

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

**Wilson, Michael, U.S. Army**

Interview conducted by Connor Campbell, Salem State University, 11/26/2019.

Michael Wilson served in the Marines for 6 years. Now he is a veteran and student at Salem State University. During the interview, Wilson talks about his childhood and childhood education. He talks about what led him to make his life changing decision of joining the Marines. Wilson goes into detail about his bittersweet feelings about training, memories he made during his deployment, and difficulties faced when returning home.

Transcript: Kathryn Coe, Kevin Roberts, 12/3/2019  
Transcript Edited: 8/4/2020 by Kirsten Rigol, Amber Shannon

Connor Campbell: Today is the 26th of November, 2019. My name is Connor Campbell, and I am joined by Michael Wilson, the Salem State University student and Army veteran. Thank you for agreeing to be interviewed today.

Michael Wilson: [Of] course.

CC: So, you were born in Melbourne, Florida. Did you grow up there?

MW: No. No, I grew up in Beverly MASS.

CC: What was your childhood like?

MW: In Beverly? Incredible, awesome. I think I had a very good childhood. I had incredible parents, awesome brother and sister. I'm the oldest of three. It's really good. I guess just the regular American Dream growing up, man.

CC: And you enlisted directly after high school, right?

MW: Yes

CC: What made you choose that path?

MW: The military for me, It's something that I always had been fascinated by. I thought that soldiers, Marines, just military members alike were just really cool. They were my heroes growing up. You know, I didn't have Superman— I don't care about him none. It was the military guys, police, First Responders— those guys were my heroes. And coming to the end of my high school career— it's my junior year— I had no idea what I wanted to do. I had just been in school for 12 years from preschool on, you know? To me not knowing what I wanted to do prompted me to maybe not be the smartest decision to go straight into college and I thought you know, maybe I'll just go in the military. That was more of just a humorous thought at the time because it's a huge commitment. That's not just a job. That's a life, a lifestyle change in general. It just completely engulfs you, so. But I didn't know that. It was more of a thought and then I went and talked to my friend's father, who was a recruiter out of Peabody and I went back to my dad and I explained to him what I wanted to do and he was on board and I enlisted actually when I was 17. So it was pretty cool. On my 18th birthday I was at MAPS [the Military and Student Entrance Processing Station in Boston] and I oathed in and that was it. Just waiting for my date to go to basic.

CC: So your dad was happy about that, how did the rest of your family feel?

MW: Yeah, so I wasn't the best kid in my high school years for sure. I did a lot of things I wish I hadn't done but I had learned from, thinking back. My dad was enthused with the fact that I had

made such a big decision because that's a big step for the family in general, not just the individual, you know. My mom was pretty on board, a little skeptical. I feel like every mother in the world hearing their son is going off to the military since, you know, the time of the first militaries. It's not an easy thing, but to the same respect she was happy. She was proud. She understood my decision. She understood that that's what I wanted to do. So, she was really on board too so it was cool. It was nice to have that support.

CC: It's good. So you've enlisted, you've got your ship date. When you went to boot camp how did you feel during training? Because you described at one point boot camp was a "shit show."

MW: [*nodding, laughing*] Yeah, yeah—I did training, my basic training, at Fort Sill, Oklahoma, which was a shit show. I mean, I was not a fan of Fort Sill. But when I first got there it was hot, it was the middle of the summer time. There was a two-month drought, no rain, no nothing. So our whole training experience was in the hundred and ten-plus degree weather. I was in a relationship at the time, things weren't going fantastic. My relationship with my family wasn't fantastic. So when I got to Oklahoma, and I started getting screamed at, it was a huge eye-opener for me because like I have been trying to run the mill at home, in my head, by my damn self for too long. I can't believe I ever would be like that. So it was a really big eye opener for me, which then made me feel really guilty about some of the things I had done which then made me—you can't talk to anybody when you're training. So I just sat there and just brewed in my thoughts. And that was [*inaudible*]. As far as a shitshow, I think the biggest shit show part of it would really be just be the heat, getting smoked all the time for people doing stupid stuff. One day, we went to the chow hall one morning. I believe it was either after a rough march—yeah, I think it was after a rough march—and we're all tired and we were just hot and we were just dead and we went and we ate breakfast but they let us eat whatever we want. So typically when you go to the chow hall when you're in basic training at [*at least in 2011*], there was a set thing you could eat. You couldn't touch the ice cream. You couldn't touch anything good. You just eat the normal food. Whatever, understood it, didn't question it, whatever. So there's one particular morning, they let us go and eat ice cream. Whatever the hell we wanted. It was fantastic, but unbeknownst to us, once we finished eating—not even, we were probably at three-quarters of the way through—and the drill sergeant started screaming and was like, "Get up, get up, get up." So we had just engulfed ice cream and all this other junk food, milk, whatever—and we got outside. He made us sprint back to our bay. So I mean you could just imagine—my shoes were like two shades of brown. I just had throw-up all over me from the guy in front of me, the guy in front of him, myself. So that was the perfect definition of the show, you know? So.

CC: How did you get through it? I mean you've got the heat, the screaming, the belly full of ice cream?

MW: A big motivation for me while I was there was I had hyped myself going into the military up so much. Like I mean, I don't even know what you can compare the level of like—it wasn't conceitedness, but I just talked about it a lot and I made myself out to be like, *this is me, I'm making a huge change in my life*. I think what really got me through it was my family. I had let them down so much, man. Honestly, like I just—just with everything I was involved in in high school, my attitude. I think I owed a huge part of that and I had to finish for them. For myself, I really just wanted to prove to myself, I suppose, that I could do something other than what I was

doing. Because the rate I was going I wasn't going to end up anywhere five star, you know? It wasn't going to be good. But also with doing it for myself— again, like I said, I had really just hyped up everything and I felt that if I failed at this huge stepping stone in my life I couldn't— I couldn't go home and look at anybody, you know? Like how do you fail out of boot camp? And I mean people do, tons of people do, but I wasn't going to do that. There's no way. I couldn't let myself.

CC: So you mentioned your attitude and that do you think that boot camp and the military in general helped you fix your attitude or —

MW: Sure

CC:— change it?

MW: Sure, hundred percent. I think it made me appreciate a lot more. I'd never really been away from home at that point other than like going to camp, etc. So when I went to the military, from Boston to Oklahoma's a hike. It's the farthest I've been away from home, really. Different environment. Pretty, pretty, pretty crazy with the Drill Sergeants and everybody and just being away from home. So I think that it gave me definitely a better understanding of what family meant. Meeting some of the guys that are still my best friends, you know, that I met in basic I definitely think that that was a huge attitude changer for me.

CC: So you said your MOS, changing gears a little bit, was a unit supply specialist. Can you describe that job? What that entailed, specifically?

MW: Yeah, so, it's logistics, quartermaster. Basically, it's a lot that goes into that job. Basically you are in charge— you with your boss or you with your soldier, whomever's in charge— are in charge directly for the commander of your units property book and property book is basically— it consists of every piece of equipment that that unit has. And a commander. Your commander, your captain is signed for all of that. So your job is to make sure everything is there, anything that's not there is accounted for on some type of supporting document. You have to just compare the books and scrub it. It's kind of like a logistics accountant per se sometimes but then the other hand you have to make sure you guys are all set for the training exercises, make sure you order everything they need, make sure you have enough of what they need on hand, coordinate with different units, different Battalion staff-people to get training event, land secure. I mean if there's a lot that goes into that, plus all sorts of different tasks that come down from higher's wants. It's quite a bit. It's a pretty busy job.

CC: Is that what you imagined The Army would be like when you first enlisted?

MW: No, no. When I had went to the recruiter with my father, I had went to go infantry. I went to my recruiter first without my dad when I was 17. We were just talking and I told him I want to go infantry, which is one of the easiest jobs to get into, no discredit to them, it is just easy to get into. You don't need as high line scores, etc. So I went back and told my dad like this what I want to do, this is what I wanted to do but that he went with me to the recruiter and kind of blind sided me and told him that he wouldn't sign the waiver for me to enlist if I didn't get a different

job. It was very frustrating for me. So I thought my military career was going to be just infantry stuff, grunt stuff. Just kicking in doors. That, I think, that's what a lot of people going in want or think, [but it was a] very different experience. I got to do a lot of that training, but at my job, it just consumed every piece of me when I was at work.

CC: So when you describe your deployment, you mentioned providing air missile defense from the terrorist group, PKK. Could you just sort of expand on that a little maybe describe what your deployment was like?

MW: Deployment was all right. It was— it was a pretty interesting experience, I think. Being a logistics person, you get attached to every different type of unit. So, when I was overseas I was with 88, the Air Defense Artillery Unit and then in Hawaii with 25th. I was with a combat engineer unit. In Turkey, however, we were about 10 kilometers or so away from the Syrian border on this Turkish tanker FOB. This tanker base was pretty cool. But again, our mission was just to make sure that no missiles coming— that were being shot from Syria into Syria came over the border and affected the city of two point something million people. I think my deployment was really good for the first six months because I had volunteered for it and I wanted to get at least one under my belt before I had gone out. I had planned at that point to get out of the army after three years. I was just like I'll just do three get out, but I want to deploy. So overseas, my first six months was nice. Got into bodybuilding, which was a lot of fun. I really learned my job overseas— 'cause I had only been in the Army for a year prior and my first unit, I hadn't learned as much about my job— no one's fault, but I just wasn't trained enough in my unit to do my job well. So when I got overseas we landed in Incirlik, which is an Air Force Base, a Turkish and US jointly-owned Air Force Base. It was really interesting because I was with Battalion S4 at this time. It's Battalion S4 [that] oversees all of the other units that kind of fall under that Battalion and the supply guys make sure they're good to go, their EXOs [military performance personnel], etcetera. So I was there for a month. I was doing battalion stuff which was quite a bit trying to prep all the vehicles that were coming through customs, coming from the US overseas, and I got pulled from S4 to be Bravo battery supply sergeant as a PFC [Private First Class]. So that rank that is slotted for is an E6 and I was an E3 so it's three pay grades above what I was— that was huge! That was crazy! I was not ready for that at all, man. I didn't know what the hell I was doing. But I had an old commander who was fantastic, Captain Demback, who is now captain or Major Melson. She taught me everything. Everything I needed to know. Which is really cool because she sat there with me and really walked me through the steps and it was cool that a commander knew so much about this job, which is good because the command Supply discipline program for the military to the Army is a Commander's program. I don't know that too many of them know in depth about that. They just entrust their EXOs, the supply guys to take care of it, but it might be the commander that's familiar with that's really really good. But she— she taught me everything, and that was a hard adjustment. Trying to be live, doing my job for a whole unit when I was just like a peon in my first unit, because my Supply Sergeant did everything and I just kind of watched. So having to hit the ground running while we were just establishing our talks and everything on this forward site was rough, but from that point on I felt it's great.

CC: So you mentioned that Major Melson, was it?

MW: Yeah,

CC: So, she was familiar with the people under the jobs they were doing?

MW: Yeah.

CC: Do you think that's rare?

MW: No. No, I don't think that it's rare for the commander to know the job requirements of each individual in her— in that person's unit. I think you have to know, because if you don't, if you're just a commander and you just don't know what your guys are doing, then this is chaos. Then there's no order. How are you going to lead people if you don't even know what they're supposed to be doing, you know? I think that she in particular— and I've had plenty, I've had two or three commanders who I would have done anything for— because they just understood. They knew. But she in particular was phenomenal, by far one of the best I ever had because I didn't want someone to baby me. You know? That's not what the military's about. You don't baby people. You have to teach them, you lead them, you mentor them, train them, and she was able to do that in such an effective way that I trusted her and she trusted me enough to where we gave each other enough rope to make things happen with, you know? And then when she had left we did a change of command in-country; and then Captain Jones came over and he— I had already been pretty spun up to speed at that point, but then he and I both together just hit the ground running and just made moves because I was the only logistics guy for Bravo Battery at the time. So it was pretty intense.

CC: So in Turkey, did you interact with locals much? Either Turkish or even Syrian if you were so close to the border?

MW: Not so much with locals. There was Turkish soldiers on this base we were on, so with them, yes. We had them for like, we have interpreters, we have just guards that were just manning the post because it was their base. We were just kind of on it. I got pretty close with some of the guys who used to run around the site's, the attack sites. I have a patch from him, I gave him one of mine, he give me one of his, and it sounds like a stupid small momento, but it was a pretty cool thing we had. I had learned—not enough to walk around the city— but I had learned enough Turkish to be able to communicate with this gentleman. Young. I think he's like twenty one, twenty two. But in Turkey they have mandatory service, so everybody goes. I think if you're going to college, you plan to go to college just to be in for two to four years. But if you're not going to college, you're only doing your mandatory time, it's one or two. And this particular gentleman was doing college. So he was in for quite a while longer, but the locals were pretty cool. Those Turkish soldiers were awesome. They were really good to us.

CC: Sort of switching gears— As a country, I think we often view the military and politics as linked, even if it's not that simple. Did you feel this way when you enlisted, served, and now that you're out? Do you see that sort of politics, or just like invading sort of in the military?

MW: That's tough. I think— I think yes, but I will say this— when you're in the military, if you don't allow yourself to be susceptible to political things, political talk then you're not going to

know what the hell's going on in politics. There is a lot of politics in the military. There has always been. Do I think there's some more now that are affecting soldiers? Yes. Could I pinpoint exactly what those are? No. I personally, when I was in, I didn't pay much attention to the politics because, for example, with the President of the United States he is your Commander in Chief and it doesn't matter what's said or what's done you do what is said or what is there to be done, and there's no— there's no choice. So in my opinion, it is good, yes, to have a political view and be on whichever side of the fence you want to be on but when you're in the military, in some respects you don't get to choose. You just do. So, do I think politics run the military? Think they're interfering? Yes. But to what extent? I am not sure. I never really involve myself with that.

CC: The media definitely plays a role in that. What is something that you think the media got right while you were serving? And something that the media got wrong? Just sort of about the military maybe in general?

MW: It's an interesting question. Honestly, I don't really know how to answer that. I think the media covers what they're going to cover. I think that they talk about what they're going to talk about. There really wasn't much talk at all about, for example, my mission when I was overseas. I like to think it was a pretty important mission. I do. But other than just local military news and stuff, it was— it was a pretty down low mission. Whether it means the mission was a little bit more secretive. I don't think it was. It wasn't any type of classified level that we weren't able to talk about it once we were there or what, but I mean, I think that there's just not a lot of coverage on the military from the media anyway. None that should be covered. I don't think that there's enough of the right things, the things that should be covered that are put out on the air. You see a lot of the stuff about tragic accidents, which should be talked about, but there's not enough good. I don't think there's enough recognition for our guys or they're doing enough. You know? So that's how I feel about that.

CC: What do you think some of those good things are that you wish that they do talk about?

MW: I think we see it typically more so on like Facebook and social media. But when something happens and soldiers go missing like all these World War II and Vietnam vets and the POWs [Prisoners of War] that are found overseas all over the place. They find their remains and bring them home. That's something you should talk about, because that gives families peace of mind, you know what I mean? It gives them rest. That's an honor to bring those guys home, to be able to bring them home, that's huge and the country owes those guys. Maybe, maybe, owes isn't the right word, but in my opinion the country owes those guys the respect and that spotlight. Whether they're here or not, they did something that ultimately ended up in them not being able to come home to their families in one piece. So to have a spotlight on people like that. I think some of these guys that do incredible, heroic things when they're overseas. I think that is something that should be spotlighted more. Obviously, there's scenarios where you're not going to be able to— you're not allowed to, but if it allows, you know? I think there absolutely should be something. The heroic acts, the sacrifice. It really is just the bad things, the tragic things that happened that are on the news and it kind of puts a terrifying image in the military. Like if you serve, you'll die, you know? Which is not the case. There's plenty of jobs, plenty of things you

can do that, you're not going to be in a combat situation like that. I don't know, man. They just kind of shape it how they want it to and there's not much I can do about that, unfortunately.

CC: Looking back on your time in the Army. Is there anything you would change about your service? If you could?

MW: If I could change anything. I don't know, man. I think that the good things that happen in the military for me were great and very beneficial, but the bad things that happened to me were very eventful, but I learned a lot from them. I never got like any UCMJ [Uniform Code of Military Justice] action. I never got Article 15s [punishing misconduct through judicial proceedings]. I may have gotten a couple negative counseling statements for stupid shit throughout the years but never anything crazy. I think if I had the opportunity to go back, if I had to go back, I would have tried to change my units around a little bit. I'd want to try to spend more time with my unit in Hawaii than in Oklahoma. I don't know. I don't think there's much I would have changed. And by no means was I the perfect soldier. I was a pretty just regular Joe, you know? Just trying really hard at my job. But I don't know that I would change much. I maybe would have changed just trying to measure up with my buddies that when we were all, you know, lifting and doing PT [Physical Therapy], when I hurt myself which ultimately results in me getting out of the military. I may have changed that, not been so big headed. But other than that, no, I had a lot of good times in the military. A lot of bad times. But I mean overall it's part of the job, you know? So.

CC: Do you want to talk about that injury that you mentioned at all?

MW: Sure. So it was in 2012; I had finished training and I had finished my AIT [Advanced Individual] training, and I had gotten stationed in Fort Sill, Oklahoma, which I had hoped I would never go back to. And I was doing PT one morning with my unit and we were benching and we're doing decline and I had done a couple of reps and on my third rep down my shoulder snapped out of place, and I was able to rack it back up. I don't know if it was the grace of God or just because, whatever. And it killed for a week and I didn't lift. I didn't do anything. I didn't push myself. I just kind of let it be. After the week it stopped hurting so I continue to lift. At this point I had figured out we're deploying. I was still lifting and throughout my whole deployment I just lifted. And, with the guys I was deployed with, these guys were animals, you know? We would be at the gym for two to three hours a night from like 10 o'clock until midnight to one in the morning. Whatever, whatever time we got to do that. And we would all try to push each other to lift more, to be bigger. It was just crazy, just a bunch of testosterone trying to push you and make you this monster. With that though any pain you felt you didn't think about because you didn't want to be the smaller guy. And with the guys, if they ever hear this they'll know exactly who I'm talking about. We just didn't want to be the smallest dude. You know? So we kept pushing. The pain got worse and worse and worse in my left shoulder and I got home from deployment, we redeployed and I was doing push-ups one day and my shoulder snapped. I almost broke my nose. I just fell on my face. It was the craziest thing ever. And from that point on I had these huge issues. I couldn't I couldn't do push-ups. I couldn't do pull-ups. I couldn't carry certain weight on it. I mean, it sucked, man. I couldn't shoot prone. I mean, there's just my soldiering was basically taking away because of this, I don't know, being big-headed. I don't know. But I got to Hawaii. In Oklahoma they couldn't figure out what the hell is wrong with me.

They couldn't determine what it was. I got to Hawaii and this major there had realized that it was a torn labrum. I had a lot of cartilage deterioration that she said my shoulder had looked like I had been a major league pitcher for like 15 years, which I only played the t-ball when I was a kid, you know? So like it wasn't anything like that and I'm a righty, it was my left shoulder that was the one in question, so we did a surgery which I had hoped would be fine. Then they decided to put me into some crazy intensity Physical Therapy which worsened my shoulder. It didn't recover from it— it got worse. I could barely ride my motorcycle. I mean it was awful. So I was then presented with a few options, the first one being that I had to pretend nothing's wrong with my shoulders. Because I couldn't do [a] PT test. I couldn't pass anything. I couldn't do more than like five push-ups without excruciating pain, and I'm all for pushing through pain, But when your body physically will not do it because something's going to explode. No way. Just no way. So three options. The first one was to pretend nothing happened and just kind of keep soldiering on, which didn't make sense, but I couldn't do that. My shoulder needed attention. Second one was [to] just stick [it] out— I was at about five years and eight months at this point— stick out my last two to three years. It was really two years, because I was going to do eight years. That's what I reenlisted for— another five [years] on top of my three— just stick it out the last two and then get out after eight years, which means I have my unit deployed. I couldn't deploy. I was useless. I was not combat-ready at all, because it was just awful— and the third one was get out now, take a paycheck and, you know, get some disability, and then go to school and just call it quits. It took me thirty days, maybe even longer, to figure out what I wanted to do because I had planned on doing life. I planned [on] twenty-plus years— that's what I wanted to do. So, to have those options presented to you was kind of impossible to choose, but I talked to my mentors, military and civilian. I talked [to] my parents, my wife at the time, everybody, everybody— friends, people that had no idea about what the military was— I just talked to everybody, and all of their answers came to the last option which was, “Get out, take the medical discharge. It's an honorable discharge. Go to school, and try to better yourself”, which was tough. I wasn't ready for that— and people throughout their careers are always going to have times just like anything else— being a professor, being a student, where you don't want to do that anymore. But, at the end of the day, you wake up and then you have a regular, normal day, and you're like, “Dude, this is incredible”, the opportunity to be able to do this. So, everyone's got good days, bad days. If I could go back and do it again, I wouldn't have hurt my shoulder. If I had any say in that, absolutely not. I'd still be in.

CC: So, what did you do following the end of your service in the days or weeks immediately after? I mean, it must've been kind of a shock to you.

MW: Yeah, coming home from the military— that transition was something I was not prepared for. That's something I like talking about a lot, because I don't feel like there's enough talk about it. When I came home, I was married, and I was getting honorably discharged for my shoulder— it was a really abrupt thing. I made the decision, and I was out in 60 days, and I had to get my whole house packed— my car, [my] bike shipped— everything, just shipped, running around, clearing post. So, when I finally got home, we had thirty days. We didn't have any of our household goods, and I didn't have my car for about a week and a half when I got home, so we had nothing. We were living with my ex-wife's mother, which was nice to be able to have that type of transition point, so we weren't just out without a paycheck trying to rent somewhere. So we got home, and, thankfully, the first thirty days were okay. They're pretty alright, because the

most leave you'll take in the military's about thirty days. It's the most I've ever heard of someone taking outside of if you have maternity leave or something. So, anyway, that first thirty days [were] kind of cool, [I was] just kind of relaxing, visiting friends, visiting family, catching up on things I hadn't done in years. And after that thirty days, I think, is when I started having problems. I was running around getting all my car stuff squared away. We got our household goods. I was trying to get just everything back to normal. I had signed up, or, I guess you can call it 'signed up' for school— for Salem State. I got accepted- trying to go through orientation here, which is a whole other story for a whole other time- it was crazy [CC laughs]. It was hard, and, to be honest, I can't pinpoint what made it very hard. I was an alcoholic. I absolutely was drinking very heavily every day. I was having a really, really rough time, and then I ended up divorcing my wife of six years. So, [that] on top of trying to figure out what my purpose in life was after the military, and trying to figure out how the hell I was going to blend into a school of eighteen-year-old kids, and how I was going to try to shut off the military from my life, was rough. Very rough. I don't even know how to explain that feeling, man. I was not prepared- because, in the military, you have structure, you have a sense of purpose, and you have direction, and you know what you're supposed to do all the time. If you don't know, someone knows, and all your guys— you just make it work. When you get home, you're on your own, man, you're just—. It's just you and the world— that's it. You've got your family, yes, but in your head, it's you and the world. You don't have your brothers that you were with for years. I mean, you eat, sleep, shit, everything with these group of people, and then you just— they disappear, and they're still there, most of the time, at different bases- but you're home, you're not with them. You can keep in touch with them, and it's good as a grounding support, but it's hard when you don't have that sense of purpose that— the military, in my opinion, is the biggest sense of purpose you can have. You're doing something way above yourself, way above anything you could do outside of the military, you're just—. That feeling is incredible. Then, coming home, you're like, *oh, I'm not in anymore-* or you'll wake up and you'll get ready to go, and you'll start packing your bags. I did that like six times. I'd wake up [because] I thought my leave was over— I'd pack all my bags and it'd be like, "let's go", and I was like, *oh wait, I'm out*. That was a really weird adjustment. And I don't even know if I'm picking these points that I wanted to, because it's—. When you're asked about that transition, everybody's going to be different, and what makes it hard is going to be different for everybody. But, there are main points within that transition coming home that make it very hard. I did a lot of writing and I wish I had brought some of my material with me because I really captured, creatively, some of those feelings, some of those experiences that I have gone through, which are really valuable, in my opinion— but that transition is hard. I don't even know what the drinking did, or helped with— nothing, really. It was just a really hard year. My first year home was really hard. Really hard.

CC: So, you said you expected a life career in the military, but it didn't happen, so you decided on Salem State and [it] seems like you made that decision relatively quickly. What made you think [about] school, college?

MW: So, to the military, most of the time if you're—. If you do three years consecutive service honorably, you have access to the GI Bill, whether it's Montgomery or post-9/11. So, I had the opportunity to do that— and they get taught [to] you when you get out and [they say], "hey, this is

some things you can use as resources, go to school, use this and this is what you get". I wanted, lowkey, to just jump right into work. I didn't know what I was going to do still, just like I was in high school. I didn't know I had these incredible, translatable skills from my job in the Army, because I was [in] logistics— and I had an opportunity from Raytheon when I first got home to go [to] work, but I had been encouraged by mentors of mine that, "School would be the best bet, and that the job offer from such an incredible company would be available to you if you had a degree, maybe even more so than just now". So, college, to me—. Getting paid to go to school, tuition [being] paid for it made sense. I chose Salem State because both my parents were alumni here; they both obtained one of their degrees from Salem. It was close to home, by the time I was living at my house in Beverly, [it] just made sense. I decided to work for this Mercedes-Benz dealership part-time, and over the summers and long breaks, so I had something to do [and] make a little bit of extra money. But school seemed to be the most sensible thing for me when I got home.

CC: After leaving the army, have you noticed any habits or thought structures that you've carried back with you from the military that you just can't shake?

MW: Yeah. Well, I guess if this falls into that question, a certain man, growing up—. I was very, in my opinion, very polite. My parents had incredible manners. I mean, they are angels, my parents. And they always taught us, you know, it's going to be "Mr. and Mrs. whomever your friend's last name is", or whatever the case— you're always addressing adults and people respectfully, appropriately. So, I still, to this day, call my friends' parents 'Mr.' And 'Mrs.' when everyone else calls them by their first name. In the military, though, I come home, and at work I call everybody 'sir', 'ma'am', which— 'ma'am' gets me in some trouble sometimes, because I feel like when you—. Some people, when you call them 'ma'am', they take it as like you're calling them old [or] it's like "respectfully, you're old", which isn't the case. So... *[laughing]* I want to clear that up— if you're called 'ma'am,' it's a respect thing, and if it comes from a guy in the military, or a man in general, it's not because you're old— it's a respect thing. I think something else for me [is] I'm always checking my time. Everything has to be on time in the military. You have to be 10 minutes early to everything, and I'm legit 10 minutes early to everything. I have to be. If I'm not, I freak out. I legit get anxiety. It's terrible, weird— just goofy. What else— I mean, there's plenty, man. My language is pretty colorful— and you go from being in a combat unit with a bunch of crazy, but incredible, people. You learn a whole new dictionary of words, which are not necessarily acceptable all the time. But those words tend to... *[chuckling]* our hope is, you know, the best. And I think, for me, a problem that I'm having is sleep, so— as was pointed out, that I definitely was a little bit late to class this morning. I don't sleep very well. I think, for me, that part of that is [when I was] in the military, I would maybe sleep three to four hours a night, and then I was up at 4:30-5AM to go to PT [Physical Therapy]. So, I think, even though I've been out now for about two years, my sleep is still pretty reflective of that, because that was a thing for six years, every day. So, my sleep, definitely— that schedule carried over, which sometimes can affect my class schedule. My 8:00 AMs, they're rough. I think, also, my way of— actually, as my girlfriend had just put this to me recently— my way of thinking around death is very different. I sympathize— I have sympathy, of course I have sympathy. I'd like to think I'm a really caring person, but when someone passes away, I am not as an emotional wreck [*'wreck' said while making an air quote gesture*] as people would expect someone to be when something like that happens. So, my sister passed away in August of 2015—

CC: I'm sorry.

MW: Yeah, thank you— from a heroin overdose, actually, and that was rough. I was pretty jacked up from that. However, it was like the first notification— when I first heard, I was stationed in Hawaii at the time, and she lived in the area [local to Beverly]— when I first heard that [it had] happened from my mom, I was in shock. It's my sister, for Christ's sake, I'm going to be in shock. And I was upset— I think I may have cried once just from the initial shock, but I wasn't—. It makes me sound, well, crazy, man— but I wasn't out of my head upset. So, I got home, I came home on emergency leave, I saw my parents— and the way I manage that type of emotion is I pretend it didn't happen. So, I came home and my parents were— and my dad's the strongest guy I ever met in my life, emotionally, physically, everything, he's just strong. My mom was upset. My dad was upset. My brother and I, at that point, weren't really talking— he was upset. So that was hard, but I just - and maybe it's because I've always been the oldest kid in the family, I got to try to be strong. I was a soldier for Christ's sake. I got to be strong— I can't be broken. But when I was at the wake for my sister, I walked inside— so, before the wake actually started to the public, it was 3:30-4 o'clock to the start of the wake. I walked inside, and I walked up to where the casket room was where she— my sister— we had an open casket for 30 minutes for the family, then closed for the public per se— but I walked up to that room, and I looked in, and then something just shut off in my brain, and I felt that it was— it was my brain, my heart, whatever the hell it was, man. It was the most awkward, sketchy thing. I just turned around and I started pacing. I paced for 30 minutes— that remaining 30 minutes from 3:30 to 4:00PM, before those doors opened, I was pacing. My dad had to come and drag me in there to say my good-byes or whatever, and it wasn't until I saw her— maybe it was [because] I didn't want to see her. I think there was a sense of maybe just unrelated to the military, just doubt that it even happened, disbelief that it happened— *it's your sister*. But, after that point, after I said my goodbyes and did my thing, I was in line at the wake— I completely had no idea what was going on, I just— I was— everyone's like, "I'm so sorry", I was like "Yeah, it's great to see you, man". Yeah, I was super chipper, it was crazy. So, one of our friends have recently committed suicide and it's sad, it's very sad— I just don't know how to show that to people anymore. I can't— I'll get upset watching a movie sometimes. If it's a war movie, and there's a brother and a dad and they have a moment, brother and dad moment, that's huge for me, son-dad moments— but death— I lost a lot of friends when I was in the military, and in the military you don't get a year to mourn, you get a couple minutes. And some of my infantry guys that have lost friends, Afghanistan, Iraq— when that happens and that's it, that's it— you say a little prayer in your head real quick and then say you move on. You kind of adjusted to that, because you can't— then you get other people killed. If you're sitting there crying in the battlefield, you're— what use are you? None. And your boy wouldn't want to see you like that. So, over the years, I think I just shut off that part of me, which is weird. So, I would say that that was from the service— a trait that I carried home. So that was an interesting one, for sure.

CC: Do you think maybe other veterans have similar experiences?

MW: Yeah. I know some guys, quite a few people that just kind of shut off death. They're not fazed, and I wouldn't— and we're not monsters, we're not robots, but when you're trained, and brought up a certain way, and you're meant to be strong, but who's stronger than the military

guys? Nobody. That's a huge stigma and that's a different thing. But the vision of the military is, "Who is stronger than the military? Nobody". Superman, but Superman ain't real. Soldiers are Supermen. Marines are Supermen. Maybe it's just not wanting to be weak, not showing weakness— because if your guys see you're weak, maybe you feel like they'll judge you or think of you differently, which isn't going to be the case, because those guys are— those are your family. I don't know, man. I just think that I'm definitely not the only one. I know I'm not the only one that has kind of shut off death, and I think you'd be surprised if you asked veterans how many of them felt that way, how many people [would] say yes, so.

CC: Speaking just on veterans in general— are you involved in the veteran community or in any organizations?

MW: Not so much directly. I have helped out with a couple of the Veterans Day/Memorial Day events in Beverly, kind of just because I was there and I was— I just asked for some— they asked for assistance and I helped. I am very close with the guys through the SPO [?] on campus. They are very good friends of mine. We've done more things in the past for vets, the community, writing groups, etcetera— but as far as a direct hand in anything linking to vets, I'm not actively engaged in any of that now.

CC: Okay. So, as a veteran you might commonly hear, "Thank you for your service". Is there anything that you wish civilians might say to you that isn't that, maybe [that] they might ask you?

MW: It's an interesting question. All my veteran buddies would have a couple cents for this. I know I don't— I think that when people say it, they mean it genuinely, and they just want to legitimately just thank you for what you've done. I think that, sometimes, it can become a lot. It's kind of awkward sometimes when someone's like, "Thank you for your service". You're like, *what am I supposed to do, man?* [laughing] "All right, cool. Thank you". But 'thank you' for what? So, I've learned over the years of— [I'm] just saying, "Thank you for your support". I leave it at that, because then it's awkward— it's really awkward, because then there's— you're just kind of looking at each other and it's— well, anyway, your bill, I mean, it's just weird to say. I think that some people I know get upset when someone says, "Thank you for your service"— not upset, more mad. I don't understand that, really. I'm not looking for attention, I'm—, you know what I mean? I don't go out and be like, "I'm a vet, thank me for my service." That's not what I'm doing. I don't think anybody does, that's weird. But, I think that civilians, they just—. Not everybody thanks you. Some people may want to, but they just don't speak up. Some people just may not care. But, I think that people actually do take the time to thank a veteran for their service. I think really— it is a meaningful thing, but just understand, to the civilians, that sometimes we might not know how to respond, and the response you get may not be what you were expecting, but it's just— the kind of weird— it's hard to answer, I suppose. So.

CC: What would you say to a young person today that's thinking about enlisting? Is there any advice you would give them that you wish you had gotten before you enlisted?

MW: Yeah, I think the biggest one that I'll stick with is that— do your research on the branch and what job you want. I obviously wanted to go in as infantry and now it's— wanted to shoot shit and

blow shit up, that's what I want to do. But, I'm very fortunate and very appreciative of my father for helping me find a job, and pushing me to find a job that had translatable skills getting out, because I don't know what other job [it] would be comparative to, but if you go into the military as something that has no type of translatable skill to the civilian world— because [your time in] the military will end one day, [whether it] is three years, six years, 30 years— it will end, and when that ends you're going to need skills outside of just leadership to be able to work, and it's not always the case that just because you're a veteran you're going to get a job. Unfortunately, not all society looks like that. If you don't have any experience getting out, you're going to have a hard time finding a job. So, yes, infantry's cool, and the guys [that] are in infantry will— they'll bleed blue until the day they die, but at the end of the time, end of the day, man, it's—. I think if you were a young person looking to get into the military— do your research, figure out what interests you, and then what your already goal was for a future job. See if you can't find something that [it is] relatable to in the military that you can just use when you get out. That's just setting yourself up for success. That's it.

CC: What's it like from your experience being a veteran at Salem State?

MW: It's alright. I think that there's an adequate amount of support on campus for vets. However, when I say that, I mean specifically through the VSO [Veterans' Student Organization] and then the first year seminar for student veterans. I think that people outside of those organizations and people outside of those faculty members are not as able, or trained, or, I guess, just experienced enough to really deal with veterans— and, we're not aliens, I mean, we're not crazy, but we're older, and we're a different breed of animal, and we're just a different breed of people, that's it. I think that the people that they do have on campus, though, in particular— the gentleman who oversees this whole project, do an incredible job when they know how to deal with veterans, because it makes it so easy for us to be in a class, and having vets all in the same class together is huge. And it's a huge, huge success for the transition process for veterans, because you're with guys and gals that have done what you've done, and you're in the civilian world now, and you're in a college institution that is a very different— well, to say that we [are] in a different way than what we do in the military most of the time, but when you get to be surrounded by professors and students who are vets or who know vets, it just— it makes you feel more comfortable, and makes you feel like you can do school, and that's my opinion. And I share that with a lot of the gentlemen that I had met, actually, in the student veterans group on campus here at Salem State my first year, is that it— yeah, I do think that Salem state has a good veterans program. I think they do a good job.

CC: What are your plans after you graduate from Salem?

MW: Oh man, I don't know. [*smiles nervously*] I still don't know.

CC: It's a big question.

MW: I know it's a huge question. I've kind of narrowed it down, and my parents help me try to figure it out. They said, "Pick three things that you really love doing". One of them is— I love talking, I love people, and I love helping people. So, there's a lot of jobs that fall under those categories, but I don't know if that's really what I want to do. I don't know. Real estate really

interests me. I'd love to start my own business. I'd love to get into commercial real estate, investing, ownership, entrepreneurial based studies really, really interest me. I think that modern-day millionaires now are just entrepreneurs, man, and they just kind of step off the beaten path from what society expects of you and just make it, they figure it out. It's not easy, but I think that that, as a veteran, is something that we do anyway, you kind of— being in the military, you're off the beaten path, you're kicking through jungles, you're doing whatever you're doing through the mountains, and you got to figure out your way. So, I think after school, that's what I'll do. I'm getting a business degree. It's a plan. So, I'll just take that and kind of use it as a blanket to help me get to where I— wherever that is I go.

CC: So, this will be the final question.

MW: Sure.

CC: Is there anything that you want to say that we didn't touch on in the interview? Anything you wish we had touched on?

MW: [*long pause*]. No, I think it was really well-rounded. I think the questions [were] really good. I think it was in-depth enough. I think that if I had to put a special emphasis on anything, it would be the transition process for vets coming home. I really don't think that there is enough literature or enough advice for vets coming home, because that transition's different for everybody. But, I think that veterans returning home need to just be ready for that, and be really open-minded, because that— we go into it with a single mind that we've had for years, and it is completely different from anything we've done— and some people argue, “Well, you were home before, for 18 years— you're just playing. It can't be that hard”, but try doing military for six years, active, consecutively— and then being thrown back into [a] society that aren't military. That's— nothing, nothing can prepare you for that— but you've got to keep an open mind and just be willing to learn, I guess— and I think I didn't allow myself to be open-minded. I was very just against everybody and anything that wasn't the way I thought, because what I thought was right, and what I thought I knew was what I was taught in the military, but I think this— just try to figure out an easy— and talk to each other. Just resource, network, try to figure out what helps other people transition out because that— when that time comes— it's going to come fast. There's a lot you have to put into place to make it happen, but that would be the only thing, is the transition out.

CC: Thank you so much for lending your time today.

MW: Thank you for interviewing me.