

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

Prochilo, Mike

U.S. Army, Corporal E4

Interviewer:

Interview conducted by Dr. Andrew Darien, Salem State University, on 4/03/2018

Summary of transcript:

Prochilo was born on January 26, 1983, and grew up in Revere, Massachusetts. After a difficult childhood, he joined the military when he was 17. He enjoyed being in the military and wishes he stayed in. He was a Corporal E4 in the U.S. Army, and was a combat engineer. Prochilo was deployed twice, to Korea and then Iraq, and had very different experiences during his two tours. His interview describes some of the trauma and danger he faced during his combat tour in Iraq, as well as his resulting struggle with PTSD. Upon returning home, Prochilo became a police officer in Revere before retiring due to health concerns. He is currently enrolled at Salem State in pursuit of a history degree as part of the military's vocational rehabilitation program.

Mike Prochilo

Narrator

Dr. Andrew Darien

Salem State University

Interviewer

April 3th, 2018

at Salem State University

Salem, Massachusetts

Andrew Darien: Alright so today's date is April 3rd, 2018. My name is Andrew Darien, professor of history at Salem State University. I have the great pleasure of being joined today by Mike Prochilo who is a U.S. Army veteran. Mike, thanks so much for being here today. I saw in your biographical information form that you were born in Boston and I know that you went to high school in Wakefield. I'm wondering if you grew up there as well.

Mike Prochilo: I grew up in Revere.

AD: In Revere. Do you consider Revere your hometown?

MP: Yeah.

AD: Can you tell us a little bit about what it's like to grow up there?

MP: Well I grew up in the projects, so it was not exactly the same as everybody else. I grew up with my mother. I saw my father on the weekends and stuff. Say, I had a unique childhood where I got to hang out in social clubs with my father and then my mother's boyfriend. My parents weren't married, they pretty much hated each other anyways. My mother's boyfriend's father was a member of an organization, so he had his own club that I used to go down to, and pretty much did whatever the hell I wanted whenever I wanted, there was no accountability. I used to go to Boston, take the train, the bus, whatever. Then on football, played a little slot machines at the club or go to the horse tracks sometimes with my father. But, you know, growing up in the projects, you know, you pretty much just hang out with your little group of friends and that's it.

You don't leave the little area. If you do, you're going to the city or whatever, you don't go to other neighborhoods, and you don't go to other projects. You pretty much just stay where you're at, and break things, steal things, stupid things like that. The school in Wakefield was a vocational school. I wanted to be an architect until I realized they stopped drawing on the boards, you know. After a couple years of school, you have to the computer stuff, the CAD, and that sucked. So as I was trying to figure out what to do, my father kindly told me if I became an honors student, which I did, that he would pay my tuition and to go to Wentworth. So when I became an honors student, he told me pretty bluntly that he wasn't paying my fucking tuition. [laughs] So that kind of sucked the fun out the dream of being an architect out the window, out the door. And I made it to sixteen, figured I was gonna drop out of high school, get my GED, and instead of waiting to go to school, or go college at 18, I was going to join the National Guard at 17 and start school a year early. I don't remember what the hell I was going to take, but it didn't end up working out because I had to work to make money to live. So after about a year of that, living on peoples couches and stuff like that, I decided to into the regular Army the, and I did that at 17-18? Yeah, something like that. I went to basic training when I was 17. So, I went into the regular Army a year after, at like 18. So I mean, like I worked as a kid two or three jobs in the summer, you know working my ass off, and then got nothing to show for it, so I figured the military would buy me some time to sort of figure out what I was doing with my life.

AD: So you just mentioned a whole host of life experiences that were really interesting and would like to follow up on a few of them.

MP: Yeah, sure.

AD: Quick question though, do you have any siblings?

MP: I got two half-sisters. One on my father's side and one on my mother's side.

AD: Where they or any other extended family part of your life growing up?

MP: On my father's side- so, like my teenage years my father had a falling out. The whole family is messed up. Everybody hates everybody for no reason. So, you know, my great-grandmother was the one that pretty much held everything together. And when she passed away, there was nobody, there was no nucleus, nobody there to maintain the-

AD: Did you know her?

MP: Yeah

AD: Till what age?

MP: 12. So when she passed, everybody kind of just went their own way, so.

AD: You had a good relationship with her?

M: Yeah. She was fine. I used to always drive her crazy or whatever. My father lived with her, so when I would go visit my father, I never really wanted to be with them anyways. I used to just hang out with my grandmother because he was miserable, mean, and not a fun person to be around, so.

AD: Where did the architecture dream come from?

MP: I always liked, like, the architecture of houses. I always found it interesting. And it was one of the few things I could actually draw. And, you know, most of my life guys that I know, you know, older people older guys. You know they were all the same- construction. My father did construction, my mother's boyfriend did construction, his father owned a construction company and whatever. They work in the summer, they're broke in the winter. So I didn't want to be like that. I figured that I gotta do something else. I didn't know what to do I had to get outa that. Not the blue collar, I don't mind blue collar work. It just- it seems like, you know, all these people end up in the same place, you know. They just never have money, all they do is gamble, drink.

AD: Architecture felt like a ticket out?

MP: Yeah. It felt like a step up, like it was a way to get out of that atmosphere. You know what I mean? Because if you don't, in that type of world you, if you don't make an effort to step away, you're gonna get sucked in. You know, like, I don't know how many friends I had, well kids I grew up with that are dead, or in jail, whatever. You know what I mean like stupid stuff because they never got out, they never did anything. They were stuck in the same project mentality, you know what I mean. Who can you rip off, and then you go from doing stupid things to actually doing time you know.

AD: So what do you think made you different, in that it seems like from a young age kind of you knew that you wanted to move away from that?

MP: Well my parents, my father was an alcoholic, my mother was a junky pretty much. I saw her overdose at a young age. And it's just like, the people in the projects, you always see them, it's the same thing over and over again. So it just seemed stupid, like nobody's happy, everybody's miserable, you know, your living week to week. It's not a way- it wasn't the way I wanted to go. I didn't drink as a kid, I didn't do drugs, I didn't do anything. I was still a bad kid, you know don't get me wrong. I was. People will always tell you, like, I was one of the worst kids in the projects, but I drew the line at like drinking and doing drugs.

AD: You were destructive to others but not to yourself?

MP: Yeah, I got off on breaking things and pissing people off. Plus, no one could touch me so.

AD: Why couldn't anyone touch you?

MP: Because of who my father was and who my mother's boyfriend was.

AD: Oh I see.

MP: So there was a little element to that but then, you know, you don't want to be a rat either so if you do something, you can't go running and telling daddy that, you know, this ones picking on me. You got to handle it yourself, you know, so. There's certain things, know what I mean. Like you can get away with a lot.

AD: Do you feel like, despite all the challenges that surrounded you, you learned how to take care of yourself?

MP: Yeah. I learned at a young ae how to take care of myself, you know what I mean, like. But especially like, I don't know, people are like so gullible. People are just like, you don't want to say they're stupid but I mean like, come on man. You don't know if this a scam, or that's a scam or if this ones, you know, whatever, trying to screw you over and you don't not realize it. It's stuff that you pretty much learn at an early age, you know what I mean, did learn, you know, that things always evolve and stuff anyway. But you know, it was a good. Besides my- it wasn't a great life, but I'm glad I experienced life like that because, you know, I'm not a sucker, you know. A lot of people are suckers so I pretty- I don't have any regrets about my childhood. It's just better parents would have been nicer but, you know, what are you going to do?

AD: Did you know other veterans while you were growing up?

MP: Yeah, my father was in the army and he got kicked out. My mother's boyfriend's father was in Korea, Korean War veteran. He lied to actually go over, so he enlisted I think at like 16 to go to fight in Korea. And one of my friend's father's was a Vietnam vet and he was a little whacky. But yeah, I knew some veterans, I had an interest in the military, military history, stuff like that at a young age. Like, I think the first book I read was something about the battle of Lexington and Concord, and then ever since I read that book I always wanted to learn more and more and more. So one of the few things I actually like, you know, in spite of the required history classes I got to take, you know. But that's not really- there's not many classes here for that sort of topic you know, but those are things, like, I still read, things still interest me.

AD: Would it be accurate to say that the Army provided you with the ticket out that architecture could not?

MP: No. Well the Army provided me, ideally the Army was supposed to be the place where I could figure out what the hell I wanted to do. Instead of just starting, you know, getting involved with people, getting stuck in traps where you get involved with- like, you know start working a dead end job, pretty soon you can't get out, know what I mean. I mean you get a girlfriend, get her pregnant. Who knows what happens, you know what I mean, you have to escape the entire situation. So, I was in a hurry, you know what I mean, like I said I was living on people's couches so, you know, there was a timetable element to it to.

AD: So I think, if my math is correct, you were maybe 18 during the 9/11 terrorist attacks?

MP: Yeah

AD: That sound about right?

MP: Yeah. I was working in Boston as a frigging waiter or something at a hotel.

AD: Do you remember where you were and what you were doing when you heard about it?

MP: Yeah, I was working. I was waiting tables or something and then I told them had to leave early because I was in the National Guard. And I figured they were going to do something, call people up or whatever, and I wanted to get out of Boston because, you know, thinking of people- stupid thinking that the planes were going to crash into the John Hancock tower. Like Boston is not that, you know. I don't know.

AD: Everybody knows that you go for the Prudential Center first.

MP: [Scoffs] Good luck hitting that, too. You know, it's like you think that they're going to be able to- I don't know. Anyways, I just want to get out of here before the traffic gets so backed up. So I went to my buddy's house and, you know, called my armory and like, you know, what are we doing? And they're just like nothing, there's like nothing going on. It's like, seems weird, you know. Like, you would expect, like, some sort of mobilization or, I don't know, like be ready you know. But they never called anybody up. I think that there's- it seemed at the time like it was this big thing, you know what I mean. Like it was going to be other stuff going on, other attacks that, you know, nobody really knew what was happening. So to me, you know I thought, "Alright, we're gonna get mobilized, they're gonna go send us somewhere to protect something, to do whatever." And it didn't happen and that was in what was it- September, October? Yeah, a month later I was in Korea.

AD: Interesting. Do you remember how you felt when you saw the footage of the planes crashing into the towers?

MP: I was like, wow! That's interesting. I mean the- you know, it's like, it seemed so obvious why wouldn't you crash a plane into the one of those buildings because they're so big you know, like you can't miss it. But, I guess just surprised, like wow, you know, we're going to war. Pretty much knew we were going to war. You can't just let that crap go and not go after somebody, but pretty much [inaudible] us-

AD: Did you have any idea who the culprit was?

MP: No. I knew, like, from before that douchebag Clinton, after they tried to sink the USS Cole when he shot a couple missiles into Afghanistan and, you know, that was it. Its like stupid, you know what I mean. Like, you have to fight, you have to kill these people. You can't shoot missiles at them, and they already know you're coming anyway. But I think, I knew, I didn't- I think a lot of people knew that Iraq was going to be something, that was going to be something

going on with them. That, you know, was just a matter of time, so. I already committed to going to Korea, so I couldn't change my orders anyway, but-

AD: Were you disappointed that you weren't going to either Iraq or Afghanistan at that time?

MP: No, because things- it doesn't happen that quick, you know. You have to play all, the politicians have to play their games of, "We'll get to the bottom of this blah, blah, blah, figure it out," and then you know, you don't. I don't remember if anybody knew, like, who was directly responsible at the time or what it was, if there was a country behind it, you know all that stuff. But you definitely felt like something's going to happen. But you can't just do- somebody has to do something, you have to have some sort of response. But I don't think, you know, when I ended up going to Iraq I wasn't surprised. I mean sort of surprised that, you know, at the importance they placed on us as a unit. Like when I left Korea- but, well I mean, there was no sense of urgency nothing like that. The military's pretty, like, good at keeping the panic. You know what I mean, if you're going to be all panicky and nervous and stuff like that, you're not gonna find many friends or many people to share that experience with. Their gonna shut you out pretty quick, so it's just, you know- there's no like, "Oh my god, what's going to happen?" It's pretty much like chill out, relax, see what happens. You just kind of wait around until somebody tells you to do something so, it's pretty much how it goes.

AD: So obviously I'm going to want to hear about both Korea and Iraq, I just wonder if we can- I'm a chronology guy so I'm wondering if you can just step back a bit. I would love to hear a bit about what your experience at boot camp was like?

MP: Well I was the youngest person there, and I was scared. And I remember I went to basic training at Fort Leonard Wood in April of 2000 and-

AD: Is that Missouri?

MP: Yeah. Middle of nowhere. And I graduated in April of some year, 2000, and what I did was like, there's a lot of misconceptions because, you know, there's- the Marines will always tell you, like, their boot camp is whatever, but they're just- it's a whole different story with those morons. But we do what was called one-unit station training, so the same Drill Sergeant you had for your basic training after nine, nine and a half weeks, you got a weekend off and then you started- like, my job in the Army was as a combat engineer, a 12 Bravo, was 5 weeks long, so 5 or 6 weeks, I think. I forget which one. But either way, so you come back from that weekend, same Drill Sergeants, same barracks, everything's the same. Any like, some of these other noncombat units where they get treated like adults, you're still considered to be a recruit until you graduate from that. Even though you already graduated basic training it's like, yeah congratulations, we'll see you on Monday, or Sunday night, Sunday evening, whatever it was. And then you come back and they smoke you. Because, you know, you were out eating and drinking, you know, trying to relax. So, bring you back to reality pretty quick.

AD: So you mentioned you were scared. Was there something particular you were afraid of?

MP: Well just the whole atmosphere, you know, like everything you do is wrong, everybody is yelling at you. You know, I didn't think I was going to be able make it. I was like, there is no way I'm going to be able to survive this, this is- what a mistake I made. Big mistake. Like this is fucking stupid, crazy, I got to get out of here, and I almost made a mistake. Because they ask you, they try and ask you real nice like if the Head Drill Sergeant, Sergeant Whitehead, they'd be like, we know that some of you might not feel like this is for you so if anybody has second thoughts, maybe you want to quit, want to go home, now's the time to do it so raise your hand. And I was, like, waiting for someone else to raise their hand. [laughs] And somebody was dumb enough to raise their hand and every Drill Sergeant that was there was went flying over screaming at him until the guy started crying. And then they even went harder at him, and I'm like woah, I'm scared to say that I'm scared. You know, to want to quit and just deal with it, just go through it's like forget this, I'm not fucking raising my hand for shit. [laughs]

AD: What happened to that guy?

MP: He didn't graduate. He ended up breaking something, something in his leg or his foot, I don't know. He was probably somebody that shouldn't have even been allowed to enlist. Like he wasn't in the right state of mind or physically, but there's a low bar to be a combat engineer so, you know, it's one of the easier jobs to get into, that and the infantry. So he didn't graduate with us. I think because he was medically hurt they gave him, like, a second chance. They don't really let anybody go you know. You really don't get to quit, you know, no matter how bad you are. They find ways to make you eventually succeed you know.

AD: So did boot camp live up to the hype?

MP: I think like after the second week like, it was- well once you got used to it, it wasn't that bad and then, you know, like I enjoyed the cadences like, you know, marching and all that stuff. It just felt like you were a part of something. You belonged to something even though its basic training and you realize, like, when you get to your unit your just- it's a different world. But you know it's a big impression. Like, you know, I'm in the army, wow. I'm part of- I'm a soldier, you know, all that stuff. You're firing a rifle, you're doing this, throwing grenades, blowing up stuff at 17. So, it's pretty cool.

AD: Had you had any experience with guns?

MP: Yeah, I shot- how do I put this. My mother's boyfriend, he's gone, he overdosed, he died anyways so it doesn't matter. He- we were coming back from the club, and he had a stolen 45 and he let me shoot it into a car door. So, and then I had to carry the gun home with him cause if the cops stopped him they weren't gonna- it was kind of an asshole move, but I didn't realize that until later on in life. You know, I carried the gun home, and then he went to Maine a couple of times with my mother, and a guy he knew had a cabin type thing up there so he, like a little 22 rifle that he gave me, pretty much go up do whatever you want, go shoot whatever you want.

AD: So you like guns?

MP: Yeah. I mean I don't own any. I mean, that's like another topic about, you know, the whole debate about that, which is totally over blown. But I like it. There was something about, like, after the military, I went back into the National Guard for a couple of years. It's just, it was like a relaxing feeling. When I was in Iraq, I know I'm jumping around a little bit, you carry your rifle at all times. I always had my rifle, always. Same thing in basic training, you always have your rifle. It's glued to you. If you lose that thing or if you don't have it within arm's length, arms reach, you're in basic training getting- bad things are going to happen to you. Same thing in Iraq, you always have your rifle with you, always loaded. None of this, you know, take the magazine out crap and the way they do it now. There was no safe area, you know what I mean, no place where you can just, you know, clear your rifle and then put your ammunition away. It was always loaded. So it was like you felt safe, you know, always being able to have that. And then, you know, I sort of have that same feeling holding that rifle again, like it feels like a safe feeling, you know because it's so familiar. I mean you live with it for a year.

AD: You feel naked without it afterwards?

MP: Yeah. I felt scared, you know. It's just something about it, like it's nothing particular. Like I'm not a great marksman or anything like that, but something about, like, rifles I like. Handguns, whatever, but rifles- it's just like a calming effect. I like, you know, target practice, like I don't want to go hunting. I don't want to go kill any animals and stuff like that. I'm not that kind of, you know. I don't do crap like that. I'd rather just buy a cheeseburger from McDonalds than kill a deer. But I like, you know, target. It's like, it's a skill you know. It's one of those things that seems so easy, but it's really frigging aggravating when you can't do it right and you're like what's going wrong. So, it's like a puzzle I guess, you know. So I find that to be interesting, but I mean I haven't fired a riffle in I don't know how long, a decade, maybe more so.

AD: How did you choose you MOS [Military Occupational Specialty]?

MP: Because the armory was in Chelsea at the time, so I'd take the bus from Revere to Chelsea, and it was the first one that- the basic training was the first one. It was the quickest available time for me to ship out. The other one was Cap Scout, and the MPs[Military Police] which I'm really mad that I didn't do that. But Scouts were in Dorchester, and I think it was, like, talking like a month's difference, so to me it was like I had to get out of the work situation I was in. I was still living with my mother but, you know, things weren't going very well, so I had to get out of there. So, you know.

AD: It sounds like just a matter of expediency.

MP: Yeah pretty much. And they showed you a cool video of explosions, so I was like [shrugs] sounds fun.

AD: Did you feel like the army was honest with you when you signed your first contract? Did you feel like you had a pretty clear sense of what you were getting in to?

MP: Yeah, I had a really good recruiter for the National Guard. Going into the regular army is different, or transferring from the regular guard to the army. But, you know, I guess the- he was a ranger- he went to ranger school, and I saw him just when I was working at a gas station. He just came in and I just asked him about the ranger tab he was wearing because, you know, I was interested in doing that. And, you know, we started talking and he was like I'm a recruiter or whatever and I was like, oh okay you know. I got my GED as soon as I turned 17, I think? Yeah. No, I don't know, whatever, I got my GED anyway. So as soon as I turned 17, I was able to enlist. So that was pretty much what I did. I don't know if my mother signed or if I forged her signature. Either way I got, you know, I went in as soon as I could. And I guess that the only thing that was a letdown was just how much boring the National Guard is, how much it sucks, and how many people that there are incompetent over there, so. It's a sad sight but-

AD: So, was it exciting to go to Fort House?

MP: Camp House.

AD: Camp House.

MP: No, it's one of the worst place that you can go in Korea. Well it was, they closed the camp down.

AD: I thought that they transferred it to South Korea.

MP: Yeah but, you know, I mean like. They took- they fucked those guys over pretty good, the guys that were stationed there. It was already a year tour, because you're so close to the DMZ that it's considered a hazardous duty. So they sent the guys from Korea to Iraq for 15 months. So they, you know, technically went from, depending how much time a guy had in country, he was going to Iraq with this same unit. So they pretty much hosed those guys in the, where I was, at the western corridor, and then when they decided to give all that crap to Korea in 2006, they sent that brigade from Iraq back to the States. So like, that's how they, you know, I guess decided they were going to do it. Instead of sending those guys from Korea home for a year and then shipping them out, they just sent them from Korea to Iraq. So they-

AD: In what years were you in Korea?

MP: I was in Korea from 01' to 02'.

AD: And so that must have been during the time when Bush made his axis of evil comment including North Korea with Iran and Iraq. Do you have much of a memory of that? Did you have much of an idea what your mission was when you were there?

MP: Oh yeah, I was kind of a pogue when I was there. I got assigned to brigade headquarters unit so I was- they make the combat engineers who were assigned to that type unit, like, all the heavy lifting crap. When you go out- when the units go out to the field for training or whatever, they send like a headquarters element out there to establish a line of communication so the

engineers can communicate with other branches, with the other units within the divisions. So if somebody needs a company of engineers, or needs resupply, or the engineers are out there doing their own thing and they need something, or somebody gets hurt they go through us and then we go to the next headquarters. You're gonna, you know what I mean, it's like a chain. And after a few months it became- I became a driver, so I drove a Major, Major Williams who was like this big, angry, black guy from Mississippi who hated everybody. But he liked me, so it was cool. I had to take him everywhere. I had to take him, you know, all over Korea for all different missions and stuff like that, meet with whatever meetings he had with people. And every year they, the White House, takes one person from each branch of the service as like an internship for like, I guess maybe the Chief of staff, I don't know what exactly it is, but I know it's, you have to be- there is a lot of applicants. So he was actually chosen to represent the Army so out of all of those people he became, whatever. He went, left Korea and went there.

AD: That's a long drive from South Korea.

MP: Yeah. In a Humvee it'd take forever [inaudible]. But that's mostly what I did. I drove him around and crap like that, listened to him tell me how much he hated some people. [laughs]

AD: Did you interact with South Koreans much when you were there?

MP: Yeah. We had two different types of Korean soldiers. There's the KATUSAs [Korean Augmentation to the United States Army] that get augmented to us, so they're Koreans who speak English. And they put them, they have- I think there's like a mandatory 2 years of service type deal. So if you speak English, you become a KATUSA, you live in Army camp or whatever. You live like a soldier, an American soldier. You still get Korean pay. And then you have the Koreans in the Korean army, who are dumber than anything I've ever seen, who like literally get beat up. I've seen a Korean soldier get the crap kicked out of him by his NCO [non-commissioned officer]. I don't know what he did, but we pulled into the camp and they were kicking the crap out of him. [laughs] And they slept on, like literally, on straw. So they had a wooden, a long wooden bed-type deal, and straw on top of it and all the soldiers, like, just slept on that, so their life sucked. But they hated the KATUSAs because the KATUSAs were with us. So they had, like, the good life, good food, and all this other crap. And usually the KATUSAs, because they know English, their parents had money and stuff like that. So, you know, you got the poor Korean kids in the army getting, you know, the crap kicked out of them, and you got the rich kids in the KATUSAs, so they didn't get along. The KATUSAs were pretty much afraid of them. [laughs] But-

AD: And how did you get along with the KATUSAs?

MP: Some were good, some were just dumb. Like, they played stupid because they didn't want to do stuff because they're lazy. It's really- I don't understand why they even started doing that. It doesn't make sense, because some of them speak good English, and some of them are willing to do what you tell them, and some of them are just like I have to get permission from whatever

Korean, freaking, whatever he is. So it's like, dude you're in- what are you talking about, like I'm telling you what to do. No I need to get permission from so and so, I'm like, what the fuck, what is this? Like you're playing games here. So like some KATUSAs- and they would all hang together, and I kind of, I mean I used to get along with them. The whole thing was like, you wanted them to, wanted to show you the country, and unfortunately like I preferred to go drink, you know. I didn't get many, much time off, so I drank a lot, other things.

AD: So, from what you were saying before, you didn't drink or do anything like that when you were growing up, but that was something you learned by the time you were in the army?

MP: Yeah, if you didn't do it, people don't trust you. And it's sort of like, what else are you going to do? Like sit in the frigging barracks all day? It sucks. Like Korea sucks! It sucked. Like now I guess it's alright because its only- everybody is having a party over there now. It's like when I was there, it was like little small camps all over the place, so, like my camp was in the middle of nowhere and there was just like 500 people, 600 people on it. And you had another camp with like maybe 100 and something and another camp with like another 500 to 600 people, all scattered along the highway up to the border. And it's like, you know, you're always going different parts of the freaking country for missions and crap like this, crap like that or you know it's just ugh.

AD: So you did not go directly from Korea to Iraq?

MP: Nope! I got to go to Missouri which is much more exciting.

AD: Back to Leonard Wood?

MP: Yup. I tried to- this is where the regular army recruiters suck. Part of the deal was nobody wants to go to Korea, and I volunteered to go because everybody told me if you go and enlist in the Army your gonna have to go to Korea. I was like, well I want to go to Korea so that I can learn how to be, like, a combat engineer, like learn the real stuff before I go to a regular unit and they look at me like I'm an idiot. So, of course when I became a driver, I didn't learn anything about being a real engineer, but I learned how things worked and I met a lot of interesting people. I got an opportunity to go to West Point that I refused, which is one of my biggest regrets. And-

AD: Why do you regret it?

MP: Because I should have went to frigging West Point!

AD: Why didn't you?

MP: Because I didn't want to re-enlist, or I didn't want to enlist for 6 years. And I liked to have fun and, you know what I mean, when you're a certain rank you get to have fun, when you become an officer you kind of don't get to have fun really anymore. There's a lot, a lot of stress. So yeah, no, they told me if I volunteered for Korea you get to pick you duty station afterwards,

and I wanted to go to Fort Drum in New York to go with the 10th Mountain Division, because they were going to be the first ones to go anywhere. They always get deployed, they're like the first ones to go into a fight. They were the first, besides special forces, and some Marines who will tell you they were the first ones there, they weren't. 10th Mountain was the first Army unit there. In retrospect I'm glad, because I'd rather have been in Iraq than Afghanistan. That was where the action was anyways. So, I got sent to frigging Missouri and I was probably there 3 months, 4 months. I was there for 2 months and I already got orders to go to Iraq, well to prepare vehicles. So, you basically put everything on a frigging train and send it over to wherever it goes, I think Texas it went to, and then all that crap gets loaded on to a train, boat, and they ship it over, and then you just wait for personal orders. So anyways, before I get all sidetracked, yeah so I was in freaking Missouri, it sucked, and I didn't want to be there.

AD: And so, what year were you in Iraqi?

MP: 2003 to 2004.

AD: And where specifically where you deploying to?

MP: [laughs] I don't know, get a map. Pretty much anywhere on the map of Iraq, I was there. We were supposed to, I don't know if you remember there was like this grand strategy of, we were, an invasion from Turkey, and we were supposed to be the lead element of that invasion from Turkey. So, you know, they kept dicking us around with, like, yes we're going, no we're not going. You didn't know from week to week if you were going to be in the states or overseas, like you really didn't know. So when they finally decided that we weren't going to invade from Turkey, we had to come in through Kuwait. So I think it was like mid-April, we got into Baghdad, like just after the 3rd infantry division took Baghdad and we were attached with the 4th infantry division to Texas. And the unit we were with was the lead element to that whole gaggle of units, the First Squadron 10th Calvary, so we were attached to them. And then, so the first place, like actual town you know, Baghdad, was where we started and we moved a little north to a place called Taji, fought like a little battle for that place and it was, much to my surprise, the place where Saddam Hussein manufactured and stored all his chemical weapons, and I didn't realize that at the time but, when you- like everybody broke off and went to different areas because the complex was huge. And the other part of the task force, they kept going and we got stuck there because there was so much, like ,stuff, like missiles, you know, like crazy things that were just left. Like, you know, things that you can't just abandon. Somebody has to watch the crap. So we got stuck there for a while, and I guess like the most ominous thing is when you are pulling into one part of the camp and, you know, hasn't been cleared yet and you don't know who's on there or whatever but all you see is gas masks, gas masks all over the ground and like a white, powdery substance. Like, fuck, we're gonna die! And we ended up, the Air Force didn't bomb any of the bunkers that were there, some of the bunkers were climate controlled and you only do that for really sophisticated stuff like chemical weapons that have to be- they can't be out in the sun. You know what I mean, you can't just leave it like regular ammunition. So those

were all emptied, and they sort of, I don't know how accurate it was, but there was rumors that the stuff went to Syria before we got there. You know it was- you could see the tire tracks from the trucks that pulled in and out of the bunker. We had one of the chemical detectors went off and we found like a 55-gallon drum of something. I don't know what it was but, you know, we worked our asses off. We worked like 20 hours or 24 hours on, and maybe like 4 hours off because we didn't have enough frigging people. Like we're just completely undermanned.

AD: Was there any combat at that time?

MP: Yeah, we got shot at and stuff like that, but there was no direct combat. People would drive by and freaking shoot at us and stuff but by the time you- they're such crappy shots that they wouldn't hit you anyways, they sucked! They never trained with live ammunition, you know. People don't understand that the United States Army trains with live ammunition, like that's how you qualify. The Iraqi Army, they didn't do that, because they couldn't afford the ammunition. So, they would practice at like stationary targets that didn't move and they would just, whatever they did, they didn't shoot their freaking rifles. So, and that's another thing that was all over the place, rifles everywhere, you know what I mean, AKs everywhere. So, you know, people just dressed up like- they didn't dress up like soldiers anymore. They're just regular people driving around, shooting at people.

AD: And you didn't feel unsafe at any time?

MP: Yeah, I felt unsafe twice in the beginning, and then at like my- I stopped caring. The second night I was there, we did- we set up a perimeter and all you could see in the sky line was Taji, the camp was being bombed and then all around you see other places on fire other things so like the sky was, like, light up. I just felt like wow this is like, woah holy shit, we're- this is like the real thing. And it was like, scary. This is like- we're here. This is the real deal. And I guess there was like a couple of guys who tried to sneak into our perimeter and the unit, like I said the 1 10 Cav we were with, they have night vision on their armored vehicles. We don't have night vision, we can't see shit. But they did and they shot the three guys, and they only found part of one, who they put in the trash bag and they buried, and in the morning the dogs dug up the guy [laughs] and were eating him. So-

AD: That's something you witnessed?

MP: No I didn't see it. It was right behind me, but I didn't see it. I saw them burying the trash bag, and whatever I was doing, I don't know, but they were like yeah the fucking dogs dug him up and were, you know eating him. I saw dogs eating, literally dogs eating dogs, like wild packs of dogs. There was a dog that was running down the street with a guy's foot in its mouth. When we were driving around, I don't know what the hell we were. Whatever, I think we were lost, but we were driving, wherever we were going I don't remember, at the time. But the little dog had somebody's foot in its mouth. So like, there was dead bodies all over the place, like I didn't see too much just because, like, things were wherever they were, but they were just not where I was

at. Like they were, wherever I was going like you had to get there. It wasn't let's go sightseeing and go see and check for dead bodies and check for this and check for that. You know tanks that got the shit blown out of them, you know. There were people in that thing but you know I'm not going in there. I don't want to see that shit. I remember pulling guard duty and there was a pack of dogs eating another dog behind us. And it's like, I got pissed! I'm not going down there, the fucking dogs will get me, like they're freaking vicious, man! And one nights I was on observation post, this- they scattered a team of three guys, a couple teams of three guys each, throughout the camp like to just keep an eye and try to see if people come in. Which they were fucking- there wasn't enough people to guard the place, but they were so many warehouses like. So, they put us at the very edge of the camp and this camp is almost the size of a city, like its huge, you know. It was like a ten-minute ride from one end to the other. And we do our radio check right before it gets dark and stuff. They give us night vision goggles, so I'm thinking alright cool we're going to actually get some sleep because we'll just work in shifts. Soon as it gets dark there's freaking people at the town like right outside the camp started shooting. Like whether they were shooting at us on purpose or were just shooting because they wanted to shoot at the warehouse. They were fucking shooting at us. So while that was going on, you know, we were like fuck, slid down and hid behind a berm. And we tried to radio it in, and the radio didn't work. And the only reason why it did work when we did the radio check was because it bounced off the track vehicle we were using so it used that antenna to send a signal, so when it was just our radio antenna it wasn't strong enough. So then we hear a truck right outside the fence, when we're you know maybe 25 yards away from us. We can hear it but we can't see it, so we had awesome night vision goggles from fucking Vietnam era or something, don't work can't see shit. So I'm like fuck man, and we got this warehouse behind us and it's like rows of nothing but warehouses. So I'm thinking, because I was in charge you know, I got one guy trying to get the radio up, I got another guy and we're like trying to figure out what these guys in the truck are doing. Because, you know, if they come in we can shoot them, but we can't seem them so if we just start shooting they might not even know we are here so let's just, I don't know how many of them there are, nobody knows anything. If we start shooting, either we scare them off or they figure out where we are and they kill us or something. And then whole time worried about, if they're in the perimeter are they behind us. You literally can't see more than freaking 15 feet in front of you it was so dark, except for the tracers that are coming flying over. And there's only, like I said, three of us so we're not splitting up. I'm not going to send one guy to go look on one end and I go down another end and then, you know, what if something happens. We're fucked. So, you know, there was about, felt like a long time, but it was probably, whatever, like 20 minutes. And the kid was able to, working on the radio, I don't know how he did it but he was able to jerry-rig the metal ladder that was next to the, attached to the warehouse to the antenna on the radio to send out a call for the, what do you call it, the quick reaction force. There's is always a squad that was pretty much, you know, a rollover patrol, and to come like, hello we need help! Somebody's either shooting at us or someone's about to jump us from behind or whatever, we can't see shit!

AD: Like a SWAT team.

MP: Yeah, basically, but then, it's just, you know, when somebody opens a car door usually a light comes on and these guys at this thing, all the lights were out. So you can hear the doors open, hear the doors close, hear them talking, like whispering or whatever. It's like, what the fuck, like really want to know what's going on. Can't, the first thing you don't do is put your flashlight on. That's a big no-no, so I'm not going to flash our flashlight to, you know, try to see. It's just sort of wait and react, so I was pretty scared during that time. And when the quick reaction force showed up they're like, "Why'd you fucking call us? The truck took off." The people who were shooting at us stopped shooting. I was like, look there's bullet holes. Everybody's shooting everywhere, you called for that? No, there was a car out there. We're like trying to explain to them and they were like whatever man, you freaking wasted our time. Like they thought we were like overreacting. Like no, it was fucking scary. After that it was like, alright, fuck it, whatever. Don't panic anymore. Don't, you know, things aren't so bad. Just don't overreact. I didn't think I was overreacting but everybody else did. Except for the guys I was with, they're like no, you don't understand. So.

AD: So your unit received the Valorous Award-

MP: Yeah, the Valorous Unit Award. Yeah, in 2004.

AD: And what was that for?

MP: The first company to do the route clearance, and basically we were already doing that anyway, like getting the IEDs and stuff. So they just formulated, I don't know what they did, some sort of procedure so us, our company, another company, and another battalion all received the Valorous Unit Award for that. I think they were just, I don't know, I forgot the reason for that, the purpose. But yeah, we got that. We got spurs, golden. If you go with the Calvary and you enter combat, you get a pair of gold spurs. We were supposed to, I think, get combat infantry badge things because we fought as infantry and shit. Supposed to get a humanitarian aid award because we provided aid and water and all this other crap to almost 30,000 refugees from Iran. A bunch of freaking, we got screwed out of a bunch of stuff. But yeah, I mean my tour, my deployment, was a lot of different things. It just wasn't one thing. Like I said refugees nothing, I didn't- nobody had to deal with that crap. Took care of a jail for the Iraqi police. All we did actually there was to throw the MRE bombs at the prisoners.

AD: Did you-

MP: It didn't kill anybody. It was just a water, water bottle that pops and explodes and it's like a loud noise. We did it to them because they wouldn't shut up. But, you know, they weren't bad

at all. I don't know what they even got arrested for, but we did stuff like that. We had, let's see, three guys in my battalion got killed on Christmas Eve. They got blown up. I was in a convoy that was hit with an IED.

AD: Were you close to the guys who were killed?

MP: I knew the driver, the Sergeant, Sergeant Bisky. The other two guy were officers I didn't know. But the way they died is- one guy got decapitated. I knew the kid who was in the Humvee behind them and he was pretty affected by it afterward. Because another guy who got blown up from the his waist up, like landed on the Humvee behind them. Like it actually, the explosion actually picked up the Humvee and put it spun it in the air and then Sergeant Bisky, the driver, was peppered with shrapnel. And the radios didn't work in the Humvees, so they had to flag down a passing convoy and they were able to call the medevac. So he was alive, but the medivac had to turn around because it had some sort of mechanical malfunction. So when the second medevac was dispatched he was already dead. So it was just like- it's just like thinking about it, how sad, you know. They're gonna like be telling their parents, children, wives, whatever, on Christmas Day that they died. So that kind of made me feel bad. I had a Lieutenant who ended up getting killed like two years later in Iraq. And I used to treat him like shit, so I felt guilty for being so rude to him. But we did a lot of stuff. You could probably talk about all the things we did for four or five hours, like it was a lot of shit.

AD: Then you were hit with an IED?

MP: No, I didn't get hit. It just missed.

AD: Your convoy was hit?

MP: Yeah the vehicle in front was hit, and the driver and passenger behind were wounded. But they were able to drive to a camp and they got medevacked right out. Like, this was before all this freaking up-armored crap, you know what I mean. We had Humvees, regular Humvees, there was no armor, there was nothing. They didn't even have doors on the freaking things, so a little different then it is now. And stuff like that. We got shot at a couple of times.

AD: You have some pretty tight friendships from your time in the military?

MP: I still talk to them. I still talk to all of those people. Well most of them I try to. Everybody's got their own thing going though, you know. You try to keep in touch as best you can. You try to do some sort of reunion or whatever.

AD: So you came back to U.S. in 2004?

MP: Yeah, I came back to freaking Missouri in 2004.

AD: Again in Missouri.

MP: Yeah.

AD: You can't stay away from that place.

MP: Armpit of America. And I wanted to reenlist but I couldn't get a bonus. I wanted to go back to Korea and actually not drink the year away. And I wanted five thousand dollars and I know it's, like, trivial but it's like nobody wants to go to the freaking country. I'm volunteering to go back, and I'll be spending another year in Iraq. That's at least worth two years of crap, you would think. And nope. I think right about as I was getting ready to get out, like my last month of being there, they're like, oh the bonus went up. You can get whatever, I think it was more than five thousand, you know fuck it I'm already mentally checking out. Like I had skin disease, Leishmaniasis, from the sand flies over there. I had to go to a hospital in Texas for experimental treatment. I had knee problems. I had, I guess arthritis developed in my knees when I was over there. And I think part of it to was from that Camp House because it was built on a freaking hill. Everything you did was up and down up and down that stupid hill.

AD: So what's the date you actually got out?

MP: October 2004. October 1st, 2004.

AD: And were you provided with some sort of transition period, or help in acclimating back to civilian life?

MP: No. They just let you go. [laughs] Like you didn't even, like you never worked there.

AD: Must have been strange.

MP: Yeah, it's weird trying to get your bearings back, or trying to figure out what the hell you're doing. You know, I honestly didn't like it, and I wanted to go back in the Army. And I was going to, and within a month I met a girl that I was with for like 12 years. So it's like, if I go back into the Army this relationship is going to be over. You see, she's- if you're in a combat unit it's a different life than other jobs in the Army, especially with spouses. A lot of cheating wives, but-

AD: And no cheating husbands.

MP: Not when they're in Iraq. I ain't cheating- I'm not cheating there. Korea for sure, but not in Iraq. But the wives get all the money, and you would be surprised how many freaking guys came home to no money, broke because their freaking wives or girlfriends stole all the money. Suckers. [laughs]

AD: So, where did you go and live immediately upon getting out?

MP: I lived with my mother for a couple months, and then I moved in with my girlfriend and we got our own little piece of paradise in Revere. We stayed there for like ten years and then moved to Lynnfield.

AD: Was it odd being back in your mother's home?

MP: It was depressing. It's like, I didn't have nowhere else to go. So I had to, like, make nice and pretend that everything was okay and, you know, within a few months I was like, fuck it.

AD: What were her feeling about you going into the service?

MP: Like, she thought I was going to get killed and all that other stuff. She was just a pain in the ass. Like, I didn't care what she, what anybody, thought about what I was doing. I don't know how true it is or not but I stopped talking to my father. I didn't do anything to him, I mean he just is an asshole. And she apparently saw him and told him that I was in Iraq and he just laughed and walked away. It's like, okay. Funny. So, I came back to Revere. Worked in a hotel for about a year, doing security. Became a mailman for about a year. Then I became a cop for about eight years and now I'm wasting away here.

AD: How was working as a cop?

MP: Sucked. Worst fucking job I ever had.

AD: Why is that?

MP: Because I thought it was going to be similar to the military, like with the brotherhood type deal going. And it's a bunch of backstabbing, money grubbing, disgusting people. And there are some good guys, you know some people I still talk to. It's just basically like you got, everybody has like a little click, so you find your little place in the world. And, you know, some guys are better than others, you know. Some people will, you call for help and somebody is there right away. And some people are just cowards. Go the other way. I've seen somebody go the other way when like I was going to a call for a fight, he literally- I was going to the house, I took the turn and he goes the opposite way. What a ffff- there was no mistake. The street sign was

literally right there. And then he drove, and I was motha fucker. And another person who left with me from the police station, she was behind me and she was there, but I mean it was a house I had already been to. So, I knew the people. It wasn't a big deal. It just sounded like it was going to be something. And then I think once he realized that I was already there, like you call it off on the radio, then he's like oh, I'll be on route too. Yeah, once you realize there's nothing is going on you show up. You freaking-

AD: Were you a good cop?

MP: Yeah, I never did anything wrong to anybody. I just didn't like going to work. It was a miserable experience. It sucked the life out of me. It made me drink a lot, it made me develop anxiety, stress. It's like one of those jobs where you're going to be a kiss-ass type person until like a lot of political contributions in order to get rank, and that's the best way if you want to be a cop for the long-term because you don't have to deal with the same amount of stuff as being a patrol man. But when I found out I had PTSD from Iraq, the military, so was also sort of suggested that the police job was probably, well not probably, did make everything worse. And I developed like- like I have this phobia of dead bodies and stuff like I can't deal with it. I get like panic attacks, so they let me retire. Well they forced me to retire, but I wanted to get out of there anyway. So I got a disability pension from them, and I get 100% disability from the VA, and they're trying to rehabilitate me to go back into the work force. So I'm on like the voc-rehab thing for school.

AD: And at what point did you recognize that you had PTSD?

MP: When I had to pull my doctors reports for- I forget what it was. I wasn't, like, trying to get anything, I just figured I was having a tough time readjusting to life, because to be honest with you, I missed the military. I still do. Just like the loyalty, you know, it's something you don't find anywhere else in the world. And people say they're your friends, and people will say, you know, he's my best friend. You don't have any idea what a friend will actually do for you until you're in the Army, or in you know, probably the Marines, they all stick together. But when you're in a combat unit, you go and live next to a guy, a bunch of other guys, in something smaller than this room, you know, and even if you can't stand them, you know, you still like got a connection with them. you know. And it extends even past like the deployment to, you know, stupid stuff like going out. Like I was in, I guess I should have, something should have recognized I had a problem when I came back because I turned into like a horrible drunk. Like I wasn't like that before. Like I drank, but I never caused problems and I couldn't go to any places. I got banned from everywhere for starting fights and doing dumb things. But when I was with people in my unit, I remember them trying to throw me out, out of a club, and the bouncers come up and they say he's gotta go. And they all get in front of me, and they're like no, he didn't do anything wrong. They're like oh we saw him throw a glass at somebody and they're like no

he didn't do it, they did. Pointing to another group of people. And the bouncers, like, stood there for a minute, you know. They weren't sure what to do, because they knew if they were coming to me, that they were going to get into it, it's going to be a brawl. And they decided to kick out the other group of people, who nothing to do with it. But it's like that sort of like mentality. Like, he's an asshole, but he's our asshole. You know what I mean, like if you screw up yeah, your friends will make you pay for it but they ain't gonna let anyone else do anything to you. It's like that sort of- that's not anything around here. Not the police department or anywhere else.

AD: I know that this is a little off topic but I'm curious, did you ever experience that feeling of brotherhood with any women in the military or did you-

MP: No, women were a waste. I had women in the unit that I was in Korea and they freaking sucked. They couldn't do a road march. We had to do a ruck march, and this is another thing that aggravates the crap out of me, double standards right. So the women supposed to be all equal, all this other crap. They stuff their rucksacks with their sleeping bag to make it look fuller. We gotta weigh our rucksacks, the men, the real combat engineers. We have to weigh our rucksack before we go out and when we come back. So, and I had to carry the radio, so I'm carrying like fifty-something pounds on my back and then, you know, the thing with the road march is that you're supposed to stay in like a formation type deal, and people were just like so scattered. So I have to run up, back and forth up the stupid freaking thing, that gets drawn out because the women can't even carry their freaking sleeping bag. And then, no shit, at the end, like there's a truck that follows us in case someone gets hurt, they go in the truck. Three of them are on the truck, faking, oh I can, I'm hurt. It just pissed me off, pisses me off.

AD: Getting back to the PTSD, did you get some help from Veterans Affairs with that?

MP: I don't know. I don't know if things are worse or better, to be honest with you. I go to the VA for a lot of stuff. A lot of things have gone wrong physically. So, that's a whole different complaint department. But I just go- the real reason why I go to the VA is because it still has like that military feeling. So even though everybody there's miserable it's, and it's probably not the best medical care, it's- I don't know. I'm content with it, even though I complain about it all the time. But yeah, I get help from, I guess help for the VA. The toughest thing with the VA is consistency because they have like a high turnover rate. So once you build that trust with somebody it's kind of hard. And then there's people like, you know, I had like severe panic attacks where couldn't even go grocery shopping, couldn't sleep. I mean still have sleep problems but, you know, waking up soaking wet, having nightmares, just unable to like for whatever weird reason eat in public. I couldn't do that, I would always feel like I was going to throw up. So I got, you know, some doctor who actually prescribed me some medicine that works. But it took a while to get to that point because some of these people want you to be like a freaking hippy and count to ten and take a deep breaths. Like I didn't try that before, like I

didn't think about, like you think I want to be here. You think I want to say this crap, you think I want to go through all this stuff, like you think I want to take pills, like medicines, and be like my grandmother freaking with the Monday through freaking Sunday pill thing. Like it's not where I want to be. It's not what I want to- you know, I didn't envision this after my time in the military.

AD: So why did you come to Salem State?

MP: Because it's close. I didn't get accepted to UMass Boston, and I take an Uber because I'm an idiot and I got arrested for drunk driving so I lost my license, twice. So, it actually worked out. And it's supposed to be a good school for history but, you know, whatever. I won't make any comments on that but, it's- I thought it would be, I don't know, I thought it would be good. Like I went to North Shore[Community College], I like North Shore. I like that school, I like that school better than I like this school.

AD: What did you like about it?

MP: It was really flexible. Classes, I know, I get it now, because there's- they don't teach as many classes so they can be flexible with the days and stuff and the times and here there's more classes to teach so it's not as flexible. But the flexibility and the students were better. I like those students better.

AD: Do you feel like the military prepared you for school, for college?

MP: No. Day one in basic training you're taught that civilians- you're not a civilian anymore and civilians are scumbags. And I adopted that policy full heartedly. I was all in on that mentality. Because, you know, they want to build you up, you're superior, blah blah blah, all that crap and I felt I was. I'm like, I am superior to any normal person. Like, what the fuck are you doing with your life? I mean, I'm a combat engineer, I fucking blow shit up. What the fuck do you do? You know, it's arrogance but it's also like confidence, you know. You feel like you can do stuff that maybe normally you might not think you can do. But yeah, and then I adopted the same thing because once you're in the military you're in that culture. Your whole life is just contained in one place. You don't leave your base. You know, unless you want to go somewhere, but usually you have to go back. I mean, when I left Korea to go on vacation to come home, I left my vacation early to go back to Korea because I couldn't stand being here. I didn't want to take my leave. I couldn't wait to go back to Korea. So, I don't know.

AD: What about the whole idea of transferable skills?

MP: None. I have none. Even trying to get into, like, commercial demo it's so regulated. And I had one interview, and there's not many companies that do it, but like the licensing and all that

stuff is ridiculous. And then when I was a police officer, I thought about transferring to the Boston Police or going to the State Police to do the bomb squad, well try to get on the bomb squad, and one of the stadies I knew said there's like eight guys that are on it and everyone wants to do it. So I was like fuck, I'm not going to get that. So I was like, other than that, and that's still assuming- it's hard to understand, but when I was in Iraq we blew up things up, we did everything you weren't supposed to do. We just did it the fastest way possible. Because it's like you want to get done with your mission and get the hell out of there. You want to go home or back to wherever you're at to eat, to relax, to chill out. And after awhile you realize that like all these procedures and everything you are taught is just a waste of time. It's like you can blow this stuff up in half the time if we just, you know, do it this way. The expedient way, you know. We had a lot of sappers, guys who went to sapper school which is like a month-long like engineer-specific course on how to do crazy explosive things and learn a lot of stuff, whatever. So those guys come back to your unit and they teach you and tell you how to do whatever. So you learn a lot from those type of guys and you learn like, I don't need to have all these different freaking cords going everywhere. I can just use one stick of C4 as long as it is attached to another stick it will go with the blasting one blasting cap and on a time fuse and boom. Just drive away. You know give ourselves a couple minutes and just drive and let the shit blow up. And then instead of like going through this enormous procedure we did, I think I only did twice and the first time I did it I wanted- I thought it would be fun to get a cool picture, which wasn't a good idea because I went outside the armored vehicle to get this picture and I was in a ditch so I thought it'd be okay and the fucking concussion of the blast like went right through my body. It was like something I never experienced in my life. I was like woah. I could actually see the shock wave coming from the explosion, like coming like, it was almost like slow motion like seeing it come towards me and I was like this is not going to be good. And fuck it. It was like holy crap, that thing.

AD: And you were concussed.

MP: I don't know. I was probably concussed a couple of times. I got whacked in the head with a tank hatch to so there were a few things that probably didn't help me out too much there.

AD: So what advice would you give to someone who was going into the military today?

MP: Go into the Air Force. It's the best branch of the service. The military is never what you think it is going to be. Everything is like pretty much by chance. You know, chance of where you are going to get stationed, chance what kind of unit you are in, chance of what you'll be doing. You don't know, like nothing is for certain. If you're physically motivated you can try for other, you know, schools like ranger school. You do all these fancy things that don't make you a better soldier but they look good on your resume. I would just tell don't listen to the recruiter, do your own research. There is plenty of it out there. And just don't worry about your feelings.

They're going to get hurt. Don't be a baby. You know what I mean, everybody's goanna break your balls. You know what I mean? It's part of military life, don't take it personal. It's the only place where racial slurs are accepted because they're not serious. And I've been called all kinds of names, wap, guinny, whatever and it don't bother me I don't care. I know it's joking but you can't do that here. So I would just say yeah, that people are going to be tough. They can be tough. You know, there can be some tough times but when you're with people who are going through the same things you are going through, whether it's new to them or they've been there a couple of years, so everyone knows what it's like. So if you are going to go into the military, just do your own thing, do your own research, do what you want to do and leave your feelings here. It's- you know, it won't be able to survive. And it's an awesome experience. I wish I stayed in. Biggest mistake I made in life was getting out of the army. I don't want to say that, my freaking ex-girlfriend, whatever I don't know where we're at, that ex-girlfriend, girlfriend thing would disagree. Because I have a daughter now, so you know the best thing in your life is your daughter, type crap. But the military was the best thing I ever did. It probably destroyed my body and didn't make me mentally. Who know's what the hell happened to me mentally. And I still wish I stayed in. Regardless, even all the stuff I know now, I wouldn't have traded anything for it. Other than the opportunity to stay.

AD: So, here's my last question. If there was one idea or fact that you wanted to communicate to larger civilian populations that are less familiar with the military, what would it be?

MP: Marines are all liars, they are not the first ones in. But besides that I would just say, everybody in the military is not equal. Everybody in the military has a different experience. So, somebody might be a food service worker who has PTSD from whatever. You know, that doesn't mean anything. They could have their own traumatic experiences doing who knows what. Everybody has experienced their own personal story. Like, every story's different. No one's the same. You know, what I did is not the same as the guy I served with. You know, maybe we shared the same experiences in Iraq or Missouri but I did something completely different in Korea that most people do when they went to Korea. The Valorous Unit freaking whatever Award. It sounds cool, it looks I guess something to be proud of. But there are so many things you do that you don't get credit for, so I would just, you know, you gotta just to talk to the veteran as they're not as a veteran but talk to them as a regular person. Most veterans don't mind talking, it's just the way they're approached. You know, like most combat veterans don't like talking. I didn't, wouldn't have done this a few years ago. So- but if you talk to somebody, they'll tell you whatever, and don't- the things you see as a veteran, the way you experience things, makes you seem like you don't have empathy. Maybe some veterans don't. But don't take everything they say as being serious, because some could be just be joking around and what they went through, it was normal for them. You know, some people have really crappy service time. You know, they see a lot, do a lot, you know, and it's not pleasant and pretty but each person is different some people come back, you know, from deployment, pick life right up like

nothing ever changed. Some people, like me, end up all over the place. You know, everybody comes back differently. Some people don't even go overseas and they still have problems adjusting. So yeah, just try to communicate to them as a person not as, like, anything special because if you start making them uncomfortable. For me it's uncomfortable to be treated as something different or something special. Like, I don't feel special. I don't feel different. Well, I know I'm different but I don't feel like I deserve like a parade or all that garbage. Everybody just, most veterans just wanna be able to be treated like normal people. Talked to like normal people not like, "Oh you went to Iraq, oh you went to Afghanistan. That must have been so hard for you." Like, you know, just talk to them like a regular person and usually you'll get somebody usually who will return the courtesy and talk to you like a regular person and not a dummy. And if you're interested about what they did, don't come out and the dumbest question you could ask a veteran is did you killed anybody. Even if they did, I used to tell people, yeah I only killed women and children and I would say it with a straight face, and they said, "Really?!" You freaking moron. Yes, yeah. Okay that's what we did. But you can, don't ask that dumb question. Just talk to them like a regular person. Hey what would you do in the service or where were you stationed. You know, stupid things and then eventually when you build a little bit of a trust with them they'll open up about more detailed facts or more, you know, answer more questions than yes, no, I don't know. So that would be my only advice. Talk to them like regular people. And don't ask if they ever killed anybody.

AD: Well, I won't give you a parade or thank you for your service, but I'll at least thank you for the hour and a half you spent with me today.

MP: Hey, if I can use this for grad school I'll be happy.

AD: Alright.