

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

Morales, Guillermo

U.S. Marine Corps, Sergeant

Interviewer:

Interview conducted by Ms. Dawn Allen Carlson, Salem State University, on 12/05/2013

Summary of transcript:

Guillermo Morales left his homeland of El Salvador at age fifteen and came to live with his mother in Revere, MA. He speaks about his reasons for joining the military of his adopted country, and how he chose to deal with being an El Salvadoran in the U.S. Marines Corps. Guillermo explains why he changed MOSs, and how he felt about his various posts at Quantico Marine Base in Virginia and Okinawa, Japan, as well as his deployments to Iraq and Afghanistan. His interview recounts an American dream of upward mobility, military discipline, and transition to civilian life.

Guillermo Morales

Narrator

Dawn Allen Carlson

Salem State University

Interviewer

December 5th, 2013

at Salem State University

Salem, Massachusetts

Dawn Allen Carlson: Hello. My name is Dawn Allen Carlson. Today is December 5, 2013. I am joined today with Guillermo Morales who was a former sergeant in the Marine Corps, and I want to thank you right away for joining in with the Student, Citizen, Soldier interviews. So, we'll get started here. Can you describe a bit about growing up in El Salvador and in the United States— what the differences were?

Guillermo Morales: Well, actually growing up in El Salvador was a bit of an interesting time in my life. I was born in '86, and from what my family tells me, there was a civil war going on, so it was very rough times. My mother decided to pursue the American dream just like everybody else, so in 1994, I believe, she managed to get to the United States. By which means I have no idea because I dare not ask. So by that time I was living with my grandmother and my very large family of fifteen members in a single household. So you can definitely tell it was very hectic. It was mostly my grandmother, my grandfather, my aunts and uncles that I was raised with—or by, rather. By the age of fifteen, my mother was able to push the paperwork through to get me into the United States. I flew in July 11, 2001 which was a very interesting day in itself because it was my very first time flying. It was very thrilling, very exciting, and when I got here it was a whole new world. Now at the time I wasn't sure what the American dream was, so I didn't really chase that. Instead I chased a little bit of schooling, and I decided I should be learning the language so I could better communicate. My mother put me through school, so I went to Revere High School in 2001 in ninth grade; and then I got a job at age sixteen, and it took me about

eight months to learn English. It was one of those challenges that I overcame with a little bit of difficulty. And I graduated in 2005 when I decided to join the Marine Corps.

DA-C: Okay. And you mentioned that your mom came up to pursue the American dream, but you don't have anything more about that? Like did she have something specific why she came? Just the American Dream?

GM: I don't think she was even sure about what the American dream really was. All she said was the American dream. I'm assuming to her it was a better job, better opportunities to actually grow. I'm not sure if she got all that, so—

DA-C: Okay. How old were you when you came up?

GM: I was fifteen.

DA-C: You were fifteen. Okay. What makes a person born in El Salvador join—want to join the US military?

GM: Plenty of reasons, actually. From—If you look at the immigration side, then you will figure they want citizenship, and that is one of the ways to get it. Yes, it is true; however, that was not my main motive. The reason why I joined personally was because I felt the duty to repay my dues to a country that gave me all the opportunities and accepted me as one of their own, so the best way to do that was to join the military. That was my number one. Number two, I didn't think at the time that I was going to college just like every other kid that joins right out of high school. So I figured, "Why not?" Go into the military, serve a country, apply for citizenship, get a really good education—not really education, more like training, and be something—part of something larger than myself.

DA-C: Right.

GM: So those were my reasons—

DA-C: Did you plan to make the military a full career or just a steppingstone to—

GM: At the beginning it was just a steppingstone. After being in for four years I looked at my options based on the job I was doing well in the military, and I realized that it wasn't enough to come out and be a better part of society as a whole—to be actually beneficial and to actually contribute rather than take away. I decided to reenlist for another four years and change my job to something a little more meaningful.

DA-C: Change your MOS?

GM: Yes.

DA-C: Okay. What was the reaction from your family and friends when you mentioned joining the military or maybe specifically the Marines? Did you know you were going to join the Marines right away?

GM: No. The Marines was kind of a hiccup. I actually wanted to go to the Army first, but the recruiter took a little too long to give me an answer back, and the Marine Corps recruiter was just there. He talked to me. He gave me all of the options. I actually liked the idea better. The way he presented it was very, very tempting. When I brought it up to my family, my mother and father were torn. My mother was, “Absolutely no, no idea, hell no. Don’t do it.” Trust me it was very dramatic. My father, on the other hand, is a man of few words. “If that is what you want to do, then do it. If that is what you feel you need to do, do it.” Friends, they were all against it, of course. I believe they were influenced by the generation of the Vietnam era. “Everyone is a baby killer and that’s how you will end up being. You’ll never come back the same. I hate the military.” I decided to change friends. (*Both laugh*) If they weren’t supportive, they weren’t friends, so I decided to join against all odds. The only one rooting for me was my dad.

DA-C: What was your main goal to—when you enlisted? Was it—you mentioned a little bit about education, and how you didn’t think you would go to college. Was that ever on the horizon—going to college?

GM: Never. My main point was do my four years, do my duty, and get out. Come back and figure out what the next plan is.

DA-C: And you had anticipated you’d get skills in the military you could use on the outside so to speak?

GM: Yes. That was definitely a plus, but I realized those skills would not be enough.

DA-C: What was your MOS?

GM: I was a 151 Administration, so I was a paper pusher. (*Both laugh*)

DA-C: And then you changed to computer science?

GM: Yes, in 2008. I sent out my reenlistment contract and changed my MOS to 0651 Communications, specifically data, so I was a data network specialist.

DA-C: Sounds fancy.

GM: I know. They changed their name to cyber something. That’s since I got out so—fancy words. (*Both laugh*)

DA-C: All mean the same, though. Right?

GM: Exactly.

DA-C: Can you describe your experience in boot camp or some of your experiences in boot camp?

GM: Boot camp was interesting. It was like everything else in the military. At first, confusion, no idea, hectic... Definitely needed to learn a lot. At times it seemed like there was too much to learn, and my brain was about to explode: all the rules, all the regulations, all the formalities. Keeping with the schedule. Knowing exactly what to do, how to do it, when to do it. Luckily, there were a lot of people that who in a somewhat friendly way reminded me to do it. After a few weeks, the confusion kind of started slowing down. I started to get a grip on what was going on. Didn't (*words are unrecognizable*) the schedule, so I was always on my tiptoes which kind of helped and made the time go faster. As far as my rack mate, the people to the left and right of me, I still had no idea who they were, or what they were up to, or the reasons why they joined which I realized were not the same. Yet we are all in this together, so I figured keep pushing, just get it over with, and move on to the next task.

DA-C: How long is boot camp?

GM: Three months.

DA-C: Three months. So you had a long time to learn all that?

GM: Um-hm.

DA-C: Was there ever a time during boot camp that made you question your decision to join the military?

GM: No.

DA-C: Why not?

GM: I knew right away it was going to be tough. I heard all the stories; everybody made comments about you remember watching *Full Metal Jacket*, it's kind of like that. Let me judge for myself. Let me decide for myself. I'm the one going through it. Of course, you aren't going to have the same experiences as the guy next to you, so I didn't prepare anything to be honest. I knew what I was getting into; I knew it was going to be tough, and that I was going to hate it at times. I was already mentally prepared for all of that. It was just another Monday for me.

DA-C: Wow. (*Both laugh*) How has your time overseas changed or affirmed your decision to join the military?

GM: Now, is that referring to deployments because I was stationed in Okinawa, Japan for two years?

DA-C: Anything overseas. Did it make you more strongly for the military or less?

GM: Stayed the same to be honest. While I was in Japan, it was a great, great time I had there. I learned a lot. Saw different ways of military, different units, and different leadership styles that you encounter throughout your time. So to me it was all about taking the best and getting rid of the worst. Every day is a new day. So don't take anything personally, it's just business. When I deployed—my first deployment was to Iraq in 2006. and that was a bit of surprise because it wasn't on the schedule, but—

DA-C: I'm sorry. You weren't on the schedule to be deployed?

GM: Yes. Until the very last minute.

DA-C: Okay.

GM: I was three months into the unit when they decided we're not going to take this guy, we're going to take you instead. So I pretty much had 48 hours to get everything together, go to the training and then ship out.

DA-C: I'm sorry, so there was additional training to be deployed?

GM: Yes. You had to do—I can't remember what it stands for—predeployment training, it's called PTP training. It's about a month worth of exercises that you do prior to deployment. May or may not be the same thing that you will be experiencing while you are out there, but they try to give you the basics as much as possible, so I had to go through all that which wasn't too bad. We did that training in Camp Fuji in Japan, and then we deployed to Iraq. But at the time I was in an engineering unit, so it was a lot different than the infantry or artillery or—We were the guys that brought all of the logistics.

DA-C: Right.

GM: It was interesting. I didn't really get to see the whole country per se.

DA-C: Of Iraq or Japan?

GM: Of Iraq while I was deployed, but I was out six days a week doing patrols, a lot of convoys. Even though I was in administration by trade, they didn't really need me in the office, so they put me in the Quick Reaction Force which pretty much was in charge of going out and securing convoys and providing security for the commander whenever he wanted to go out, and react to anybody that needed help.

DA-C: (*laughing*) So you'd be called out to different places?

GM: Yes.

DA-C: Okay. We have more questions on that a little bit further on, so I'll move on with these, and we'll go back to that.

GM: Okay.

DA-C: How does your El Salvadoran background affect your experience as a Marine?

GM: I knew that once going in, everybody was going to be the same. So I decided not to let anything affect that at all. I was a Marine. I wasn't an El Salvadoran, or I wasn't anything else. I was just a Marine. That was the one thing I draw from my own head on day one. I understand that a lot of people have—especially in the Hispanic community have a lot of pride in where they came from—where they belonged. I belonged to the Marine Corps. I belonged to the military. I belonged to the people to the left and right of me. I didn't have time to think about anything else because in my head if I started thinking of that I would alienate myself and separate myself from the group, and I wasn't going to be part of it. And I wouldn't be doing my part, and somebody else would have to carry that burden. So I—even though I wanted to associate myself with my background, I thought it would be more beneficial if I didn't. So I just crunched it out.

DA-C: That sounds like a very Marine kind of philosophy. Is that something you got from the Marines, or is that something you went into the Marines knowing you were going to do?

GM: I knew I was going to do that. I did a lot of research prior to joining. I did a lot of talking face to face with people that were in for 20 years, were in for four, that just got out of boot camp, all of my recruiters. I talked to a lot of people—tried to gather as much information as possible. So I had a better idea going in instead of just going in blind because to me that was just a losing battle. I wanted to be prepared.

DA-C: (*laughing*) Okay. Okay. You described a little bit about your MOS as a paper pusher.

GM: Yes.

DA-C: Can you describe a little bit more about what you may have done either in Japan or in Iraq as part of your MOS or as part of your new MOS what you did? Does that make any sense?

GM: While I was in Japan my main role was just to be an administrative clerk. It was pretty much brought in any request that came through: prepare orders for deployment, prepare travel tickets for people getting out of the island because they got orders, awards, promotions, pretty much all the human resources—I guess it would be in the civilian sector. Make sure everyone got paid on time. Make sure if they have any issues, that everything would be taken care of. Those were my main responsibilities. Once I got to Afghanistan—to Iraq, sorry, once I got to Iraq I was taking all the promotions that was my main concern, but a week into it—two weeks into it, they were like, “We need to expand this group. You are going to it, and someone else is

going to pick up promotions.” So they sent me over; I got a one-week course on machine guns, and convoys, and vehicles, all the vehicles we were using, and off we went.

DA-C: And then you left Iraq, and there was a period of time between Iraq and Afghanistan?

GM: Yes.

DA-C: And did you go back to doing the promotions and all of that?

GM: When I got back from Iraq in 2007, I went back to Japan, and by that time, I was the only administration clerk we had in the battalion besides from my gunnery sergeant who was the admin chief. All the other clerks we had were from different MOSs such as water purification, welders, motor (*word unrecognizable*) drivers, so I had to teach them how to do everything I knew how to do, and I pretty much became the assistant to the chief which was a very interesting role in itself because I learned exactly just how much paperwork a battalion goes through. Which to me it was all a learning experience, and it was a big headache. I probably lost all my hair there. (*DC laughs*) Trust me I had to keep it short, or I would have been pulling it all of the time. It was an interesting effect. Then I got orders in 2008 to go to headquarters Marine Corps over in Quantico, Virginia. At that time I was a bit torn because my unit was about to deploy to Iraq, and knowing that I was the only other clerk who knew what was going on, and they needed people to take the administrative positions while deployed. My sergeant major came over to me, and he’s like, “Hey! You need to extend.” And I said, “I already have orders and can’t do anything else.” So I talked to my girlfriend at the time, and I told her, “Hey! This is what’s going on. What do you think?” She said, “No, come home.” So I got out of Japan in March 2008 and got to Quantico, VA, where I began my duties under MMEA-6, the Enlisted Retention Assignment. So they deal with all the recruiters, all of the career counselors, the monitors which are the people that issue orders on how to go in and how to do it. So I moved from a battalion, a very low level, and made a huge jump all the way to headquarters of the Marine Corps which was a hectic process in itself. But again a learning experience because—even though it was very, very political, I knew that I needed to learn, I needed to adapt, I needed to evolve. So that was—everybody thought it was a bit of a challenge and a very scary—everybody I talked to. “What do you think about Quantico? Can you tell me a little bit more about it?” I heard all the bad jokes about, “You’ll be saluting all the time, officers everywhere, all you will do is make coffee.” I didn’t pay attention to all that. I did make coffee, but I did more than just that. When I got there, actually, I was greeted by my chief and my OIC [Officer in Charge], which was a lieutenant colonel. I realized I was going to work directly with an 05, and his boss was an 06, and that was my entire chain of command. So it was me, my chief, and two high level officers. So at that time I needed to stop being a child and start being a little bit more mature. No time for a game anymore. This is a very high ballgame that I need to start playing in, and I have to put my poker face on. It was interesting. I learned a lot from there as well. So I went back to doing administration, an 8am-4-5pm except for Fridays when the general went to play golf. Then we got a half-day. I loved it. It was really awesome. I learned a lot. Very good decompression

time. A lot of time to go back to my family. I was with them every other weekend. It was so close, a 7-8 hour drive, something like that. I got lucky. I got very, very lucky when I went back to it. Sadly, by the time my reenlistment came around, I couldn't stay in the MOS anymore because it was full. And I talked to my monitor, and I told him, "What are my options?" And I talked to my career planner and my career counselors, "What are my options?" And they were like, "Either you get out, or you change your job." That's how I ended up going to Communications.

DA-C: And once you were in Communications, that's when you went to Afghanistan?

GM: Yes.

DA-C: Okay. All right. So you served two tours of duty overseas in Afghanistan and Iraq. And you said a little bit about it, but can you tell me more about how you felt when you learned you were going to be deployed to Iraq because you were being separated from your unit. Is that correct?

GM: Half my unit, yes. It was scary at first, but at the same time I was new to the unit, and didn't really know anybody, so there really was nothing holding me back. So I decided to look at it on the lighter side—glass half full. And I said, "This is what I have to do. It's a whole different challenge. I'm going to go see a whole other country. I'm going to learn a lot more, so do it. Let's go." I packed up my stuff the same day I got the order. I didn't really unpack. I put my civies [civilian clothes] back in there and go, so it was scary but very exciting at the same time.

DA-C: And did you feel differently when you learned you were going to be deployed to Afghanistan?

GM: A little bit because by this time I already had a girlfriend, a fiancé. I was already—had other people dependent upon me rather than just me, and as challenging as it was, it was bittersweet. Excited once again to go back out, and do what I needed to do, but at the same time, kind of, it was really hard to leave loved ones behind, but they understood, and they supported me, both my girlfriend and her parents because we had such a close relationship. And they were like, you know, "We can't stop you from doing what you want to do—from doing what you want to do." So—it was a lot of help that they came out like that. So, yeah—

DA-C: Okay. You were put in a Quick Reaction Force in Iraq?

GM: Yes.

DA-C: And you mentioned that you had—you were deployed kind of where you were needed. Can you describe a bit more about what exactly that meant?

GM: Our schedule was very hectic. It was pretty much—companies would go out, and we'd bring out logistic support such as water, building materials, food, anything that all the units needed. So we were the ones to provide security for it, so we were outside of the wire probably zero-two in the morning—

DA-C: Outside of the wire?

GM: Leaving the base in route to go to another base to drop whatever we were carrying. It was pretty much a zero-two in the morning till the mission was done. So there were times that it took us a few hours, and other times it took us a few days—up until a weeklong mission to do what we had to do.

DA-C: And the whole time you would be traveling?

GM: More or less, yes. We'd travel to get to where we needed to go, drop off the stuff, figure out what else we needed to do, and go back to base. [Section removed at interviewee request]

DA-C: Were you traveling with civilians at this point?

GM: No.

DA-C: Everyone would have been military?

GM: All military.

DA-C: Were they all Marines or all Army?

GM: All Marines.

[Section removed at interviewee request]

DA-C: So they were already in the compound and just trying to escape?

GM: Yes.

DA-C: Okay. That sounds terrifying. Which was—Where was the most difficult place you were deployed?

GM: Afghanistan.

DA-C: Because of that incident or was there more to it?

GM: It was just altogether. It was a lot more, it was—I really don't know how to put it—kinetic, a lot more movement. It was a lot more threat. We had to react to a lot more. We had a bigger area of operations to take care of. Everybody had a very, very rough time of it. When it came to our motor team section, their vehicles were hitting IEDs and roadside bombs every day. Our infantry guys were separated from main headquarters, and they all had their own positions to

man. They were in the middle of nowhere, and they had no idea where the threat was coming from. All they knew was they had to react and stay vigilant, so it was a lot more hectic than anything else I've ever encountered.

DA-C: Okay. What kept you going while you were overseas?

GM: Knowing that I was going to be home soon.

DA-C: Really?

GM: Yeah. That was my top priority. Going back. Going home. I had my mission, and I knew I had to take care of it, but I knew I always had somebody waiting for me. I knew I had people back here supporting me, and I needed to go back to them to let them know, one, that I did my job. I did my duty, and make them proud and just tell them all my stories and laugh about it afterwards.

DA-C: (*laughing*) And I hope you've been able to do that. Do you agree with why you were being deployed, and why or why not?

GM: Do I agree? I can't really say yes or no because I wasn't really sure what the goal was. All I knew was somebody started something, a war broke, and we needed to defend our country. That was everybody's belief. My belief, like I said before, was just do whatever my country needs done. Serve my country well. Make them proud and then move on. Where my orders came from, didn't really matter. Orders are orders, and they need to be followed. Questioning is definitely out of the question. (*Interviewer laughs*) It was just a matter of get your orders, do what you need to do, and move onto the next task.

DA-C: Okay. While you were deployed there was a lot of political backpedaling on our efforts in Iraq and Afghanistan. How much do you know about this, and did they affect your job as a Marine?

GM: Iraq—I wasn't really connected with the outside world, so I wasn't sure what was going on. Heard rumors every now and again, but that is all there is—rumors. They don't really have no ground to stand on, and definitely I would not use them for anything. It's like putting blanks into a gun and going into a firefight with them—that just makes no sense. Afghanistan, however, being a communicator, I had more access. I knew more, so I was more involved with what the unit was doing, what the battalion was doing, what we were doing all together. And even though I knew more about the news, and what they were saying, and general opinions from different entities, or people altogether—Everybody is entitled to their own opinion, right?. Anyone can say whatever they want because of the Constitution and whatever else they want to quote. That gives them the right. That's what we are fighting for. So did I get mad about it? Not really. They can talk. Talk is cheap. Action speaks for itself. And they can go online, go in the news, "This is bad; this is wrong; this is right." It doesn't really matter. The only thing that

mattered to me was what we were doing that day, what we were doing in that area, and how it was going to affect us and the people that we were trying to protect.

DA-C: So the political situation didn't really affect you on the ground?

GM: No.

DA-C: In Iraq, was it good that you didn't know, do you think? And in Afghanistan, you were kind of burdened with that, or it didn't matter to you whether you knew or didn't know, or it was all the same to you?

GM: It was all the same.

DA-C: Okay. All right—I asked if you had contact with the private contractors on the convoys. Did you have contact with private contractors at any other time during your deployments? And what do you think about that as a system?

GM: In Afghanistan we were working with General Dynamics. They sent out their field service guys to help us out with whatever we needed. [Section removed at interviewee request] We had that support, and for the most part, they were very knowledgeable. Of course, everybody has that bad apple—that one percent. I loved working with them. They are awesome. They are very, very helpful. We know why we are there because, one, we were ordered to be. Two, we believed in something greater than ourselves. That was the main consent we got from all the civilian contractors we worked with. That even though they aren't part of the fight, they are not carrying a weapon; they have a very basic protection—helmet, plates. They still risked their lives just like us, and I think that is very honorable in itself. Now, granted, some of them do do it for the money, but others do it to do their part as well, so I had a very good experience with all of them.

DA-C: That's good. When you learned you were rotating out of any given combat zone, how did you feel about that leaving—?

GM: I was the very last one out every single time.

DA-C: Oh, really?

GM: Yes. Iraq. I was the very last group to leave. I was glad to be the last person out because that meant that nobody else stayed, and I had more time to make sure I didn't leave anything else behind or anything that could be used against us. [Section removed at interviewee request] I mean I did want to see my family. I did want to come back home. I wanted to get the hell out of the hot sun, but at the same time I figured I'd been there six-seven months already, a little bit more sand in my lungs won't hurt me. So I wanted that extra time to make sure that, one, everybody under me was already taken care of and already home. Two, make sure all my job was completed. If there were any questions, if anyone needed any help, that I was there to help

as much as possible before I leave. Three, there was nobody else behind. We all came together; we all left together.

DA-C: So you felt good about that?

GM: Yes.

DA-C: Do you have any personal thoughts on Syria?

GM: No.

DA-C: Do you follow it in the news?

GM: Yes. I know that they have a lot of conflicts. I do know that it is more of a civil war than anything else; however, if the US wants to get involved in it, then they have their reasons, and I am sure they can explain them. All I know is that orders will come for us to go if we do go. We can't really question. We just have to do it.

DA-C: Will you be called back into service?

GM: No, I did my eight years. I have no inactive service anymore, but me and my wife have been toying with the idea of—if need be, of going back in. Would I go Marine again? Nine out of ten, yes. If I don't do that again, any other branch will do.

DA-C: Would you try to be a civilian contractor?

GM: I've thought of that. I would, but it doesn't sit well with me the idea that that even though I'd be in that country, I wouldn't be next to those people fighting. I wouldn't be able to do what they are doing, and given time I'd want to take someone else's position, so they could have a break. And that right there is more than enough—reason for me not to go as a civilian contractor.

DA-C: Okay. Now that you are home, do you keep up with military affairs in the news?

GM: A little bit, not too much. There was a reason why I got out, and that was because, one, I couldn't really stay in anymore because there are rules, and I was a sergeant; and if you don't pick up staff sergeant E6 by a certain time, you get kicked out anyway. Based on my situation, it wasn't a good idea for me to stay just for two years cause that was all I was given, so I decided to get out. When I decided to get out there was a question of what to do? My options were pretty simple, either go to school or go to work, and I realized this about a year before my contract ended while I was still on my third deployment. I talked to my wife about it—

DA-C: Your third deployment?

GM: I did a new deployment in 2012. I was on a ship, the USS Iwo Jima.

DA-C: Oh, okay. That's not on your bio?

GM: I thought it was. About a year before my contract ended, I told my wife, “Hey! Here are our options. What do you think?” After discussing it with her and any other person involved because if I was to get out I was going to come back here, and if I was to come back here we needed a place to stay. We had to get the parents involved; we had to get Grandma involved because that’s her house, so I decided to bring it up and make it a family decision and not just my own because it this will affect more than just me.

DA-C: Right.

GM: What we decided was that since she’s— already went to college, and she graduated and all that. She knows the college side, so I really didn’t need to do that. What I needed to focus on was work. So I started working on my resume, started gathering all the information I needed, started figuring out what job markets were open, what job markets were good, what was stable, what wasn’t stable. Try to do all my research before I make a final decision on it all. Put it all on the table and decide Plan A, Plan B, or Plan C. My first plan was to go to college. Without an education now a days you can’t really do much anyways. You need a bachelor’s to go flip burgers now a days. College was top priority, and work was secondary. I knew everything about college from my wife; she taught me a lot. I learned a lot from her, so I wasn’t too worried. When I got back that was my main focus. Start finding jobs, start making—put my name out there, so get a LinkedIn account, get a Monster account, a usajob.com account, badjobs.com. Every other website—try to do as much networking as possible. And my family all kind of laughed at me at first, and they were a little confused why I was doing it so early. I was a year out. “That’s insane. That’s not reasonable. Why are you doing this?” Those were the questions I was being asked all of the time.

DA-C: Really?

GM: Which I responded, ‘Just let me do this; I have my reasons. There’s a method to the madness even if I’m doing it a year early. If they see it now, they’ll just be like, “Oh, he’s a year early.” Who cares?’ But six months, three months before I get out, they are going to see that name again, and they’ll be like, “Oh, this guy was a year out, and he was already doing his research, so this means that there’s something more to him than him just trying to find a job, or whatever else they will think.” And that was my reason behind it all. And at the time they were like, “Okay, I don’t know whether it is going to work or not, but we’ll believe you.” When I started, you know, actually seeing results from all my efforts, they were like, “Ah, now we understand it.” “Now you know the method to my madness.”

DA-C: You’re a man who doesn’t jump just to jump.

GM: Look before you leap.

DA-C: Yes. Is the job search your biggest adjustment between the military and coming back into civilian life, or did you have a bigger adjustment to make?

GM: Definitely a bigger adjustment. There are so many factors when you get out of the military. Some people see it from a good way; some people see it from a bad way. It all depends on the person, and how you view life altogether, to be honest. Some people just decide to seclude themselves, and they are like, “Oh, I’m out of the military. No one will understand.” And that is the wrong attitude to have. I’m not saying you need to change it because there may be some underlying factors behind it, but if you change your view and think about it, then you can definitely move on. One of the biggest challenges that I got was being in for eight years, knowing that I was going to lose the chain of command. I was going to lose that structured life that I lived for eight years out of high school. It was intimidating. I looked at it and said, “Either, A, I can go crawl in the corner and cry to death, or, B, I can do something about it. Be proactive. Don’t be reactive.” That is one of my biggest things. And I thought, “Well, if no one is going to give me a structure then I can do one on my own,” so I structured myself. I became my own boss. I became my own chain of command, and that was the biggest one. The second one, since I was in an infantry battalion, males only, for the last four years of my life, it was a bit challenging to talk to anybody other than a male. Trust me, I get such a weird look when I say that, but it’s the truth. I started realizing that about 8 months before my contract was up. When I was talking to one of my staff sergeants, I was like, “You know, I’m going to get out soon, and I don’t really know how to talk to anybody else but military personnel.” I need to change that because I don’t want to be the weirdo that gets out and doesn’t know what the hell he is talking about. I don’t want to be the guy that comes out with all the military terminology that nobody really knows. I want to be able to be eloquent. I want to be clear about what I want to say and get my point across. And I also need to start interacting with people because I know job hunting is going to be all of that. I need to know how to do interviews. I need to know; it was just that. I need to know; it was my main driving point. I need to know how to do what I need to do when I get out.

DA-C: Now, you mentioned that you hadn’t talk to any females for a while. There are females in the Marines. Were they just not in the infantry unit because it was combat?

GM: Yes.

DA-C: But they weren’t necessarily even behind the scenes as support personnel?

GM: Infantry battalion doesn’t have females. The only time that females are attached to an infantry battalion is when they are attached to the Female Engagement Team, but they are not infantry. Now, the Marine Corps is going through a few changes where they are making females go through infantry training and all that other stuff, but that happened after I left.

DA-C: I see.

GM: Very, very minimal interaction, slim to none all the time. Most of them were somewhere else. I couldn’t tell you where to be honest, but I realized that was going to be one of the biggest issues. And I realized we all know that the military language—we know it can get filthy at times

and very, very inappropriate, and I didn't want to be that guy. I didn't want to be the one to curse in an interview and blow my chances—or say the wrong thing, offend somebody the wrong way without even realizing it, and the next thing I know I've got a problem on my hands. So that's when I decided it's time, okay, to reeducate myself.

DA-C: How has being back in school benefited or not benefited that adjustment?

GM: Benefited greatly. Trust me. The one thing I was being told was you are not going to be in the military; don't expect the same treatment. They don't have the same customs and courtesies. They don't have the same discipline as—

DA-C: Who told you that?

GM: Quite a few people, actually. Mostly my in-laws, my wife, a few of the Marines I knew who got out prior. It was just really good advice from every front, and they all had the same thing. They aren't military personnel; don't treat them like that because, one, you will get in trouble. Two, you won't get good results. Knowing all that and preparing for all of this actually benefited me a lot. Now I know on a group experiment—on a group assignment, I'm not going to be the one leading the whole thing. I know how to follow. I know how to lead. I know both sides. I know that if somebody doesn't do it the way I want it done, then instead of shouting commands at them, I know to sit down and speak to them and let them know, "Okay, this is how I think it would happen." Instead of going this is how it needs to get done. Two very different reactions come from that. If you want good results, you will take the appropriate one, so it helped. (*laughing*)

DA-C: Excellent. What is the biggest lesson you learned in your time in the military? And when you look back over your military career, what if anything are you most proud of?

GM: Becoming self-sufficient has definitely—

DA-C: Becoming self-sufficient.

GM: Yes.

DA-C: Okay.

GM: Be your own person. Be your own support because even though you can count on people to the left and right of you, ultimately the only person who really cares about yourself is yourself. And that carries on not just in the military but in civilian life because you are not always going to count on that person to the right of you in philosophy class to make sure that you are up in time to go to class or that you turn your assignment in on time. They don't care. I don't care. You know. It's just you have to be self-sufficient; you have to be resourceful because—one of the things that has really gotten my attention, and I started questioning is—I see veterans who come to Salem State that have absolutely no idea what is going on, and they have absolutely no idea

how to navigate through the holes, or how to talk to certain people, or— they don't really know. Instead of them going out and searching for the information, or trying to figure out a different way to approach a problem, they just roll up in a ball, and they go cry in the corner until they die. And, I'm actually glad I'm not one of those persons because if I was, then I definitely wouldn't be doing this. (*laughing*)

DA-C: (*laughing*) What if anything would you change if you could?

GM: Change as far as?

DA-C: Anything in your military career.

GM: In my military career? Definitely change the fact that I didn't start school while I was in. That is—

DA-C: You can start school while you are in the military?

GM: Yes. The military will, as far as I remember— tuition assistance, they can help you with it. You can either do online courses, and they have plenty of colleges that will help you like AMU— American Military University, I believe, Phoenix—University of Phoenix, they can help you with that. I know Coastal Carolina Community Service, when I was down in North Carolina, can help you with it, and they have resources on base for you to go to classes on base. I didn't know any of that until I was late into the game. I mean had I known I probably would have had a bachelor's degree by now, and that is one of the biggest things that I regret not doing. And I think it was because—the fact that, one, at the time I wasn't self-sufficient; I wasn't resourceful. It's one of the big reasons why I am now; and, two, even though they publicize it, the information doesn't really get to the lower echelons, the lower people on the totem pole. So we need to spread this more and more to the military personnel that are still active duty. The same benefits that some of the veterans may not know about what the veteran benefits are; and, you know, we have a great veterans' organization here. We have Sam Ohannesian, Ted Serozynsky— they are a great source of information, but I don't see everybody going to their office on a daily basis to figure out what is going on and what else can I get?

DA-C: Right. Now these are like private individuals and private groups through the University. Have you done any work with anything through the government that is veterans' benefits?

GM: The VA, Veterans Affairs, yes, I've done a lot of work with them. Actually, some of my disability claims are through them, and they've been a lot of help, and I learn more and more every time I go there.

DA-C: Oh good. What is your opinion on non-US citizens gaining citizenship through the military?

GM: I was one of them. Actually was kind of a funny story. I didn't know you could put in for a citizenship request while you were in the military. I found that out when I was in Iraq. I actually started my paperwork while I was in Iraq, too. Trust me, getting fingerprints in Iraq is pretty challenging in itself, but I put it through. A year later I received a letter while I was in Japan saying your paperwork has been approved. "You need to come in and do a couple of things—interviews. We'll push your paperwork through, and we'll get it done." I did all of that, and I got my citizenship while I was stationed in Japan. I swore in. There was a two star general that came in and did the whole ceremony for us, and that was it. Now, my take on it—you can look at it in two ways. I mean, you have people just doing it for the citizenship and people like me who didn't even think about it until they were already in. Yes, it is a good idea. They are serving in the military; and, yes, they are paying their dues. So it is a very good thing that they are doing it. Two, that brings an incentive for them to do more because they know that we are not just here to take advantage of the country and then leave. I think that is what a lot of people believe about non-citizens in the US. They just come in here, and they take all of your money and send it back to their country of origin. That's it; that's all they are here for. That's not always the case. I think it is a really good idea. It's a really good opportunity for them and definitely needs to be taken advantage of as much as possible.

DA-C: And kind of related to that—What do you think about the Dream Act?

GM: Sorry?

DA-C: The Dream Act. Where kids who are taken from their country of origin when they are very young, and their parents brought them here, and they are technically illegal aliens. If they go to school, or join the military, or something then they can also become citizens by virtue of the fact that they have been here a long time and are doing something productive like joining the military or—. What do you think about that?

GM: I think it is a very good program. If you really think about it, it's not the kids' fault. It wasn't—They didn't decide I'm going to the United States illegally, and, you know, I'll just go to school. It wasn't their decision at all; however, if they are the ones going into the military then they figured it out. They consciously realized, "Okay, I'm here illegally. I got brought in here. I need to do something. I need to do something with myself." And, you know, some people get accustomed to the life here already, and they don't want to lose it. They want to keep it. If they make the conscious decision to go into the military and serve and get a citizenship from there, then I don't see why not? What's the problem? They are doing something productive. They are not taking advantage of the country. They are trying to help it. Let them do it.

DA-C: Now we've come to the end of the interview. Is there a question you would have liked to have been asked, and if so, how would you answer your own question?

GM: One question I really wish I had been asked—How do I feel about the veteran presence in school, in Salem State? I know that Salem State is a great school when it comes to veteran support. I do know the president is very pro military, and she loves us at least that's what I've been told. I wish I'd had the chance to meet her, so I could actually verify that information. But the more and more I see, and I make my way around the campus, I don't see much military support as far as visually seeing it. I do know the school has a Veterans' Center—Veterans' Center Project. That's what the veterans' organization is trying to work on. I know they have a Veterans' Affairs Office. They have Ted Serozysky and Sam Ohannesian. They are great people, great resources; and I know the school also has the Veterans' Hall at Ellison Campus, but there really are no—nothing showing where it is. There is nothing visible. To me, if you show something, if you put a banner, put directions, put a picture, it speaks a lot more to everybody because then if you see something new you didn't see before, people are like prone to go and take look at it. Then they know. I actually realized when I did my Combat Paper Project that the school is doing—

DA-C: The which?

GM: It's the Combat Paper Project.

DA-C: Oh, okay—

GM: It's pretty much where the veterans donate their uniform; they pretty much shred it, and make a paper, and print whatever they want on it. That has attracted a lot of people as well. The reason why I wish the question was asked is because I don't think the school knows as a whole that we are here. A few people here and there know. I know that when I reveal myself as a veteran in some of my classes, I get the weird looks. I get one or two answers. I either get, "Yeah, I know everybody in the military." "I know some people" or "Maybe you know them?" I get, "You're a veteran, whatever—" I think it is very important for them to know we are here and have a more stronger presence because we can bring a lot into the table. We have a lot of knowledge; we have a lot of support; we have a lot of leadership styles we can bring to any organization—to the school itself. I really wanted to take—I really wanted to feel how the school views us—sees us and what their opinion on us is from faculty members to students themselves. And, I don't know, I really just want to be able to do more for the school, and that is something we just need to really, really look at and come up with an idea and put to action not just wishful thinking.

DA-C: Well, I think you are a great representative for that. I want to thank you so much, Guillermo. It was a wonderful interview. It was wonderful meeting you. Thank you.

GM: Thank you.