know, “This is my son. Look what he’s done,” and just exceptionally proud of me. And then wanting to use my experience to help her kids because, you know, I was, yeah, I was a problem kid in high school. I didn’t do any homework, or I didn’t do any work. I was really lazy, you know. Got in trouble a lot, and effectively she wanted me to show some of the kids, maybe that had the same situation that I was in when I was in high school, that you can overcome that and become, you know, a better person—have more drive, you know, more pride in yourself. She even said, “You know, you look like you have gotten taller.” Since I was in the Air Force I wasn’t—I wasn’t taller, I was—I didn’t shrug down as much. I didn’t drag my feet when I walked, and it’s always been a source of pride for everyone in my family. My father—he was always, you know, said that he was very proud that I did that, and it’s kind of hard not to when, you know, you have someone in uniform and you—I always took pride when I put my uniform on. It’s one of those things. I mean it looks good. It makes you different from other people that are walking the street. You walk down the street in uniform; you’re much different from the person walking next to you because you’re in uniform, and it—it almost commands respect and it’s—that makes you proud of doing that. And then when other people around you—your pride is

exuded onto them, and they feel proud because they're with you and that's, you know, my entire family was always thankful that I did that, and always very respectful of it even though if they didn't agree with political reasons that were going on, they were still always very proud that I was in the military.

SM: So you consider the military a part of your educational experience then?

AB: Most certainly. I went through—well, I did get college credits for a lot of it, but basic training is very—not so much—education is mainly Air Force history, but the other things that you learn through that being part of a group of people that if you see pictures of us on our first day there, we're all in civilian clothes. Hair everywhere, and then you see us at graduation marching. It's called the bomb run where you march in front of a general, and we had to carry the flags, and you see everyone you know marching in unison and perfection, and that's—to me that's education that taught all of us how to become a team and work as a group. Then I did my tech school which is my technical training as a nuclear weapons specialist. I had to, you know, learn all of that stuff which is—there's physics in there, and there's a lot, you know, of maintenance things; and then even further upon that is I had to go through Airman Leadership School which is a school you get to when you hit E-4 that teaches you how to be a supervisor. And that is another great thing that I learned through the Air Force—is they teach you how to lead people and how to empower people to do things and be better. And effectively, you know, the whole group is better because each person is better, and that's most certainly an educational benefit, not necessarily a degree education but a life education—is, you know, being—being a strong person, a strong leader.

SM: So even though you said before what you learned during your time in the Air Force wasn't really something that translated to a job here in the civilian world, you do think you picked up education and skills in your time in the Air Force?

AB: Most certainly. The actual job I did didn't translate over very well. I was a nuclear weapons specialist—doesn't really work. There's no one—there's no listings in the newspapers that say a guy that can turn wrenches on a nuke, but a lot of the things I did learn is because I moved in that job. You have different areas that you can work in. You can work in, you know, munitions support which is all basically where you issue tools and do all the inspection of tools and everything. And then you have maintenance—the guys who are actually doing the work. (*belches*) Excuse me. Then you have control which I worked in for a while. Munitions control which is like a communications hub where any emergencies—you run all the checklist, you're in control of where people are going, things like that. And then I switched over to munitions operations which is more of accountability and—accountability and planning is the real big thing that they do, and that—that right there is helping me more because well effectively I can put on my resume that I dealt with the accountability of four billion dollars worth of assets for the Department of Defense—The Department of Energy which is completely and wholly true. That's what we did. And it's—and the thing with that really confers to accounting is the accuracy and perfection that you have to have. You can't make mistakes which is the big thing in my career field—is they always say, "We're not working on sandbags here, people," and it's true. You know, you're working with something that's very delicate and very important. You have to have perfection because if you don't, mistakes get made, and it happened in the news a

couple weeks ago. Things go very wrong, and people get fired, and you can go to jail for a lot of different things. If you are very negligent on things, you can go to jail for it because what you're dealing with is so important. So it's—that was exceptionally, you know, important for me to confer to the business world which I didn't think it would. I honestly didn't, and now that I look back on it, I'm like, "Wow, I did accountability. I did accountability. I did accountability." Now I'm in accounting. Now granted it was nuts and bolts and assets and things, but it confers to dollars, too. It's the same thing.

SM: That's interesting. So why did you choose the Air Force?

AB: Better life, in all honesty. My stepfather always said, "Al, pick the Air Force. It's—you guys have a much better life than we have—the Air Force's budget is much bigger. We live better; we eat better. Everything about it—you get more benefits. You're not getting deployed all the time. I was never deployed once in the six years I was in. I went temporary duty once for a week to Kansas City to go to a meeting. I mean, it's a much more stable life that you lead. I mean depending on the job, especially the job that I picked, we don't get deployed. The only time you get deployed is if you ask, "Can I get deployed?" And you go and doing something else that isn't your job, but there's just a much better life. More professional as opposed to, you know, grunt is the reason I picked it. And it's, you know, my—my godfather he was—he was Air Force. He didn't really talk about it as much, but it was mainly the pushing of my stepfather so to speak. He said, "You know, you're too smart to be a grunt. Go do something that you can use your brain with, so there I was (*both laugh*).

SM: So do you think the—the push for education in your family sort of also inspired your choice in the Air Force or, you know, that was important making higher standards?

AB: I never really equated it to that. I never really thought of that—that aspect of it, because it's kind of, yeah, I did take classes while I was in and everything. I think it would have to be more of the part of being smarter. You know, having someone say you're smarter than that. Go do something that is going to use that ability, as opposed to I can shoot good, but I'm better at working with my brain than, you know, shooting so—do something like that. I think that conferred more, plus—it's an ego thing. I get to say, "I have to be smarter to be in the Air Force," so I get to make fun of the Army guys a lot more.

SM: There you go. Even before and during your time in the service did you always know that you wanted to go to college and get a degree?

AB: Most certainly. My entire life it was—it was kind of touch and go there for a while. When I first joined the service, I didn't take class for like the first two years I was in. But then seeing all the educational opportunities, you know—I didn't have to pay for it. It's free. Why am I going to, you know—and it's so important to my family. If I'm not going to stay in the service, you know, it's—I have a lot of friends of mine that say, "You know, you can make money without having a degree," and I said, "Yeah, most certainly you can. You can make a lot of money." Most of the richest people in the world didn't get a degree, but it's a lot easier. It's that whole foot in the door thing, you know. You have your degree. People looking at resumes, "Oh,

you don't have a degree? Throw it in the trash." It is just a piece of paper, but it's a piece of paper that is a qualifying aspect of getting a job, so that's fairly important.

SM: So what made you decide to go to TVI while you were out in the Southwest?

AB: I had two options. It was either there or University of New Mexico. University of New Mexico didn't really cater to working students as much as TVI did. I would have liked to go to UNM a lot more; it's a little bit more prestigious than a community college, but you can get an education anywhere if you're interested in learning. You're going to get a good education no matter where you go. It just catered well to working and going to school. UNM—you'd have to take day classes, and I have to, you know, try and see if I could get my schedule rearranged. And if something happened, you know, and my schedule had to switch back—well, you're out of luck, tough. Get out of your classes basically, so it's being able to have that flexibility. Taking night classes, weekend classes, they worked out a lot better.

SM: Yeah. Well, it seems like quite a lot, you know, to serve in the Air Force, and work, and go to school. How were you able to balance all that?

AB: Just really do it. Kind of like I said earlier (*both laughing*).

SM: I know. We already went over this.

AB: It's—I always like to talk about, you know, my stepfather was very, very supportive of me. More so than almost anybody when I was in basic. You know everybody wrote me letters, and it was like, "Hey, you know I hope you're doing well," but he was the one that really almost every other—every couple days I was getting mail from him. Sending me pictures of the house, or pictures of the pets and everything, and, you know, saying, "You know we're all proud of you. You're doing really well." And the biggest thing he ever really said to me was—he said, "It's just like the Nike commercial. Just Do It!" And that kind of really stuck with me. That if I want to do something, I need to work for it. Like I said, my father's an immigrant with no education, and has, you know, a fairly successful business. He didn't get that way because he had a lot of education because he didn't. He got it from hard work, and that's, you know, even going—looking at my mom you know—she was a single mother working being a teacher with two kids. How did she do that? She just did it. She worked at it and did it. And it's hard, but life's hard. It ain't easy. If you want something, you work, and you get it, and you strive to accomplish what you need to accomplish. You set your goal. This is my goal. This is what I need to do to get to this goal, and then you execute and do it, and that's how you do anything.

SM: So is family support really important for getting you where you are right now?

AB: Most certainly. My dad and my stepmom have been really, really helpful with that. They work around my school schedule for my work schedule. I'm like, you know, "I've got to do this. I can't come to work today." "Okay." Every time I sign up for my classes, I say you know this is the next semester, and this is what I'm doing. This is when my classes are, and I can only work these times, and they do that. They work around that. My mom has always been supportive of anything I've done in my entire life. My sister—I ask her, you know, "Can you

look over this paper?”— for she is an English teacher—“Look over this paper for me?” My entire family’s always been supportive of anything I’ve every done, and it’s always been very, very important to me that they’re there saying, you know—I don’t like to fuel my ego but, “You’re doing a good job. Keep doing it.” That’s always exceptionally important because everyone has that, you know, desire to be recognized for things that they have accomplished. Everyone wants that. Everyone wants to say, “Wow. You’ve done a good job on that,” and that’s important because if you don’t know that you’re doing a good job sometimes, you’re just like, “Ah, why am I doing this,” and that’s exceptionally important.

SM: All right. I believe your service ended in 2005. What led you back to New England and Salem State?

AB: The quick and dry version is my girlfriend wanted to go to school. She wanted to get her PhD, and she wanted to go somewhere other than UNM. That’s where she got her undergrad. So she was looking at the University of California out in Monterey, and I said, “Why don’t you look at Massachusetts cause if you go to California, I can’t go.” I’m like, “I have a job here. I have a lot of bills. I need to pay my bills, and I can’t just go blindly somewhere hoping there’s a job out there that’s going to be able to pay for what I need to do.” So I said, “Look at Massachusetts. We have unbelievable schools.” Which we do, and she’s smart. I’m like, “You can get into whatever school you want to get in to.” I’m like, “Why don’t we go look up there, and you can look at schools. I have a job right when I get home. We have a place to live. We don’t have to worry about finding an apartment while we’re living somewhere else, and then we can get our feet on the ground, and then get an apartment, you know, figure out what we need to do.” And it just worked out a lot better.

SM: Yeah.

AB: I always had that goal to move back here, but that just really expedited that goal.

(break in tape)

AB: I have to burp again.

SM: I have to count now. Okay, get it out.

AB: (*belch*) Excuse me. Damn soda, I hope that wasn’t loud or anything.

SM: Okay, are we ready? Okay, let’s see. I know we talked about this before, but in the book that we read in class, *The US Military Profession in the 21st Century*, the authors talked about a military culture. What does that word mean to you, and do you feel like you were a part of a military culture?

AB: Not any more. I was obviously. I’m not in the military anymore. I don’t really have—I talk to my friends who are still in there and everything, but it’s really, you know, a time constraint that I don’t really—It’s part of my life that I’ve moved on from. Military culture is—I see it as like a family-type culture, you know. That’s what it really means to me. You have

people—you have guys that get deployed for ridiculous amounts of time, getting extended over there, 18 months in a country which is—you know, that’s preposterous to me. But I couldn’t imagine being married, having children, and then getting deployed, and being over there—missing the birth of your child—things like that. And the family culture of it is that everyone supports each other. This guy deployed, so everyone else pitches in to help out the wife or even the husband a lot of times: to do things around the house, get things done, help them out. That is really important; it’s a real family-like culture, and you even have that with inner—inner service rivalry, you know, people I always make fun of, Army guys and Marines. You saw that at the meeting that we had. It’s one of those things—that’s like your brother, and you’re going to pick on each other as much as humanly possible, but then when someone from the outside comes in and says something, you know, you guys are brother and sister, obviously they’re in the wrong. And it’s a real—it’s a real family-like culture. You have—it’s just like your family, you have people that you get along with that you love to hang out with, you have other people that you can’t stand, but yet they’re still your blood; they’re still your family. You know you’re going to help defend them because they are your family, and I think that’s really a real big important part of the military—is that you have that, you know, that whole culture of togetherness, and it’s called esprit de corps, “spirit of the core”. You have this teamwork mentality that, you know, even if you don’t get along with someone, you’re going to do something. You’re going to work with them to get this mission done or whatever you’re getting done because you have to, and that’s exceptionally important for the success that the military has.

SM: So even though this was a—a family culture, which you know you said was something really important to you was family. I know you mentioned that you thought it would be very difficult just now to go, you know, be away from your family, your wife and children and all that. So was the military culture something you feel like you would not have wanted to be a part of your whole life?

AB: What do you mean?

SM: Just something like, you know, you were in it for a while, but you mentioned that you thought it was—you thought it would be very difficult to leave your wife and kids and be involved in the military for your whole life?

JB: Most certainly, I even went through that—I went through a lot of home sickness after I left. I was really, you know, real close to my family. My mom is always very supportive of me, the whole family. I leave at nineteen years old and move halfway across the country, or actually almost all the way across the country, and what ends up happening is I went through it real bad. Like the holidays especially if you’re not home are real difficult. They were for me. Especially Thanksgiving was a rough one. I never went home for Thanksgiving; that was always really tough. I was always around my family on Thanksgiving. It’s something that’s real hard, but you have to get through it. What are you going to do? You’re not going to leave and go home. You don’t have that option, so you—it’s really something that you have to really work at a lot of times, you know, not being able to hang out with your family. I missed—there is actually a picture from—I think it was from Easter. I’m not sure, but it’s my grandmother, my two cousins, and my sister, and then they have a little stick with a thing on it that says, “Insert Alex here”, and they’re holding it up in the picture. That’s comical I thought. It was hilarious, you

know, that really showed that it's—it's really tough. You know, they even suffer. Obviously they don't want me around all the time that would just be hellacious on them, but showing that—that separation from your family is really difficult, and I couldn't imagine if it was, you know, my wife and kids that I had to be away from that long. I mean, that's something that's really important to people. That's, I guarantee, that's really rough on them to deal with. It could be one of the other reasons I decided to leave the service. I knew I wasn't going to stay. I wasn't going to be in my entire life. I wasn't going to retire out of it, but it was—I always wanted to move back towards my family. I'm thinking about moving away again, and now, who knows, there may be something to it or there may not be. I don't know.

SM: That's how it is with family, “You can't live with them; you can't live without them.” (*both laugh*)

AB: Most certainly.

SM: So you don't really feel that you're part of a military culture anymore since you've left the service?

AB: Not at all. I've, you know, like I said I talk to my friends, and they're still in, but other than that it's kind of—I have those traits that have stuck with me. There's that drive and things like that. I—I still talk about, you know, “my squadron” that I was in as “my squadron”. Actually someone pointed it out to me—said, “My squadron?” I said, “Hey, you know.” “You're not in the 898th anymore.” I said, “Yeah, I know, but it's tough to break a habit like that.” You go six years saying my squadron this, or this, that, the other something you belong to; and then you sever that tie, you know, like—“Is this still part of my life?” But it's not one of those things that I've carried along with me basically.

SM: Yeah. Are there any remnants—I know you were just talking about how you still refer to it as “my squad—squadron.” Is there any more remnants of your military culture in life that stick with you today?

AB: Um, I refer back to it a lot especially in political discussions. That's always a trumping card when you can say, “Well, you've never been in the military, so you don't know.” (*both laugh*) It's always been one of those things you can say to people. I—I think it, you know, important to have and keep those aspects of your life, you know—the drive, the motivation, the—as my sister would say, my video gaming skills. I played a lot of video games when I was in. I worked overnights in a shop, and there's nothing to do during overnights, so we played a lot of video games; but there's a lot of those things. There's—it's more of an outlook thing than anything. The way you perceive things, and you perceive—especially political action and things like that as being someone that was in the service and having been on the receiving end of a lot of things that have happened. The biggest thing I took with me is—because I'm a disabled vet, I still, you know, I go through the VA, and all my health care is through the VA. All my school is paid for through the VA and everything, and that's kind of—so I keep that part of those aspects with me when I go to the VA, and I talk to the old guys and everything. You always have that connection with somebody, so I guess you can say that you always carry that. If someone was in the military, you're going to talk about it, and when it comes up in conversation with anyone. So

you—you still keep those aspects, but it's not something that's, you know, overtly strong in you. You know, people hardly ever guess that I've been in the military. One, because I look young, and two, I'm not very rigid. I guess a lot of people will picture that someone in the military—they're very staunch and rigid, and I'm not like that.

SM: So you feel as if there is a military stereotype?

AB: Oh, most certainly there is.

SM: It was around?

AB: My stepfather fits it perfectly. He was a Marine. He's very—everything has to be in its order. Everything is, you know, this way, that way, very structured; but there is that stereotype that everyone—you see it a lot of times with people that haven't been around it, you know, and because of everything that happened in Iraq, you have a lot more people that are anti military. And you—it perpetuates a stereotype. “Oh, they're a bunch of grunts, a bunch of baby killers”—this, that, and the other, and they're like everybody else. People are going to be people, you know. You go through that time, and you're in basic, and everything is very structured and in order; but when you leave that, you regain a lot of your old personality back. It takes a little while to come out of you, but you regain a lot of your personality. That's who you always were, so we're all people. It's an incorrect stereotype. Sometimes it's not. Some people are very—they fill it perfectly, but it is—it is there. I've seen it. I've not been called a baby killer before, I mean, but, you know, it's something in existence. People really perpetuate it a lot of the time, and it's usually a negative light which is—but there's also, I mean, a lot of people who portray us in a positive light, so it still kind of balances out, I guess.

SM: Since we're on that topic, do you feel like being in college, you know, which can be a political institution sometimes. Have you ever faced during your time as a student, any stereotypes against or for you and the military?

AB: Not really, no. Like I said earlier that Salem State is pretty politically apathetic with things. I've had a couple of teachers that were—it was more of—it wasn't a military thing. It was a political outlook thing because I'm very moderate, and she was exceptionally liberal, and out of whatever—you have your beliefs, and I have mine. Everyone was happy, but when you're in the role as an educator, you should portray both sides of the story, and then have students decide which side that they like best—that fits them the best. At the age that people are in college is very impressionable. It's when you start to form a lot of your—your views and your outlooks on life, especially your political views, because when you're younger it doesn't really matter, you know. You get a little bit older, you start, you know—you can vote now even though most of us don't. You—you develop a lot of those views of what you think is right or wrong. You have a lot influence from your family, but a lot of it is external. Especially in an educational role, I think teachers should portray both sides of the story, and then say, “Well, whichever you think is right is right.” It wasn't like that in that class, and I felt like I was, you know, the harbinger of conservatism because I had to continue to say, “But listen, there's another side to this, and this is the other side. This can be right, too. Just because you believe in this doesn't mean that it's the

correct way.” You shouldn’t be teaching people that it is the correct way because it may not be. You know, it’s—that’s the story of my life, being moderate. When you’re around conservatives, you look liberal. When you’re around liberals, you look conservative, so it’s a lose, lose.

SM: So do you feel like your experiences and time in the Air Force has influenced your beliefs and how you approach your education?

AB: Most certainly. I approach my education much more seriously. I’m very—I work on it a lot. It’s something that I do because I’ve been past that part of my life—of, you know, partying and—My younger years when I turned 21, I was in the military. I went out, did all my drinking and partying then. Now I’m older, you know, and I have these views of determination and accomplishing goals. I have them now, so I convey that on my education because it’s important. It’s something that I want, you know, and I want good grades, and it’s—you set that goal, and you achieve it. And that’s one of the big things of military culture and military education—is that you have goals. You set that goal. Then you look at what you need to do to accomplish that goal, and then you execute and do it. That’s exceptionally important in school, I think. You have a goal of “I want this grade.” What do I have to do to get this grade? Where am I at in this class? Set that goal, do it and get it, and that’s very important.

SM: Definitely. You were mentioning something about class discussions earlier. Do you feel that you have ever used your experience in the Air Force in class discussions—and used it?

AB: Most certainly. I took a management class, and that was very big in that class because it’s, you know, the military is one way—or one type of management—the way they lead which is completely opposite of the way people think they do it. They’re actually big on empowerment and fostering people to have—to get them to be better at what they are. It’s not just do this because I said so. They actually teach you. Obviously, you have to tell someone what to do, but a lot of times you have to help them understand sometimes. Sometimes you don’t have time for that. You have to just say do it and get it done, and then you can explain later, but they—actually it’s very, very changed from what people really think it is. It’s just order this, order that, and it’s not. It’s the way they teach you to be a leader is very empowering—or to empower you’re, you know, subordinates and say, “Listen, you’re good at this, you know, work at this. You’re bad at this.” They always teach the cheeseburger method, two good things with a bad thing in the middle. When you have to tell someone that they did something wrong, which you wouldn’t think about that in the military, usually you would this—it’s just berating you on what you did wrong. “You’re an idiot, you suck, get out.” It’s not. It’s, “Well, you’re good at this. You need to work on this, and you’re also good at this,” and that’s very—and that really conferred a lot to my classes being, you know, in business that management classes, things like that. And you—there’s always been little anecdotes I think that I’ve—I tell in classes because I’ve gone through certain things that have really conferred, and I like to hear the sound of my own voice, so it ends up working out very well (*AB laughs*).

SM: Yeah, I can imagine. And what about the student culture? I know, you know, we all know, stereotypes about typical college students. Do you feel like you’re a part of the student culture at all?

AB: Not at all, not in the least. I come here, do my classes, go home. That's—that's what I have time for. I have my own, you know, friends and family that I hang out with. That's—there's no—I have no desire to be part of that because I don't have the time to be. Would I like to be? Yeah, sure I'd like to be more involved with tutoring, and I had a couple professors ask me to tutor, and then I had the accounting association—sure, I'd like to participate more in that, but I don't have time for it; so it stinks, but that's what you have to do.

SM: Yeah. Well, it's difficult being an older student. Do people—how do people approach you or treat you when they learn that you've been in the military here on campus, professors and students?

AB: No real difference in all honesty. I guess I don't really perceive any difference than, "Oh, awesome. Thanks." I've had people, you know, I've had a couple professors say thanks and not much else from that. It's not really a big topic of discussion. They just say, "Oh really, yeah, cool. What did you do—this, that, the other." They usually have questions about what you did, and things like that. It's not anything—I've never had a negative or—I've had positive; I've never really had a negative experience with it. It's just I'm another student. I think it—I think they notice more that I'm an older student than I—that I was military because I, yeah, I take school seriously, and I think that's what they notice more.

SM: Yeah. So you feel that right now your role, I guess, as an older student is more powerful than the fact that you were in the military?

AB: I think so.

SM: On campus?

AB: I really do. I mean, maybe if I was younger, and I still had the same values, it might be more important that I was military, and they'd see it as that. But I think it's more perceived that I'm an older student, so I take things more seriously. I think that's—that actually comes out more.

SM: Have you ever run into any experiences in school where, you know, the things taught in school clash with what you have experienced or learned during your time in the Air Force?

AB: I didn't really—I guess if I took history more it—I would run into that a little bit more, but I only took one history class. It was World Civ 2, so it wasn't as, you know, fairly old history, more current history. If I—if I experienced current history a little bit more that might clash a little bit from what I know. Everything's been fairly business oriented that I've taken for classes, so I've had things clash in the way I believe business is and should be done, and what is taught and how it actually is. But nothing basically, you know, towards the military. I've had a couple of teachers that it was—like I said earlier—that whole one sided thing, and that I didn't really like, and some of it touched closer to military stuff, but it never really got on to military aspects which I guess is kind of a good thing. I wouldn't want to be in that class where someone was teaching one-sidedly, negatively toward the military. That would turn into a problem. I'm very outspoken about things that I believe are right, and one of—something like that I've—you can

only hold your tongue on certain things, but I don't really appreciate people talking negatively about the military because you know people in the military sacrifice a lot for people here. And someone speaking negatively about that, especially in an educational aspect, would be a very big problem to me; but, luckily, I've never had to deal with it so— (*AB laughs*)

SM: That's good. How exactly has your time in the Air Force influenced your beliefs or, you know, your behaviors?

AB: Kind of has; it kind of hasn't. I think it—I was really moderate even before I joined the military with beliefs and things I had. I think being in the military may have pushed me a little more conservative on a few things. Not even socially, though, economically I got pushed a little more conservatively, but I've always had a real, you know—the same outlook socially and for the most part since I went through the military. There was a few things that actually changed which is actually the opposite of what you'd think you'd change. Before I joined the military, one example would be people burning the flag. My entire life I was exceptionally against that even when I was in the military. I actually changed my opinion on it halfway—when I was getting out of the military. I've always been against that. I think it's absolutely ludicrous, but what—what I ended up realizing is that I'm very big on the Constitution and the freedoms that we've been provided. I think that's exceptionally important. That's one of the reasons I joined the military because I love what we have in this country. And I always thought my outlook on it was, you know, you burn the flag, you're burning what it represents, and that would be your Bill of Rights, so how can you protest, and say I'm protesting this, but I'm burning my right to do so. And I think it's exceptionally disrespectful. I still think it's exceptionally disrespectful, and I don't think people should do it. But I always thought about it that there should be amendment saying that it was illegal to burn the flag, and I've actually wholly reversed that; and I said I think people should be able to do it. Do I think it's wrong? Most certainly I do. I think it's disrespectful; of course, it is. It's vile in my opinion, but I think people need to have that right. If that's the only way they can get the attention that they need when they're protesting, then they should have that right because I think it's an exceptionally important right that we have—is speech and protest. And for me to say that, you know, I looked at in one aspect of, you know—Well, what if someone burns something else that wasn't that important to me? Would I still be mad and say they shouldn't do that? Like if someone wanted to burn a bible, and people said, “Oh, no, there should be a law against that.” Would I agree with that law? And after looking at that and saying no, I wouldn't agree with them doing that, then logically I can't say that there should be a law against burning that either. So that is—the military kind of changed me a little more liberally in that way which is kind of weird. Usually you would think it would make you more conservative, but I guess it depends on the person, the influences, and the experiences that you have while you're there.

SM: That's really interesting. Do you feel that since you're a college student, and you've had experience in the military—I know you haven't taken many history courses or maybe political courses, but do you feel that the average college student is well educated in military history or current events?

AB: No. I think that's a fault of their own (*AB laughs*). Not the fault of the—of the, you know, the academic schedule. I think people just don't—people don't care. You know, it's especially

at the age that they're at, you know, they could really care less about political climate or things of that nature. Yeah, I can't really speak to taking history classes or anything, and how it—how it's taught there, and how much is taught there. I think it's important to teach military history and what the military has done for us, but I've never had to experience that side, so I don't really know. I think it's more of a fault of kids on their own not really caring about it. I don't think it's anything that has to do with the academic side of it.

SM: In your opinion, do you think it's important for college students to be more educated about what's going on in foreign affairs and military actions whether it be war or whatever's going on?

JB: I think it's more important for anybody to be. You know, there's a lot of—right now is a really interesting time in US history, and I think it's important for everyone to know. I think there's a lot of bad things that are happening not, you know, militaristically, but socially in our country, and I think people need to realize what's happening. We're going through a phase in history where, in my opinion, our freedoms are being eroded, and I think a lot of people just don't care. And I think there's a lot of things that have taken place that, you know, show that trend—that slowly but surely all of our freedoms are getting whittled away. It's something that people take for granted. I think it—everyone, not just college students, I think, more so in college you should be exposed to things like that, and I think professors should push more current event type things; but I think that it's really important for everyone not just students.

SM: Yeah, I agree. So if you had to chance to set the record straight for Americans, and you got to go on TV and everything (*laughter*), and you had that opportunity—very exciting, and you had a chance to talk to them about your experience in the US military, and if everyone had to listen to you, what would you want to say to Americans right now?

AB: Based on?

SM: Based on your experiences—even as a college student and being in the Air Force.

AB: You know, I think it's—what I'd want people to know is to really take a look at what is going on in your country. You know, look at your politicians, look at the system that we have, decide if you're happy with it, decide if there needs to be changes made, and do something. Become more active, vote. I mean that's the big thing. People don't get out and vote. With all the problems that we have—if you complain about what's going on, and you don't vote, I mean that's the choice that you have. The politicians we have are our own fault. They spend too much money and don't tax us—they keep taxes low but keep spending more money. That's our own fault. We put these people in office. If you really, really think that there's a problem, you know, look into it, become more educated about what's going on in your country. There's things that happen all the time in the Supreme Court and everything, and no one knows, and no one cares, and it's an exceptionally important part of your life. It affects—it affects you every single day, and it should be something you know about. I mean—you can walk through life being apathetic and just, you know, cursing, “Oh, the damn government.” You don't even know why it's happening. You just know it's bad for you. Read, do something, watch the news, you know, figure out what's going on, and why you dislike it, and what you can do to change certain things. It's kind of important.

SM: Yeah, definitely. I could not agree more. So were you always this politically active and aware, or was this something that you learned?

AB: It's coming more as I get older and things like that. I've always been argumentative, and politics is one of those things that you can argue with anyone with. So, no, as I got older, probably in the past five years, I'm becoming more and more aware of what's going on. Just certain things that I've—that I've realized that are important to me. For us to have as a country what I think that we should have and the way things should be. Which is, you know, everyone has their opinion on what way things should go, and just more as I, you know, get older, I look at what's going to happen when I have to get a job. Certain things that I think that people should have, you know, freedoms that we should have—directions the country has taken to make us more powerful. I want a stronger United States. Like I said, I love this country. I want us to be a good nation. I want, you know—want people to like to be here. I want people to be more, you know, aware of what has been given to them by living in this country, and there's been steps taken that degrade from that. We've been cutting money for education and research which are like two of the three things that make this country exceptionally powerful, and people don't realize that's going to have a direct effect on our economy. People complain that the economy's getting bad. Well, your elected officials are taking money away from things that make us powerful. I mean that's pretty much the only reason we are as powerful as we are is because we have smarter people. We—there is more money for education. Research is one of the top things that makes us exceptionally powerful and wealthy; and if you cut that, you lose money. So I've just noticed those things as I've been getting older. That certain things have to happen for the way I would like to see my country become better. And it's one of those selfish things, I guess, but because it's my—it's only my opinion of what I think should be better, but it's just things that I've noticed that I think would make us better.

SM: Did your experience in the Air Force help you at all in getting more active politically, or did it inspire you?

AB: I guess I could be a politician now that I've been in the military (*laughter*). I'm not going to be, but it really did because I think there's a lot of, you know, you talk about it a lot. Especially after September 11th, after we decided to go to war, we—it's what we talked about all the time. We talked about what you thought was right, what you think we should do, and you have—you have in the military—you have people from all over. You have them from every corner of the country, so you get different views from everywhere, and it's something that you talk about a lot. Especially, obviously after September 11th, that's what everyone talked about—with being in the military. If you're in Massachusetts, you talk to people from Massachusetts. I was talking to people from Texas, Georgia, Washington, California, Iowa, everywhere across the entire country; and you get to see, and it's important to how people develop is where they grew up. I mean there's different political climates in different areas of the country, and that's going to perpetuate their own beliefs, so you get to see a different aspect, and you get to experience a lot more of what people's opinions are. And it, you know, may have you change what you think because you see, "Well, I didn't see it from that side."

SM: So, you know, where you are now is somebody who's been in the service, and you've left, and you've gone to school. Would you recommend for students who are thinking about, you know—what do I want to do? Do I want to go to college? What do I want to do with my life? Do you—would you recommend military as a positive educational experience?

AB: I believe in two years mandatory military service after high school, so I think yes. I think that's—doesn't have to be military. I think two years mandatory civil service to your country after you graduate high school because too many people don't appreciate what they have here. I think that's important to foster that, and I think a way to do that is, you know, after you get out of high school, you do two years and you can be doing whatever, but as long as it is helping your country. I'd say military because the military does a lot to help the county, but other organizations obviously do it. Two years working with relief foundations and things like that. After Katrina hit what if we had thousands of kids right out of high school, and they go down there, and help rebuild. I think it would have happened a lot quicker. I think that gives you a better outlook on your country and more appreciation for what you have, and that there are still people in this country who don't have as much as you do. Especially, you know, growing up here on the North Shore, we're pretty lucky. We're a pretty wealthy area of the country, and people don't get to see a lot of the poverty and the bad areas of cities living—if you just stay around here, and if you don't experience that, you don't—you think it doesn't exist. It's kind of one of those things you can push to the back of your head, and I think if people were mandated that they had to help their own country, I think they'd be a lot more appreciative of that. That or it could foster resentment because you had to go and do something, but I think it's important. And I do think people joining the military is important. I think it's a good, unbelievable opportunity, you know. I don't think you can get it anywhere else, but there's also people that wouldn't fit well in the military. It's for some people, certainly not for other people. You know, it's one of those things. Your job in the military is to kill people and break their stuff. No matter what job you do- you can be a cook, you can hand out towels at the gym- you're still aiding in a war machine, and that's what the military is, and some people don't want to do that. I don't think they should have to do that, particularly, but I think that they should have to do something for their country.

SM: How do you feel about that? You're just saying, you know, a major goal of the military basically is to break stuff, or, you know, eventually be involved in conflict. How do you feel about that? Being a part of that?

AB: That's what it is. It is what it is. It's—the military's job, like I said, is to kill people and break their stuff, and whether you're actively doing that, or you are using the threat of that, which is a big goal of the US is to pose a threat. That if you—you know want to harm the US, we have this gigantic war machine that effectively will stop most any country in the world. I have no problem being with that. I've come to the realization that there are people in there—there are countries in this world that the only way to get through to them and to stop what they are doing is through violence. And it's sad, you know; it would be a great world if we didn't need guns and everybody got along, but it's not going to happen. If there are people that want to impose their will on your way of life, sometimes violence must be used. And that's—it stinks, but you have to. It's one of those things you can't get around.

SM: How do you think your experience in the Air Force and your education will shape your future?

AB: Hopefully, I'll make more money (*laughs*). Hope that's the right answer you're looking for (*laughter*). It already has shaped my future, in all honesty, because it's driving me to succeed more, and it's not just because of the military. You have to take it from the military. It's not just going to give it to you. You have to want, you know, to change your life in that direction, and you have to really think it's important to do what you want to do and what you want to succeed in, and it just gives you the tools to do so. And you can take those tools and leave them on the ground, or you can pick them and go and do something with your life. So it already has affected my life. It already has shaped my future because now I'm in school. I'll graduate in about a year in a field that's, you know, prospering right now. And I mean, obviously, the goal of going to school is to make more money. I mean unless you want to be a teacher, but then your goal is not to make more money, it is to educate other people. It—it's a tough life. I've seen too much of it.

SM: So why did you agree to be interviewed today?

AB: I thought it was a good project in all honesty. I don't think people in the military are shown—they're shown in a positive light all the time. You see it on the news and things like that. But they're not—it's not a—it's not active in how they feel, and I was hoping that it would show that while there is a military, and you have that conglomerate of what they all believe, and that generic "this is how the military feels," you also have individuals. It's the big thing they push, teamwork, teamwork, teamwork; but there are individuals in there, and they're all different. I can guarantee you my interview is going to be different from the guy that went before me and the guy that went after me. His interview's going to be different, too. He's going to have different answers because we all—we all had come from different backgrounds and different experiences. And we took those, and the military changed it a little bit, but, you know, you still have that. It's a wider view than people realize. They're very narrowed in on the military, and it's actually very wide in that, you know, that there's a lot of different people that come and go through the military. And I think it's important to realize that because they get lumped into, you know, Uncle Sam's big green killing machine. It's not the way it is. There's a lot of different people with a lot of different views.

SM: Well, that's very interesting. Thank you so much for coming to this interview.

AB: Not a problem.

SM: It's been great the second time around.

AB: Yes, the second time.

SM: This has been better than the first. I've enjoyed both. Thank you so much. Are we done? Can we wrap up?