Collective Cadence

This page intentionally left blank

Anderson, Glenn 13
Andrews, Elias 16
Armstrong, Curtis 21
Barnes, Shawna 24
Bates, Rob 26
Belin, Eric 27
Belin, Karena 32
Brito, Jorge 36
Carp 39
Chain, Eric 42
Cimoli, Gordon 44
Davis, Brandon 52
Dietz, Alicia 57
Geisel, Richard 64
George 69
Grisham, Glenn 74

A

Halter, Scott 77
Hawkins, Russel Scott 80
Jennifer Belin 83
J 86
Kilgore, Billy 87
Anonymous 91
Marcus 98
Martin, Amy 102
McCarthy, Michael 111
Mendez, Rudy 113
Molly B 118
Morford, Z 120
Peter 123

A

Powers, Matt 128
Reitano, Jerry 130
Secosky, Sindie 133
Shaffer, Penny 136
Shaul, Jonathan 139
Startwout, Arthur 142
Stefanie Cimoli 143
Sutton, Brian 148
Tamba, Folleh 150
Taylor, John 153
Ulmer, John 158
Vikki Pier 162
Wu, Mihcael 165
Anonymous 166

A

Anyonymous 170
Delia, Michael 171
Dietz, Ron 178
Leigh Boulineau 180
McConnell, D 182
Mitchell, Melvin 189
Ross, Stephen 194
Stephenson, Tim 196

AB

Chappell, David 199
Garvin, Stephen 203
Hunt, Maire 211
Hutmacher, Clay 213
Miller, Jayson 216
Park, Jeff 220
Phil 221
Solis, Rafael 223
Thelma Crosby Perkinson 224
Underwood, Bibb 226
Verronica 232
Wells, Robbie 234

B

A., Alyssa 240
Alliman, Perry 243
Antonucci, Sean 245
Arndt, Lori 247
Baranowsky, Mark 250
Belin, George 255
Betts, Guy 258
Burnett, Tab 261
Bush, Spencer 264
Butler, Michael 266
Callahan, Michael 270
Comptson, Brett 273
Franks, Pete 276
Gilkes, Sally 278
Hanson, Jody 281
Harris, Rodney 284
Harritan, Randy 290
Huggins, Molly 298

Jeanette 302
Johnson, Hans 305
Jones, Keith M. 310
Kathleen B. 313
Kathpal, Madeera 315
Keel, David 317
Killilea, Ed 321
Kruper Peck, Samantha 324
Kucera, Chuck 329
Leon-Guerrero, Anthony 332
Lindgren, Bradley 335
Lockhart, Jesse W. 337
McKnight, Brian 344
McNulty, Keelan 346
Miller, J 351
Morris, David 353
Nazario, Waldemar 355

Purser, Nicholas 356
Ring, Jake 360
Ripley, Stormy 364
Ruhlen, Terry 373
Simmons, Edward 379
Smith, T 382
Stokley, Michael 384
Strasser, Jennifer 387
Sullivan, Kevin 391
Tedder, Steven 396
Threatt, Robert 414
Treece, Richelle 419
Twomey, Patrick 421
Vos, John 422
Webb, Philip 427
Wietting, Jonathan 430
Wilson, Matt 431
Woodward, David 434
Yousif, Evan 437

This page intentionally left blank

A

A

Anderson, Glenn
U.S. Army
Major
Commander, UH-60 Blackhawk Pilot
1992-present
A NEG

When I was given the opportunity to stand up the Army's first Gray Eagle Unmanned Aerial Systems (UAS) unit there were many challenges. Our higher headquarters deployed shortly after we began to stand the unit up, we were given only two offices and not any storage space at all, and 90% of our Soldiers were first term enlistee's. Another issue was that as a newly fielded capability, not a single Soldier had experience on the system.

Soldiers by nature have a "can-do" attitude and it did not matter how young they or inexperienced these Soldiers were, every time they were given a task, they found a way to make it happen. They found storage space, fielded and maintained 46 vehicles and 36 trailers, executed 20 ranges, while simultaneously conducting split based operations between Fort Hood, Texas and Edwards Air Force base for eight months. At Edwards Air Force Base, they fielded and maintained 12 Gray Eagle aircraft,

and five ground control stations with all of their required associated equipment. After the train up was complete these Soldiers packed everything up from both locations and shipped out to Afghanistan where they were able to get this capability up and running within three weeks.

Some of the other things that these Soldiers did was, conduct the best Christmas party in the Brigade, flew four simultaneous aircraft for the first time in program history, executed four back to back National Training Center rotations, and set the standard for all future Gray Eagle units to follow.

It is amazing, that Soldiers with less than two years in the Army were able to do so much with so little. The military provides an environment where it does not matter where you come from or what your life was like before you entered the service. When you enter the military your slate is clean and the sky is the limit. Many of these Soldiers are now standing up the Army's newest Gray Eagle units, have become Officers or Warrant Officers, and others have gone on to civilian careers. What has stayed with all of us is the very special unit that we had that was able to accomplish so much. It was the greatest honor of my life to Command these phenomenal Soldiers. Looking

back it was crazy how this brief period of my life will always play a part in defining my life and military experience.

Andrews, Elias
U.S. Army
Specialist
Aviation Flight Operations
1007-2013
A POS

In Egypt, I was the NCOIC Non-commissioned Officer In Charge of the South Camp FOC Flight Operation Center. Before our new commander's first visit to South Camp, I was very wary of her as you can never tell if the Incoming commander is a 3 month Ranger or not. A 3-month Ranger being some one that is over the top about every detail of the unit and how we must all change to fit vision they had for OCR during their tour. Then after 3 months, they start listing to the unit as a whole and everything mellows out. I can gladly say this was not in the cards or stars for my commander.

I remember from our first interaction that she was a commander that I would be a better soldier and human being for of knowing. Our story starts off in the FOC in south camp when the platoon leader walked in from down the hall where his office was located. The walls of the building were made of cheap plastic painted a pale yellow. The walls chipping at

every contact point reviling untreated drywall. From a time before safety and standards existed. The floor was made from loose poorly placed cheap linoleum nailed into the ground with carpentry nails. The story amid the Aviation Company was that Jesus himself nailed the floor down during his ventures into the desert. There were sofas lining the walls of the passenger terminal in front of my desk.

My desk was a shifty construct of plywood painted dark brown with leaflets under Plexiglas. Behind the desk were radio tables with flight dispatch regulations on it. I was propped up against the radio table when the platoon leader walked into the office. He told me that the commander wanted to get the whole of the unit down to south camp for a much need company party. The toll the riots have taken on the mass majority of service members was evident. Even for the soldier with deployment patches, it was beginning to seep into their souls or at least what soul a lot of us had left. The years of constant deployments for the active army seemed endless and if you were lucky enough to get an assignment like Egypt or Honduras for peace-keeping details and missions. Though that is not our destiny in Egypt, it was meant to be an easy gig. Due to the unrest of the Egyptian people the tour was actually quite violent.

When our commander asks for a favor, I spare no expense for giving my company my extended family what they need. For at the end of the day, we are all brothers and sisters with a special bound of suffrages and successes. When one of us are wounded, we all bleed, but I digress.

When the commander asks for a favor, I deliver bottom line. So when the company party was going to be head in south camp enlisted bar a stone's throw from the red sea with a backdrop of Tiaran Island. The view I knew all too well as I used to wake up every day at day-break to watch the sun rise. I knew this party would need to be big it was time for the NOMADS to let of some serious steam. I enlisted a soldier know as Big K he handled the DJ spot of the enlisted bar and I knew this would be a task best set for him.

He handled it with style what we lacked for supply was handled with creativity. We had a backdrop that was just a white sheet he used a projector to play music video the system was bumping. I was in charge of getting the drinks and food and worked closely with the pilots and MEDeVac crew to set up the venue. I spent the morning before talking to the Hungarian military police about it to make sure we

would be skipped during their patrols, after all no one polices up our troops better than we do. After tha,t I despaired into the secret pirate cave where the signature drink the Rum Runner Baby was made before it was outlawed by the military for it unstoppable power of proof. I made enough for the whole company of nomads into the sacred order of the Rum Runners.

The company party is a go. I repeat, the company party is a go. The whole company went to the café in a NOMAD heard turning head left and right so fast it gave the rotating National Guard Support Battalion whiplash. South Camp had never seen so many astute professionals in one place at one time.

The company was rolling 75 soldiers deep. The commander addressed the company letting them know that we worked hard all though the riots and that our work never goes unnoticed. That we are NOMADS more than just a unit we are a fighting family that provides the flight despite of the night for the ongoing fight. But as we work hard it important to take time to enjoy yourself when the time warrants it.

Then the music hit and everyone danced all through the night I remember even the commander stepping

behind the bar to serve up drinks to her NOMADS because after all she is our Commander and all of this was made possible because she takes care of her people and for that every soldier that as had the fortune and privilege of serving under her. Ma'am you did well, and this drink is in your name.

Armstrong, Curtis
U.S. Army
Major
Commander, CH-47 Chinook Pilot
1989-present
A POS

I went to Basic training on 12 July 1989. About 250 of us left reception station at Fort McClellan, Alabama and made our way to Charlie Company, 40th MP BN. Upon our gracious reception by our Drill Sergeants, we were efficiently, politely, and gently seated in our company training area to receive a briefing from our Company Commander. She was so kind. After welcoming our presence on the beautiful installation she laid out a couple of rules. 1) We would be treated with dignity and respect and 2) There would be no cursing allowed in the unit. She then introduced the person in charge of ensuring we would receive appropriate care, our 1SG. He stood up and said a lot, but I only remember his opening comment "Privates, you WILL was your nasty fucking asses." LESSON LEARNED: Figure out who is in charge, early.

Also at Basic Training, my battle buddy at Basic Training and AIT was a black guy from Biloxi, Mississippi. When I say he was black, I mean BLACK!

He asked me on day one if I would take the top bunk because he "was scared of heights". Anyhow, we had a great relationship building over the months that we had at training. He swore "he would have my back". Evidently, he learned that someone had talked bad about me behind my back and he told them, "When we get home tonight, I am going to punch you in the nose" (PVT Mortenson had a HUGE nose), and sure enough, some 15 hours later, when we returned from training, Donald laid the guy out. My battle buddy and I went on to have some of the best conversations regarding race and prejudice that I have ever had. I think we both educated one another. Unfortunately, Mortensen was killed by a drunk driver after he returned from Desert Storm. He was driving home from Fort Riley to see his parents.

I was blessed to be stationed in Alaska and made the most amazing friends. During the spring, summer, and fall, four of us would go out after work and cut firewood. One day we would fill my truck, one day the next guys truck, etc. Working together had nothing to do with our Army job, but everything to do with providing for our families and the communal effort that living in a harsh climate required. I still talk to Steve, Bill, and Scott regularly. Damn good men.

I was at work on November 4, 2003 and learned that there had been a Chinook shot down in Iraq. I had only been out of flight school for a year or so but I felt the need to ask "are the names released". Brandon stores said, "no, but it probably isn't anyone we know, one of the guys was a LT from the Illinois National Guard". My response was immediate. "I went to flight school with the ONLY LT that was a Chinook pilot from Illinois." I called Aimee and told her that Brian had been killed (he was a stick buddy for several flights of mine in the UH-1 course). She said that the names weren't released and I was probably wrong.

The next day, his face appeared on TV and my daughter said, (very enthusiastically) "Daddy, we know that guy!" And that is when it began. The days of constant memory of friends that I would lose and the need to explain to my family why having people over to our house and getting to know them is so important. Getting to know their parents, understanding what makes them tick, learning their goals and dreams. All of that is what makes our lives matter.

Barnes, Shawna N.M.
U.S. Army
Specialist
Combat Medic
2007-2011
A POS

Unfortunately, I was not blessed to have been assigned to a decent unit in the Army. Leadership was poor. This was especially evident when we deployed to Iraq at only 50% strength. We had our good times, but unfortunately, the salty memories out weigh the sweet.

It was half way through our deployment and I'd had a seizure where I ended up hitting my head on my foot locker. I came to, saw the gash on my forehead, and took myself to the aid station. While the cut was being looked at and we were trying to decide if I needed stitches or to just glue it shut, we were mortared...resulting in a MasCal.

Despite our differences and me being shunned because I'd started having seizures while deployed, when it came to taking care of business and our patients, we were a smooth operating machine. We could have 4-5 medics plus the doc working over a

patient, then evac would come and take the patient to the Medevac. When it came to doing our job, nothing was more important than ensuring our the patient in front of us had the best care possible and that we did our very best to make sure they would live to see another day.

Bates, Rob
U.S. Marine Corps
Lance Corporal
Infantry Squad Leader
2001-2005, 2008-2012
A POS

In the winter of 2012, I was an embedded combat artist for a nationally syndicated radio show called, "The Story with Dick Gordon" with American Public Media. My purpose for this trip was to document the troop drawdown in Afghanistan. I met the subject of my artwork, an American Contractor, in FOB Geronimo in Helmand, Afghanistan.

I never caught his name, even though I wish I had. He was sighting in at an unspecified object/person as I was chatting with him. He, like most other contractors, was prior service and had spent time in either Iraq or Afghanistan.

To me, the war seemed much different than the one I set foot in two other times during my active duty enlistments. It definitely felt like a drawdown.

Belin, Eric
U.S. Navy
Captain
Dermatologist
1994-present
A POS

I am not a hero. I never have been and probably never will be. When I am approached by a well-meaning civilian who says, "Thank you for service," I smile and thank them for their gratitude; but inside, I cringe just a bit. I am a dermatologist. I don't carry a weapon. I have not deployed to a combat zone nor endured the myriad emotions that must certainly arise when going into battle. I have not made my family to endure months, or even years, of painful separation, with limited communication or perhaps none at all, causing them to fear for my very survival. No, the real heroes are those in the combat arms who pick up a weapon and say "Follow me!" The real heroes are those who will never have the opportunity to tell their story on a forum such as this, having made the ultimate sacrifice to allow me to write mine.

However, although I have not performed the traditional role associated with a member of the Armed Forces, I have contributed to the overall

mission and have sufficient experiences to identify with that lonely feeling that often sets members of the military apart from the very society that they are sworn to protect . . . a chasm which only continues to grow:

"For nearly two generations, no American has been obligated to join up, and few do. Less than 0.5 percent of the population serves in the armed forces, compared with more than 12 percent during World War II. Even fewer of the privileged and powerful shoulder arms. In 1975, 70 percent of members of Congress had some military service; today, just 20 percent do, and only a handful of their children are in uniform.

In sharp contrast, so many officers have sons and daughters serving that they speak, with pride and anxiety, about war as a "family business." Here are the makings of a self-perpetuating military caste, sharply segregated from the larger society and with its enlisted ranks disproportionately recruited from the disadvantaged. History suggests that such scenarios don't end well." - The New York Times. May 26, 2013. The Opinion Pages by Karl Eikenberry and David Kennedy.

"Family business" indeed. With a father, brother, and sister who are all retired military officers, that is quite apropos.

In the Navy, I have been to 25 different countries, survived an 8.0 magnitude earthquake in Peru, and seen the utter despair and loss of human dignity in Haiti. I met the president of Bolivia while having a drink at a bar. I have served as the personal dermatologist to the President of the United States, 5 of 9 Supreme Court justices, about 1/5 of Congress, John Glenn, the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, the Chief of Naval Operations, a 26 week old premature baby, and the last living Buffalo Soldier (Mark Matthews) at the age of 109. I have jumped out of airplanes (just a 5 jump chump . . . but at least not a dirty, rotten, filthy leg), learned to fly the UH-1N and the AH-1 helicopters, and fired the .50 Cal out of the back of a Huey (all while yelling "Get some!" of course). I have water skied with the Crown Prince of Norway behind a 120' torpedo boat and swam in the Arctic Ocean (that felt really good). I have been north of the Arctic Circle, south of the Equator, east of the Greenwich Meridian, and transited the Panama Canal. And believe me when I tell you that there is a story behind each of those stories.

Yet, what makes each of those amazing and seemingly disparate events actually quite similar is the one thread that runs through all of them . . . the people. Quickly following the gratitude and excitement of being selected for O6 was the sad and sobering realization that I had attained my terminal rank and in the blink of an eye, would be retiring from this team that is so unlike any other. Having done what I have listed above, how exactly am I supposed to simply "turn that off" and now drive 4.7 miles one way each day to my civilian dermatology office, Monday through Friday, for the next 30 years?

I tend to view my entire career through the prism of a single collective event – a shared experience in which people from incongruent backgrounds join together to be a part of something bigger than themselves, a rare sentiment in our current society. General Mark Welsh, in his address to the cadets at the US Air Force Academy on November 1st, 2011, captured the essence of this when he said, "Every now and then, remind yourself about why you're here, why you're really here, why you wear these things (uniforms). You're joining the professional arms. Your job will be an ugly one . . . There's nothing glorious about it. There's nothing cool about it. It's ugly . . . but somebody's got to be good at it." I am blessed to

have worked with many people who are good at it.

The military provides a shared common experience that allows complete strangers to come together and function as a cohesive unit. Seeing someone wearing the cloth of our nation, in my mind, gives them instant credibility and allows me to know certain things about them without ever speaking a word. It is that silent, shared experience that I will miss most about being a part of this august group. However, it is indeed ironic that it is that same sense of loss that will be one of my most cherished emotions, as it signifies that for a time, I was fortunate enough to be part of a team so unique and special that 99.5% of my fellow Americans will never experience it.

Belin, Karena M.
U.S. Navy
Commander, Navy Nurse
1982-2007
A POS

By early afternoon it was pitch black outside, except for the eerie red-orange flashes that periodically streaked through the sky. The heavens rumbled. The earth shook; approximately every 90 seconds, for hours. Sometimes it was violent enough to move items off shelves, other times only enough to make you aware that something wasn't right. And what wasn't right was what was coming out of the sky.

Pumice. Sand. Water. Ash.

It was June 15, 1991. Mt. Pinatubo was erupting in the Philippine Islands. And Typhoon Diding was there, an uninvited muse, along with the annual monsoon rains, to add insult to injury.

I was a young Navy Nurse stationed at the Subic Bay Naval Hospital in Cubi Point. Though the volcano had been erupting for days, it was the presence of the typhoon that shifted the wind and blew Pinatubo's spew over our base. Two natural disasters happening

at the exact same time. The Filipinos adeptly called it a "calamity." For us in the military, it was callously referred to as a "cluster fuck."

Hours of ash, sand, and pumice fell, mixed with copious amount of rain, and quickly amounted to the semblance of wet concrete being poured over EVERYTHING. In the acute stage, roads became impassable for all but 4 wheel drive vehicles. Power lines went down, trees toppled, and roofs collapsed under the massive weight of our earth's saturated viscera. Of course, people were under those roofs.

All medical personal were summoned to the hospital. Though I've never worked as a civilian nurse, I can only imagine that what was happening within the hospital during this crisis was no different than what happens in any hospital during such an event. Protocols are in place. Triage begins. Staff report to their work areas & begin to care for patients. Paperwork becomes irrelevant as long as the patients are being treated.

With inches of wet sand and rock now covering the hospital roof, it was also in danger of collapsing. However, there was no SOP (standard operating procedure) in place to delineate who should or how

to clear the roof of a concrete-like substance. Though many staff were present, there clearly was not enough manpower to be able to complete the job AND care for our patients. Being a military command, we knew who to call. Who do we always call when we have a dirty job, need someone in and out fast, and want it done without question? The U.S. Marines.

Within the hour of our request, not only could we hear the heavy boot steps and scratching shovel slides of those young men, but along with their saving work in those harsh elements came a sound as sweet as my baby's first cries. And as it began to reverberate throughout our halls, people stopped, stared in disbelief, then smiled in recognition of a shared comradery. Those Marines, in their strong, deep voices, were singing cadences and hymns. It kept them in rhythm. It kept them moving. It kept them motivated. It was what they did to make a miserable situation more tolerable.

Anyone who has ever served in the military has at one time or another sung a cadence. Whether enlisted or officer, man or woman, it is what we do when marching in a group from one area to another or when running during PT (physical training). At this time though, it was unexpected and startling. It was

uplifting. It immediately reminded us of who we were, where we had come from, and that we were part of something much bigger than the moment we were in. We were the United States Navy. Our forefathers had been through war. Our brothers and sisters were currently in war. And we were going to get through this just fine. Though strangers to us, we knew those Marines were going to take care of us, and by golly, should they need us, we were going to take care of them. Those were our brothers on that roof.

Brito, Jorge
Columbian Army
Private
Cavalry, Interpreter
2009-2011
A POS

1 de Marzo de 1988, esta es la fecha en que nací; 6 de Junio de 2009, este es el día que fui reclutado por el ejército de Colombia; sí, yo no apliqué para unirme el ejército, yo ni siquiera quería unirme al ejército, pero, verán, servir al ejército por al menos un año es obligatorio aquí en Colombia debido al conflicto con las FARC; de las cuales estoy seguro que ya han escuchado, ahora, realmente no puedo decir si esto fue lo mejor o lo peor que me pasó, es cierto que al unirme al ejército gané muchas habilidades que han sido muy importantes y útiles en vida actual; también tuve que experimentar muchas cosas que no le deseo a nadie, como ver a varios de mis amigos mutilados o muertos en combate; pero bueno, no voy a hablar de las cosas malas aquí, mejor hablemos de las cosas buenas.

Entonces, fui reclutado el 6 de Junio de 2009 en Bogotá DC. La capital de Colombia, mi país de origen. Para esos días yo me encontraba visitando la ciudad

por primera vez; en realidad vivía en Barranquilla, una ciudad ubicada en la costa norte del país, así que fui llevado al batallón y se me entregó mi primer uniforme.

Luego de terminar los peores días de mi vida, hablo de mis días de entrenamiento y después de pasas algún tiempo en la selva donde todas las cosas malas tuvieron lugar; finalmente fui transferido de una unidad operacional a una educacional donde se me fue comisionado el puesto de Instructor, esto fue en realidad por un período de tiempo muy corto pero lo disfruté muchísimo, por primera vez en meses tenía una cama para dormir, buena comida para alimentarme y lo mejor de todo, agua caliente.

Después de desempeñarme como instructor de Ingles para el ejército, fui transferido una vez más a otra unidad, pero esta vez ubicada en la Península del Sinaí, Egipto. Hablo del Batallón Colombia N° 3; es aquí donde toda la aventura comenzó, ahora con una nueva misión sobre mis hombros y con la ayuda de otros 7 muchachos que compartían mi misma posición, estábamos encargados de asistir a los soldados Colombianos con todas las otras personas de otros países no hispano hablantes. También pude conocer muchas otras personas de muchos otros

países, personas con las cuales aun converso, aun después de todo este tiempo.

Luego de terminar mi servicio militar, regresé a Colombia, me reuní con mi esposa, que para ese momento era aun mi novia, terminé radicándome en Bogotá, aprendí Portugués y ahora trabajo con Intel; la compañía de hardware para computadoras.

Sinceramente pienso que no sería el mismo hoy si no hubiera tenido la experiencia de servir a mi país, hoy siento que soy una mejor persona y le doy un gran valor a los momentos que comparto con mi familia, eso será lo único que siempre tendremos.

Carp
U.S. Army
Major
Transportation Platoon Leader
1996-preset
A POS

It was my second deployment to Iraq (OIF III), and I was serving as a transportation platoon leader in a POL truck company out of Fort Campbell. My platoon, 2nd Platoon "Ruff Ryderz" was experienced as they had went through a lot of "stuff" during OIF I, so most knew what they were doing. Our mission was to transport fuel, and I can say that no one was better at it than this group of Soldiers.

One night, we were ordered to conduct a resupply to Camp Rustimayah, which is on the south eastern side of Baghdad. Our route would take us from Taji via MSR Tampa onto MSR Pluto, and then right into the camp. I would ride in my HMMWV with my driver and gunner, and everyone else would be in a 5-Ton, either hooked up to a 5K tanker, or running bobtail in order to serve as one of the gun trucks.

We left that night, once it was dark, and started movement. All things were quiet on MSR Tampa,

and had no issues getting onto Pluto. Shortly after crossing the bridge, that went over Tampa, an IED went off directly in the two o'clock position of my vehicle. It was very loud and my ears were ringing, smoke was everyone, but from what I could tell everyone was okay. My driver had stopped our vehicle, which in turn caused the rest of the convoy to come to a halt. For a few seconds I was disoriented and unsure what to do, which is when I heard my platoon sergeant, come onto the radio and yell, "let's get the f-ck out of here", which is exactly what we did. Everyone called in their SALUTE reports, and miraculously, all were fine. Even though I say miraculously, I believe that then, and every time it happened afterwards, that God was protecting us.

The platoon arrived at Camp Rustimayah and were able to download our fuel, regroup, and get back on the road. The ride home was quiet and uneventful, which was always a blessing when traveling in Iraq.

My platoon sergeant, SSG Robert "Big E" Ellis, and I became inseparable after that night. His quick response most likely prevented any further damages or injuries, and help me get through my few seconds of being "dazed and confused." Our team never failed a mission during that rotation, nor did we lose anyone

due to life, limb, or eyesight, and to this day (10 years later) I can honestly say that I have never had the honor to serve with such an awesome group of individuals.

SSG Ellis asked me to promote him to SFC a few years later, and I jumped at the opportunity. He has since retired, but we are constantly in touch and I consider him to be family, as there is not a thing in this world that I wouldn't do for him or his family.

Chain, Eric J.
U.S. Army
Chief Warrant Officer 3
UC-35 (Cessna) Aircraft Cmdr, BN Movement Cmdr
1997-present
A NEG

His father's story...

Based on all my learning and experience in this life
19 years old and ready for action
I thought of being a doctor
I contemplated deeply and searched my inner conscious
for almost an hour –
Fuck it!
I'll join the Navy

Another Naval air station right in the middle
of another fucking desert

Let me explain first
We pictured it all
but we didn't think of that
It never crossed our minds
Little did we know
No wonder the Greeks never

win wars with this shit under their belt
That was my first experience
with alcohol and trouble
but far from my last

Cimoli, Gordon J.
U.S. Army
Chief Warrant Officer 4
UH60 Blackhawk Instructor Pilot
1988-2014
A POS

From the journal entry dated: Saturday, November 22, 2003
Balad Air Base, Iraq

I think today counted as another one of those once in a lifetime days...

My morning began with waking up at 6am. Today's mission was to fly the Personal Security Detachment (PSD) for General Abizaid, the US Central Command Commander. We would take the PSD to the places that the General will visit soon.

It was another cool morning–57 degrees. As usual it was clear with no clouds in the sky. We were a flight of two UH-60A Blackhawks. We briefed the mission and split up to accomplish our separate tasks necessary for taking off at 8:25. We began preflight and half way through it we discovered that the directional control valve that routes fire

extinguishing agent to either the #1 engine or the APU compartments was broken. It spun freely. We immediately scramble to find another aircraft which means waking everyone else up to see what we have available. SFC Harris comes out and decides to give us another aircraft. We move all our stuff, set the aircraft up and then preflight again. As it turned out, the other aircraft was having some troubles as well. The cold weather has been playing havoc on the hydraulic seals on the aircraft. They mopped up the fluid, refilled the reservoirs and we continued to work through these issues. We took off about 20 minutes late. We had 3 passengers who we were dropping off in Baghdad and then we would pick up the PSD and continue.

I was flying with Phil Pillittere and our crew chiefs were Chris Robinson and Kenneth Martin. In the other aircraft: CPT Hester, CPT Karkalik, SPC Young and SPC Buchanan from Bravo Company. Due to the recent Surface to Air Missile (SAM) threat, we have been flying much lower and much faster than we have over the past 6 months. I guess you could say our flying style has come full circle: in the beginning of the war we flew low and fast; somewhere in the middle we slowed down a bit because we now had the doors off. Later on, we began flying high...

thousands of feet high so we could fly direct to our destinations and save time in the aircraft where it was extremely hot. Then came the SAM's...and suddenly everyone was convinced, once again, that flying low and fast was our best defense. On any given day, there we are, flying at 50 feet off the ground avoiding towns, wires, huge flocks of migrating birds all while avoiding the other aircraft and maintaining some sort of formation. The workload is much greater than when flying at a moderate altitude. You are constantly searching for hazards to your flight path and calling out possible threats as you do so.

So (as most B.S. aviator stories begin), no shit, there we were. It was just after 9am. Our two aircraft were approaching Baghdad from the north to land in one of the "Sea world" landing zones (LZ's). The sun was shining bright and the flight was proceeding as planned, albeit 20 minutes late. We were making up time due to the speeds we were flying at. I was scanning the area and noticed a funny looking streak of smoke in the air to our 12 o'clock. It was a few miles away. I pointed it out to the other crewmembers and we talked about it for a few seconds but didn't really think much of it. The streak was very linear but then had a screwy twist and then started out in another direction, almost 90 degrees to

the original path. It was about 5,000 feet in the air and in the direction we were flying so it was very easy to keep it insight. I soon noticed another streak, a very thin one, come out of the original along with a small flash or glint of something metallic.

We continued inbound to Baghdad. At this time, we heard radio traffic on the "Sheriff" frequency. That frequency is used as a common net for convoy traffic to get help when needed. We monitor it whenever we have a free radio. We were out of range of one of the radios transmitting and could only hear one side of the conversation but it certainly sounded like someone on the ground was talking about receiving fire and that they needed help. We listened in just in case they needed our help. At the same time as the Sheriff frequency got busy, we heard Baghdad tower talking to an aircraft apparently in distress.

As we listened to Baghdad tower, I looked to the smoke streak and clearly saw an aircraft with a HUGE flaming trail behind it. This aircraft was over the airport at 5,000 feet or so and was leaving a large smoke trail behind it as it flew. The fire trail was huge. It looked like the Space Shuttle re-entering the atmosphere. As we listened to tower, we were given instructions to hold outside the airspace due to an

emergency in progress. We then heard the Sheriff frequency again. This time we could hear both sides of the transmission. Someone was saying that they witnessed two SAM launches and were enroute to the area.

At that point, it all came together. What we saw was not any old emergency; it was an aircraft getting attacked by at least one surface to air missile! We all realized this at the same time and our hearts sunk out of fear for our own safety and certainly fear for what would happen to the aircraft that we saw in the air trailing flames as it descended. We listened to both radios intently trying to gather any information we could. We were ready to provide assistance in the event that the aircraft did not make it to the airport. Everyone was extremely calm and cooperative. Tower cleared the airspace. An Apache was providing visual assistance to the pilot of the attacked aircraft. After a few more minutes, 2 search and rescue aircraft from the Air Force were running and waiting to provide assistance.

Everyone was there to help. Tower had coordinated all the crash and rescue services to help this aircraft. The pilot spoke with a Middle Eastern accent but was easily understood. He said that he thought his aircraft

was struck by something and that it was now on fire. He requested to land at the airport and to have help there when he landed. He continued to descend but said he was having issues with the flight controls or hydraulics and would need more time to descend, turn and line up on final for the runway. We continued to orbit at 50' outside of the immediate vicinity of the airport. It seemed like everyone on the ground was looking to shoot us down so we all scanned intently while also watching the emergency aircraft. The flame would disappear then reappear as he turned the aircraft. Everything seemed to be well under control. The pilot was still calm and at one point told the tower, "No more talking now." He continued to descend. Tower advised him that his landing gear was down but his reply indicated that it was not showing the same indication within his cockpit. He called back to tower to ask if his aircraft was still smoking and/or on fire. Tower responded that they could not tell but the Apache, who was now hovering and facing the aircraft could clearly see and responded, "You are still on fire and still smoking from the left wingtip." The pilot confirmed that he was on fire and continued.

Then there was silence. We could not see the aircraft because of how low we were, but within a few minutes, tower cleared us to continue inbound.

We could see a huge billowing smoke cloud on the runway where the aircraft just landed. From what we could gather in the ensuing transmissions, there was only one person injured. We could see the aircraft on the end of the runway with many emergency vehicles around it. CPT Hester commented that it looked like a civilian DHL aircraft.

We were cleared inbound and landed at our pad, dropped off the personnel and picked up the PSD. We took off, heading south. As we flew, we heard the Sheriff frequency talking about a grid for one of the launch sites. We wrote it down, put it into our GPS and found that it was only 4.1 kilometers away to our front. We announced this to the lead aircraft with a suggested immediate turn to the left. We stayed low and fast and quickly moved out of the area. Whew.

Our first destination was Babylon. We landed there at 10am. While waiting for fuel, I pulled out my map and plotted the grid that we were given for the SAM launch. With the other crew members gathered around, I pulled out my protractor and put the pencil to the map. Our mouths dropped when we saw the location of the launch site. It was on our route of flight, at our first checkpoint out of Sea World! We could not believe it so we plotted it again. Yep. We

were correct the first time. The launch site was within the square that we draw on the map to represent our start point...directly on our course line. We recounted our steps and original time lines and quickly realized that, had we been on time this morning, we would have been passing over that point at the same time the launch occurred. We firmly believe that because of our revisited tactics of flying low and fast, we would not have been shot at but it would certainly have made a much more interesting story to tell for sure!

The experience definitely reminded us of the danger we face here...it is real but we are doing great things to counter the threats.

Davis, Brandon S.
U.S. Army
Captain
Foreign Area Officer, UH-60 Blackhawk Pilot
2006-present
A POS

After nearly 10 years of active duty military service, I quickly realized that I have never been specifically asked to provide a story about my service. After sitting and reflecting on the last 10 years of my life as it pertains to my involvement in the profession of arms, I immediately visualized dozens of faces, which whizzed through my consciousness as a collective memory.

After thinking further as to why each of these faces were streaming through my mind, the stories that accompanied them became clear. I can recall specific instances while piloting the UH-60 Blackhawk helicopter with my crew in Alaska, Tennessee, Iraq, and Afghanistan which will stay with me forever, be it a frightening or exultant experience. I can recall the day-to-day and extraordinary happenings while serving as a platoon leader in Alaska and Iraq as well as a company commander in Tennessee and Afghanistan. If I sit quietly and ponder my career thus

far, I can remember my fellow Soldiers and I planning countless missions, spending months and years away from families, and wondering if we would ever make it home to see them.

However, when I initially reflected on this project, I first saw their faces and not the stories. The stories that seared their names, personalities, families, professional abilities, and quirks in my memory forever were secondary to the individuals themselves. It was the experience that formed our relationship, but it was the people who formed my story. I can say that along with my family and closest friends, the individuals with whom I shared those experiences have shaped me as a professional and as a man.

Every significant milestone in my career has a name and a face associated with it. These people took a concerted effort to shape me as a leader, as a pilot, and as a man. I fear it may not a full representation of the relationships that have been forged in these 10 years of service, but I will share one story that can highlight this collective memory of individuals that I have.

I arrived to Ft. Wainwright, Alaska as a young and fresh lieutenant straight out of flight school. I

learned the basics of flight at Ft. Rucker, Alabama and could maneuver a helicopter without crashing in the most perfect of conditions and without any mechanical, human, or environmental error. When I arrived, I encountered an older (to me at the time) gentleman in the rank of Chief Warrant Officer Four, whom I outranked only officially. He was my platoon maintenance officer, who was charged with ensuring the airworthiness and maintenance of the 8 Blackhawk helicopters, which were assigned to the unit.

This gentleman who was on the verge of retirement and had no reason to look upon this young Lieutenant became one of the most instrumental individuals in my career and my life. I would venture to say that he still does not understand the magnitude with which he affected my life as a man and an officer in the military. He showed me everything he knew and made a point to ensure that he was there for me whenever I was faced with a decision or issue.

One such instance occurred while deployed to Iraq where I learned one of the greatest lessons of my life from this man. While flying on a mission together on a dark night, we were transporting a full helicopter of passengers to a forward operating base, located to

the south of Baghdad. I had been flying on night shift for some time now and felt fairly comfortable flying in the cool evenings under night vision goggle aid. I was a newly christened Pilot-in-Command and my mentor agreed to act as my "co-pilot" for the flight. He was clearly more senior in the aviation world and had thousands more hours flying this aircraft than myself. As we approached the objective, my "co-pilot" checked our aircraft performance data and prepared the aircraft for landing.

I initiated my approach to the landing area, but I quickly realized that I had started my descent too late and still had a lot of altitude to lose prior to the landing zone. My inexperience told me that I had to land the aircraft, so I began to descend rapidly and almost vertically. My heart was racing and unfortunately, this was a warmer night than most and we were full of passengers, making our engines perform poorly and our helicopter very heavy.

I continued my descent and rapidly increased our power, until there was no more power to grasp. I then knew that I was in big trouble and was expecting the worst. Just when I nearly lost control of our whining beast, my mentor lightly assisted me on the flight controls and got us out of the situation. When we

circled back and finally landed, I looked over at him and saw a glowing green eye behind his night vision goggles and he simply said, “you learned a valuable lesson tonight.” I never forgot that evening for the rest of my flying career and this is but one example of the influence this one man had in my career and life, but it is still his face that I see first, not the story.

Dietz, Alicia
U.S. Army
Major
Commander, Blackhawk Maintenance Test Pilot
2001-2011
A POS

When I was in Egypt, we had an aircraft whose engine kept giving us fits. It was a normal mission transporting troops to outposts. We made several runs that day and were on our last trip back. My crew of 4 had 4 Columbian Infantry passengers, none of whom spoke English. The engine went out.

We did an emergency landing on a small paved road in the middle of the Egyptian desert slightly wider than the span of the landing wheels. I could not have done that landing without the coordination between my crew calling out the sand dune obstacles that got larger and larger as we descended, monitoring the instruments, the wires, and the width of the "road." It was truly a team effort getting the aircraft on the ground.

Yet, it was after the landing that really exemplified the idea of team that I so dearly miss. Without hesitation, the Columbians hopped out of the aircraft

and, through all non-verbal communication, followed the lead of our crew to set up a perimeter around the aircraft. It wasn't the hostile environment of Iraq or Afghanistan, but this was during the time of the Egyptian Revolution and security was always a concern, especially around a large aircraft. My crew would relieve the Columbian soldiers so they could take a break and get water under the shade of the Blackhawk. Our crew surveyed the area, taking note of distances and all obstacles that would be in our way after we off-loaded all excess weight onto the recovery aircraft so that we could do a rolling take-off to get back to base. The Columbians were watching our back every step of the way. There was just something that happened between the 8 of us out there that day. We became one single unit, even without any verbal communication.

There is nothing extraordinary about that experience. But the actions of those 7 soldiers that day is forever imprinted on my mind. We came together, trusted each other, and worked as a team. We united under a single mission and accomplished it. This is just one example of the idea of community that I experienced many, many times in my decade in the Army, and something that I have not experienced since I left.

And so I wrote this in my seach for that community...

It was clear blue and 22.
You couldn't describe it any other way.
A decade of flying forced you to become
a novice meteorologist,
to pay attention to moon cycles,
sunrise, and sunset.
To EENT and cloud ceilings.
That a small differential between
temperature and dew point
caused fog.
That winds at altitude
affect your burn rate.

Even now,
four years later,
and probably forty after that,
you note the position of the moon
and know that it will be 15 degrees lower in an hour.
And the underside faces of leaves.
Drive past a flag,
or even –
ironically, a windsock,
and determine which direction you would have landed.

But you're on four wheels now,

not three.
The only thing overtop you is a worn-out canvas –
a bikini top –
that covers only the front seats.

And this top flaps in the wind.
Passive.
Affected by the wind.
Not active.
Not affecting the wind.
Not working in unison with three others
to produce lift.
These wheels,
they stay on the ground.

Leaves and twigs,
remnants of rain water and splashes of mud
are your passengers in the back.
Even the maple's occasional propeller seeds
come along for the ride –
and you chuckle at the irony.

You can only fit two people in the back –
the back of that beauty
of your '95 red
Jeep Wrangler.
Not the 11 that you could in that mammoth –

the back of that beauty
of your ’88 OD green
UH-60A.

Now, you can pick up two friends
and go where your hearts desire.
Spend all day along the river
or in a museum.
Then you idly chat over drinks at a restaurant patio
and drop them back off
at home again.

Like those before
that you flew along the river
or overtop a museum.
That you,
not so idly,
chatted with over the intercom
and dropped back off
at home again.

Yet too,
unlike those before.
Those who you dropped off
with their rucks fully loaded,
with their radios and medical kits,
rations and munitions.

That you dropped off
with their maps and bibles

Unlike those before.
Those who you dropped off
never to pick up again.

It's been hard for you.
Hard to find two people,
even two,
to fill the void where those 11 sat before.
Maybe because you weren't even trying.
Maybe because it was easier –
easier to close the door,
zip up the sides,
chock the wheels,
and let the battery die over the winter.

But when the seasons changed,
when the earth tilted to once again
enjoy the company of the sun,
you knew it was time.
So you brushed off that bikini top,
and unzipped the sides.
You welcomed the company
of the leaves and the twigs
And those little propeller seeds.

And you went for a ride.

The breeze brushed up against your face
and you put your hand out,
cupping it up and down
forming that airfoil that would fly.
The same airfoil you formed
in the backseat at the age of five
without a care.
Not a single one.
Now you formed it as a way to let those cares
spread their wings.
To fly a little farther away.

Up ahead you see another Jeep,
And as you pass, he gives you a wave.
You wave back, and smile.
And sink in the warmth and comfort
and let it wrap around you.
And know that you are part of a community.

A community different from the one before.
But one that will wave
and welcome you.
As long as you pull out of the driveway
and go for a ride.

Geisel, Richard H.
U.S. Army
Staff Sergeant
Infantry Pointman
1969-1970
A POS

A break in the routine was coming. I had been working 7124 for months. Just think of it, new clothes, hair cut, regular hours, majestic sunrises, palm trees, gourmet meals, single man about town ready to howl at the moon.

I had been transferred from leading a hunt and destroy squad to nurse-maiding a platoon of armored personnel carriers. They were having down time at the base but the Captain assigned me to base security. I had to carryon, they had the vacation and I just kept patrolling.

Some vacation. Instead of walking point now I have a 3-man team walking out the gates of the support base. This Shangri-La in the middle of rice paddies forming waves with the wind, herds of water buffalo grazing silently and buffalo dung. Buffalo dung everywhere, especially in my nostrils. Every time I hear the virtues of organic I smell the dung and see

the fields being organically prepared for someone's table.

For 8 months my life had been a world of silence, listening for sounds not in my hearing frequency. I have no doubt my ears are growing larger. Rustle of leaves, limbs out of joint, ants marching across dry leaves, voices and the piercing sound of silence. It's hard for me to believe, but yes, I can hear ants.

Picking my steps through the bush became a ballet of movement; my sounds could not become a disguise of the sound of danger. Sounds used to be beautiful and I would search for them. Now sounds are my enemy. I search deeper and longer for them. My ears hurt. I must hear something, but it is better not to hear anything. It is dangerous to hear and not to hear. Silence; there was no silence. The men talked and screamed trying to be heard above the diesel engines. The metal tracks clanged along the earth, shaking it, cutting into it and chewing up all under the metal. The men made no attempt to be a shadow. They wore their APC's as vests; they were invincible. One RPG destroyed my invincibility. I couldn't be a larger target if it were a clown with a bouquet of rainbow balloons in a one-ring circus. The stealth hunter had become visible. I am going to die with these clowns if I don't

get control.

My job was to search and destroy, kill people, silently and efficiently. I was in total control. There were no discussions, no committee meetings; an order had regurgitated from the unseen inner sanctum, move the pawn; my life had changed.

All the kings, queens, knights and bishops are in their castle. Starched uniforms, needle point insignias, three hot squares a day and air conditioning. Move some more pawns. There are no people out there just gooks. Gooks and pawns. My men are not pawns. The only duty I have is to keep them alive. Standing orders can't trump the moral imperative.

I am not a pawn. I am a human being.

There was no moon and the stars were a blanket across the sky. There were stars in the States but not the same stars that light your way as in Vietnam. These are a cold white, larger more brilliant. The terrain was barren with a few tree stubbles. I had a clear field of fire. In the daytime the rules of engagement were different than at night. Nighttime was a free fire zone. I had always lived in free fire zones, day and night. Now the rules change.

The rumbling in my stomach reminds me, will I be able to get control, adjust to the new paradigm and, are my men going to be safe? There are no schools, no training only "on the job training". These are hard lessons and men die and men are to blame.

My world is upside down; vulgar noise, penetrating light, naked visibility, all plotting to castrate my skills.

We get to the coordinates and I radio in we are in our position.

Surveying across the field of stubbles and ruts there is movement, but they're not moving forward. A million heart beats, the night creeps on, hour after hour. What's going on? Do something. Movement as wheat swaying in the wind, taunting. To get a better view I raise up from my position. One figure gets taller. What are they doing? Must be scouts for the main body. I inch back to my position and my nemesis gets smaller. He must see me. I slowly raise my arm and wave it. My nemesis also waves. What?

I had never seen the enemy before, at least not until he was prone. A claymore would go off, a trip flare was hit, rustling grass, scrapping leaves, all sounds of the coming ambush.

Those are our shadows projected out in the field. We're lit up like ducks in a shooting gallery; see the ducks, shoot the ducks.

My men are safe this time; my skills have yet to be tested. I have never lost a man but this is a new game.

George
U.S. Army
Lieutenant Colonel
Aviator and Latin American FAO
1988-2012
A POS

I had been in for around 5 years. I had had a terrific but busy first assignment stationed in Hawaii, then came back to Mother Rucker for the Captain's Career Course. Although we requested Ft. Campbell, we were told that there were no slots available for UH-60 captains there (what??!!), so we were given our second choice of Savannah, Georgia.

When we arrived, I was assigned as the Aviation Brigade Assistant S-3 – yeah, one of the most thankless jobs that I could imagine for a young captain. On top of that, I was working for a real hard charger. Typically, our days started at 0600 for PT and ended around 1830 or 1900. I remember feeling guilty leaving much earlier than that. To make matters worse, Savannah was over-strength Blackhawk captains (way to go Assignments Officer!). To add insult to injury, at the time there was only one Blackhawk company in the division. I was far down on the order of merit list for command since I was the new guy, and my

aspirations to command a Blackhawk line company looked like a pipe dream. Needless to say, this was not a very happy time for me.

It was at this point that I considered getting out when my military obligation would be over in a year. I even gathered the appropriate forms that I needed to send to Department of the Army to let them know my intentions (yes, before the internet). But, we were so busy at work that I really didn't get around to filling them out. We were busy preparing for a trip to the National Training Center out in the desert of California – the entire brigade was going – so when we weren't in the field setting up tents and practicing 24 hour operations, we were doing drills and exercises after regular duty hours to prepare. I was dreading the trip and told my wife that when I came back from our month in the desert, I'd take the time and fill out the paper work so we could start preparing for life after the military. But first, I had to wait until the cloud of NTC was lifted.

Then a funny thing happened. I went to NTC and changed my mind. Most nights I hardly slept at all, days would pass where the only time I stepped out of the Tactical Operations Center (TOC) was to go to the bathroom and stuff some food down my throat, and

yet I knew I wasn't ready to leave the military.

The work was thankless, grueling, monotonous, and never ending. Yet, I felt a sense of purpose. I was a cog in the wheel but I was a cog, just like my buddies working alongside of me, that was making a difference and that others were counting on. I surrounded by others working hard as well as really talented leaders. They pushed us – harder than I wanted to be pushed at the time – but they were good. We were good.

If ever there was a unit that I wanted to serve with when it really mattered, it was this one. And I was just an assistant brigade S-3. These were extremely talented people who could obviously be successful in the civilian world making more money and working less but here they were, working right alongside me, breathing in the dust, hardly eating or sleeping, and rarely showering because they felt the calling too.

Two other factors influenced my decision to stay. I had recently talked to a good friend of mine from high school who was now a pharmacist. He was making great money and not sleeping on the ground eating meals that came out of brown plastic. But, as I mulled over in my mind what I would do as a civilian, I

just couldn't come to grips with the idea of doing the same thing for the next 25 years or so. I couldn't see myself going into an office with a regular routine for the foreseeable future. Despite the fact that I hated my current position, I loved the adventure, the travel, the variety, and the folks I worked with. I also knew that this valley would end and there would be other peaks, maybe just not the peaks I had expected.

The final nail in my decision to stay in the Army came on an Easter sunrise during that dreaded NTC rotation. As anyone in the military knows, your duty doesn't stop because it is Easter or Thanksgiving or the Fourth of July. Our reprieve was a 40-minute pause for those who wanted to attend an Easter sunrise service. Our brigade chaplain was a man's man and an incredible spiritual leader regardless of your faith. As a fellow captain, we had become good friends and since there was no service for those of my faith, I decided to attend his non-denominational service.

When I came out of the TOC that morning, I experienced one of the strongest spiritual moments of my life. During the night, the chaplain had erected a wooden cross in the desert. To see that cross with the white robe as the sun began to rise over the

desert was inspirational. And to join with my brothers and sisters who were as exhausted as I yet standing together in worship in the barren desert – I knew I wasn't ready to give up this calling just yet.

And the irony? I was worried about telling my wife that I wanted to stay since I thought she was ready to leave this life behind us. Her reaction? She was relieved and glad. And as the years went on, I believe she was just as committed to this life and all that it brings as I was. She too felt the calling just in a different role. I guess that's why we stayed.

And now looking back, it is amazing to remember how difficult some of those years were but also unbelievable that those five years turned into ten, which turned into 14, and then we blinked and it had been 24. But what an adventure. I wouldn't trade it for anything.

Grisham, Glenn
U.S. Army
Sergeant
UH-60 aircrew member
2006-2016
A POS

I remember one mission during my 16-month deployment to Iraq more than any other. I was blessed that in my troop we never lost a Soldier or aircraft however we did take a good amount of damage and close calls.

There was a three-week span in the summer of 2008 where our intelligence officer briefed us that the Iraqis were strapping bomb vests to children around 9-12 years old to send them up to U.S. helicopters while on the ground and remotely detonate them. We were all shocked of course because really, who in the hell would do such a thing?

Just a day later, I was on a VIP mission flying around Baghdad and we were told we were to land in the lovely area called Sadr City. Now, all my friends that have been to the great country of Iraq know what Sadr City is all about. We landed outside of the operating base and were covered by an infantry

unit on the ground. Our VIP took off to conduct his business and there we waited on the ground surrounded by about 100 local nationals.

Horrible feeling just sitting there holding a rifle and under a helicopter making all sorts of noise. The only thing in my mind was what the intelligence officer had told us. Ten minutes later, a boy approached the opposite side of the helicopter where my door gunner didn't notice him. One of my pilots called him out, and I flew over to the other side and started to yell at him to stop and get back.

The boy didn't respond and I saw adults behind him motioning to go on so I fired a warning shot and he started to run at us. The next shot stopped the boy and no detonation of a bomb happened.

My heart sunk and I sat down on the ground while two infantry soldiers rushed over to find the boy was in fact wearing a vest.

My reactions were on point and the mission was completed, but as a 21-year-old soldier, I didn't realize what effects that one shot would have eventually. Now I have children of my own and I think of what I did.

Everything was within our rules of engagement however it wasn't another soldier I was engaging it was a boy that had no idea of what was in store for him. All in all, mission complete and my crew flew home safe but every mission had the possibility of us not coming home.

The only comfort I have is that with the one act that child's elders were attempting to carry out would have ended at least myself and three other crew members lives and that didn't take place. So in ending one person's life, four more were spared. Little closure but at least it's something.

Halter, Scott M.
U.S. Army
Lieutenant Colonel
Commander, UH-60 Blackhawk Pilot
1996-present
A POS

Over the years in the Army, I have served with thousands of great Americans. I've been able to keep in touch via Facebook with hundreds of them. I still maintain in close contact with a few dozen as a friend and many as a mentor. But there are a small handful that impacted me personally and that I think about often.

One is Gary Farwell. I first met Gary when I took command of Bravo Company, 3rd Battalion, 158th Aviation Regiment in Balad Air Base, Iraq, on July 15th 2003. He was an easy going fella that had earned the nickname "Easy Money" because after long 6-8 hour flight around Iraq, I'd ask him how the mission went and he'd respond with "easy money, what's up for tomorrow?" His ceaseless work ethic, competence, and candor earned my admiration quickly.

During my first month in command, my battalion

commander was adamant about getting me qualified as a pilot in command. So the senior warrant officers in the company paired me up with Gary with the intent of him teaching me the ropes. We flew over 40 hours together in August 2003 – 18 of those were done in just two days on mission searching for Scuds in the western desert. It's a big desert.

He taught me a lot in a short time and made it fun. I got up as a PC and continued to rely on Gary as a sounding board. Gary remained in the company when we redeployed to Germany in 2004 and deployed with me and the company to Kandahar in 2005.

About a month after getting in theater, Gary was supporting mission in the mountains to the north when an SF medic was shot in the face and trapped in a cannon. I happened to be near-by and was pulled in to chase the MEDEVAC aircraft sent for the casualty. But before we got there, Gary had already gotten the patient and passed us half way. I continued on to the site to assist with an exfil of the remaining SF soldiers.

After 20 minutes of searching, I finally found the hole they were in. It was 500' deep and the width of the main rotors of a Blackhawk. I found it hard to believe

a helicopter could fit in the cannon. I got the team leader on the radio and he requested we fly in and pull them out. I replied, "I can't get a my aircraft in there." His response, "well the last guy did it!"

Without hesitating, I replied, "The last guy is a better pilot than me – sit tight, he'll be back shortly." Gary returned 15 minutes later and went down into that hole three more times to pull that team out. Gary could fly the aircraft like it was an extension of his hand – his finesse and precision was unmatched among a group a very skilled pilots in the company. I wasn't that good and knew if tried to do what he did, I probably would have crashed.

As a Battalion Commander, I signed the pilot-in-command orders for every new PC. Each time, I would bring the young pilot in and I tell him this story to ensure they remain humble in the aircraft. Gary died in a training accident in Germany in February 2010, when his aircraft encountered unexpected extreme icing. Nearly every person from the company attended his funeral in rural Idaho.

Hawkins, Russel Scott
U.S. Army
First Sergeant
1987-2011
A POS

In Oct 2010, I was deployed to Pakistan to help with a humanitarian aid effort because of a huge flood. I was serving as 1SG for D 123d AVN out of FT Wainwright AK in an assault helicopter company of UH-60A Blackhawks. I served with roughly 200 soldiers with jobs ranging from flying to ensuring our pay was correct. Our mission was to run supply missions in two valleys North of Islamabad. As most people prepared for this mission it was clear that we were going to be in what we considered a hostile environment because of the geographic location with Iraq, and Afghanistan.

I took this deployment knowing it was going to be my last one before retiring from the Army. While deployed to an air base North of Islamabad in a town called Gahzi, I found a large amount of toys, books, clothes, and many other items in giant boxes that had been sent from all over the world. I decided that I would play the part of Santa Clause and deliver as many of these items as I could while there. So every

morning before the 10 aircraft flew out to the different locations I would pack large black garbage bags full with the items. I would fly as often as I could along with them to deliver items also.

It was the most rewarding time of my life while serving. I was able to see firsthand what the people of Pakistan were going through and the smiles on the kids that we were able to give some sort of gifts to. I remember someone sending us large amounts of lollipops that the children made a small riot out of trying to get one. It was easy to see that this part of their country had suffered greatly and that they were a very strong group. We noticed every day how much further a road had been restored or that a bridge was rebuilt.

We spent almost four months during our mission there and not one time did we feel threatened by the people we were working with and for. I remember one of the Pakistan Army Sergeants who helped ensure the loads of goods that were put on our aircraft were correct for the areas that needed them brought me a cigar to celebrate the birth of his daughter. It was so refreshing to see this smile on a new dad in a country that was devastated by flood. I am so thankful for my career with the Army and all

of the people that I have met along the way. I would consider myself a very blessed man for being able to go and meet these wonderful human beings and being able to see that they are the same as you and I.

Jennifer Belin
Navy wife
Mother of 4

When I met my husband in December of 1991, I knew that we were meant to be together. I remember driving to meet his parents and having a very serious discussion about the future of our relationship. He informed me that he planned to be a career Naval officer and that the military life was not for everyone. If I had any doubts about the wherewithal that would be required and expected as a Navy wife, perhaps we should rethink the future. I was a little intimidated by these words, as I come from a family with no military background but without hesitation, I told him I could handle it.

Fast-forward 25 years and four kids later. Turns out I was right, I can handle this lifestyle. Has it always been easy? No, of course not. The Navy has been good to our family. Unlike some of our military friends and family members, we have not had to endure deployments longer than 4 months, though my husband has volunteered for several. I am in constant admiration of families who have been apart for long periods of time.

When I reflect on the 25 years that have gone by, snapshots of amazing people, experiences and memories flood my mind. There is an instant comradery when meeting a military family, an immediate commonality exists. Some of our strongest relationships over the years have been with our military friends. As such, goodbyes are never easy but it is a surprisingly small Navy and you never know when or how our paths may cross.

On more than one occasion, my husband and I have met people who ask what he does. When he says that he is in the Navy, there have been times when people ask if he is eager to get out and be done. I am always so proud when with complete conviction, he tells them that he loves what he does, it is an honor to serve and that he plans to stay in until retirement.

Recently, my husband and I flew to Chicago and he was in uniform. It was remarkable how many people thanked him for his service, bought him coffee, and shook his hand. In a time when I think our liberties are somewhat taken for granted, it was nice to see the admiration and appreciation of the people my husband volunteered to serve.

I have a confession; I tear up every time I hear the

National Anthem. At a sporting event, school event, military event… it doesn't matter, it gets me every time. I am a patriot, a proud American, a proud Navy wife. I am moved to tears by my love for this country. While I've always been proud of this country, I am profoundly more so because I know so many people who are willing to step up and defend her and if necessary, pay the ultimate sacrifice.

J.
U.S. Army
Chief Warrant Officer 4
Aviation Officer
1988-present
A POS

N and I met in 2005. We were just two enlisted guys that found a shared enjoyment of mountain biking. Our paths took us to different parts of the world, but we stayed in touch. N encouraged me to become a warrant officer. Since then, he's been there to help me out whenever I needed it. This ranged from raising my motivation during deployments to helping out during my divorce.

Kilgore, William "Billy"
U. S. Army
Chief Warrant Officer 4
Aviation Safety Officer, UH-60 and LUH-72A
Pilot
1992-present
A POS

One of the most stressful experiences in my career was flying in Iraq in 2003 as a Blackhawk pilot. I was flying with Mike, Rob, and Brian. We were tasked with moving patients as part of an ad hoc CASEVAC after a vehicle overturned. We had already landed in the middle of the desert next to the convoy of vehicles that stretched from the Kuwaiti border up to south of Baghdad. The wind was crazy and difficult to read. After performing a downwind landing near our max gross weight with external tanks full of fuel, our pucker factor was quite high.

When we were asked to perform the CASEVAC we were hesitant due to what we had already experienced. My crew, along with our sister ship crew, decided that it was life, limb or eyesight so we cranked up the birds and re-positioned to the pickup site. Once the patients were loaded we flew along the convoy route to the nearest field hospital. The

ceilings were less than 400 feet and the visibility was less than ½ a mile. Most crews wouldn't even start their aircraft in weather that poor but we did. After repositioning to the hospital and dropping off the patients, we had to move the general to another position. Once we were done moving the general we had to return to base under NVGs.

Our lead aircraft was able to find the LZ after several attempts at landing. However, we were not so fortunate. The illumination was at 0% and we had no contrast in the open desert. We were flying instruments as we couldn't see the ground. All we could do was monitor the radar altimeter and attempt to fly the GPS into the LZ. We asked the lead aircraft to turn on their anti-collision lights so we could identify them. Unfortunately, the Bradley Fighting Vehicles which were already near the LZ had strobes on their antennas which made identifying the LZ next to impossible.

At this point, my mind was spinning. I had just experienced landing a heavy aircraft downwind, with a 30 degree angle of bank and 15 degrees nose low pitch at about 30 feet off of the ground. We almost crashed earlier that day. Now I had no idea how we were going to land. I wanted to go home. We just lost

a crew of our friends a month earlier during the train-up in Kuwait. I didn't want to be another war statistic. My mind went to my family; my mom. My dad. My siblings. I was single at the time and regretted not being able to share my life with children of my own and a loving wife. This all occurred to me in a split second and my mind became very clear. I had to land the aircraft and we were running out of fuel. I had an overwhelming sense of peace come over me as well as a clear understanding as to how to get that bird on the ground.

As the pilot on the controls, I immediately started to talk calmly to the rest of the crew. I assured them that I knew where we were and what we were going to do to get back on the ground. I asked crew chiefs to monitor our altitude by glancing into the cockpit and announce if we were to descend too low. I asked the pilot not on the controls to monitor the GPS and to continue searching for the LZ. I called the crew of the other aircraft on the ground to get wind direction and their landing direction. I was able to maintain altitude while setting us up on a base leg to the approach. We slowed back to a crawl and continued our approach onto the GPS heading to the LZ.

After 20 minutes of stress, we landed safely.

I can’t begin to describe in words what my body went through at that moment. When we finally shut down the aircraft I walked over to my crew chief Rob, lit up a cigarette, sat down with him, hugged him, and cried.

The stress which we experienced during a 24-hour period created a bond between the four of us that was something special. We continue to stay in touch, although not as much as I would like.

Anonymous
U.S. Army
Major
Military Lawyer
2006-present
A POS

There are the days you feel victorious,
because you just survived.
The days where everything is particularized,
Like individual molecules in the air.
The blue sky is very acutely blue,
Bluer than blue. Vastly blue.
The white clouds are white with white.
Grouped and big.
At night, the stars are bright. Sharp.
And everywhere always,
the Carolina pine is humid and thick.

Until you get to Iraq. And then it is dry, hot, heat.
Calls to prayer echo and resound.
They are not your prayers, but they fill your body.
And you are prayerful yet.
You walk along reeds from marshy river beds
to the dining facility,
Drop your laundry off at a shed
amongst the date palms.

Work in palaces once owned by a dictator.
Opulent, irreverent.
Cross bridges destructed years before
and never repaired.
Minarets always in view; a blue royal sky at night.
And the stars do not relent, as they are familiar.
And gentle. And guiding.
On marbled pathways,
you have heartbreaking conversations.

When you travel in country,
it is a simple, continued, articulate adrenaline.
Everything is at once focused, yet surrendered.
Events are beyond your tiny control.
But are events beyond control?
They may be beyond your control,
but are they really beyond control?

But you are not in Iraq yet. Not yet.

At night you try to think of your upcoming jump.
Go through the motions.
And then you try not to think of it.
Otherwise you won't sleep.
Not that you ordinarily sleep.
At PT the next day you are tired,
but you finish the workout.

Your workday is long. But fulfilling.
Something about it is fulfilling.
People, substance, effort, results. Something.
You are an introvert by nature,
but the Army makes you an extrovert.
You are confronting things, big things,
external and internal things.
You are learning, collaborating, getting smarter.
Stronger.
Meeting nice, smart people. Funny people. People
who joke instead of stress.
You start to understand comfort with conflict,
perspective.
You solve things. You have friends.
You are somehow legitimized.
You thank the Army, for helping you be you.
As it turns out, you needed a lot of help.

Late that night,
your parachute opens into the dark, silent sky.
You fall, kick, and float to the earth and then land.
Hard. Wrongly. But strangely relaxed.
Because again you confronted something huge.
And then you must find the assembly area.
Account, communicate. Move to the vehicles.
It all rolls forward. And you are a part of that.

Things beckon that are big and unknown.
A trip to go on, where many of your friends also go.
Or have already been.
And may have returned.
You may have already been. And are returning.
Or returning somewhere slightly different,
Or very different.
And hope to return home again.

The word return is used
so much that it actually loses meaning.
So, you use words like
deploy and redeploy to distinguish.
Words unique to the military.
Words that are just barely English.
And you begin to cloister.

Your family may or may not understand.
You may or may not understand.
And sometimes you have to explain
to people who do not know
That we fight an asymmetric war.
One with barely discernable boundaries,
except for those we self-impose.
One with impossible situations. Decisions.
One where indirect fire
does not mean less deadly fire.

Where it does not mean inconsequential fire.
Because nothing there is inconsequential.
Because there are people
who want to feel better about what is going on
Over there. And, without meaning to,
they try to feel better through you.
And say things like
"well you won't be at the front lines."

As though it's the Fulda Gap
with tank warfare and a cognizable enemy.
As though somehow
you deserve to not be at the front lines.
As though the front lines are not reserved for
your spouse and your friends, But for nameless
automatons, that no one need touch.
As though there are front lines.
So, it becomes incumbent upon you to choose.
Say something attractive, reassuring.
Or say the truth.
As both have merit.

And as you think about all of it,
you ignore it all as well.
Because trying to control
the things that you can control
Is not a good answer to this problem.

Because there may not be a solution to this problem.
Because solving a problem
with no solution creates the most unique
Sadness. And anger.
And those things tend to not go away.
Not under these circumstances.
As a solution is deserved, wanted, and wanting.
And you remain unresolved.

You ignore it because you need actions
and existence to mean something.
It is the same need that drew you
to service in the first place.
A deep and hungry need to be important,
and to do huge things.
And to do the most important thing, if needed.
But that doesn't mean that you are expendable.
That you should be misused.
And you wonder, how easy of a slide is it for leaders
to slip into expendability?
Do leaders do the hard analysis?
Because they work with something special.
A force that follows.

And you find yourself wondering,
What is the balance
between service and expendability?

And, where are we on that scale?

And then you ignore it.
Because what are you going to do.
And, you ignore it also, because you must continue on with the daily things.
Like a garden
where everywhere and everything has needs.

And you go, and go, and go.
And wonder how it is that you keep going.
And then you realize that you are part of a group,
A very special group,
That runs best on tired legs.

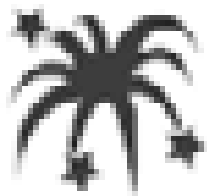
Marcus
U.S. Army
Captain
UH60 Blackhawk Pilot
2001-2009
A POS

I put emojis in... I think they help convey the emotions in a modern way that may resonate with young readers.

My time in the Army was such a rich experience from start to finish. It's hard to put individual "chapters" into words. It's more like a spider web than a sequential story. The experiences are deeply rooted in my present version of myself, but the way I view (or how they shape me) change. One example of this was my first experience with getting shot at. I was 27 years old when this happened on that hot Afghanistan July day, and in a lot of ways I was an immature 27. I was paired with one of my favorite people/pilots, Gary F. that day. Gary was a much more experienced pilot than me, and I was really excited to fly with him. He was a funny guy and he

also had a reputation as a great teacher in the cockpit. The mission was planned to start in the morning and end in the early afternoon, assuming we found the bad guys that our infantry passengers were looking for. We would basically drop about 50 infantry guys off in a valley to find this "high value target" only to find out "he's just left, check the next valley over". Ha! As a less experienced pilot this unscripted flight plan was a challenge, and I enjoyed learning on the fly (literally) and having Gary teach me some tricks. As the day wore on we were told to get more gas and then try one more valley. Gary volunteered our helicopter to be the lead helicopter out of the group of 7. We would lead the way to the next valley. Gary navigated using an old fashioned map instead of a fancy GPS and I was on the controls pointing the helicopter in the right direction and going up and down over the mountains. When we got to THE VALLEY we landed in a small, grassy field. Suddenly a mud hut right in front of us started spewing Taliban men like we had stepped on an ant hill. Rocket propelled grenades and gunfire erupted. We knew immediately that the

infantry guys we had dropped off would need more ammunition, water, and people, so we flew back to a nearby base to pick up supplies and reinforcements. By the time we got back the field where we had previously landed was on fire and the fight had escalated dramatically. We pushed dropped of the additional infantry people and began circling the area. I guess I was so well trained, so excited, and so caught up in the moment that I never took the time to get scared. Neither did anyone else. By all accounts the mission was a success. Many enemy died and we all survived. I remember later than night eating dinner in the safe confines of the Kandahar base. Some of us were bragging, some were quiet, some wanted to go back out the next day to build upon the successes. No one really talked about how dangerous the day had been or how lucky we were to come out of it unscathed. We formed such strong bonds between each other. 3 years later when I was 30, I was in Iraq during the same time as Gary but we were in different units in different locations. I worked out a way to get dropped off at his base and



spend the night reliving old stories in his barracks. I got out of the Army the next year but Gary stayed in and kept teaching young pilots. He died in a crash in Germany the following year. Now I'm 37 with my own family and children. I tell that story of that day in Afghanistan totally differently now. I still get a sparkle in my eye, but I also worry more. I consider the danger more and I miss Gary, but I cherish that time flying around the mountains. We were both really happy and young.

Martin, Amy
U.S. Army
Chief Warrant Office 2
Blackhawk Helicopter Pilot
A POS

Her name was Jennifer, though she hadn't been called that since her mother hugged her and cried before leaving her at the bus station in Atlanta weeks earlier.

No one was allowed to use first names in Basic Training. McClendon, as she was known, or Private McClendon as the Drill Sergeants called her, was assigned to the bunk below mine at Ft Jackson. We were five bunks down and to the left in our large open bay, which served as quarters for 52 women stacked in rows of bunks. There were five showers.

"My name's Jennifer," she'd whispered to me as we unpacked our initial issue into our lockers.

"I'm Amy." I whispered back, smiling. First names were an intimacy, a familiar piece of ourselves we shared in secret.

McClendon was 18 and had just graduated high

school. She'd enlisted for three years to become a cook and to earn the GI Bill. Her hair was black and pulled back tight for ease. Her skin was the color of roasted almonds. She had peculiar teeth, crooked and endearing, and when she smiled, it was obvious from her eyes that she'd been loved.

In the mornings, the lights would flash and an air horn would sound and the bay would scream to life with women racing from one end of the long room to the latrine and back to lockers and bunks.

All Privates had seven minutes to accomplish the following with the use of a dozen or so sinks and toilets: brush teeth, brush hair and pull back tight in a bun, wash faces, use the toilet, get dressed in complete uniform entirely in the cramped bathroom (due to male Drill Sergeants on staff in the bay), make our bunks, ensure all toiletries were placed back into our lockers, lock our lockers, be standing at parade rest on the black line directly in front of our bunks with our rucksacks packed and canteen on and prepared for the days activities.

Within the first week, I could accomplish all tasks in approximately five minutes, leaving me several minutes to either stand on the line or look around and

see which Private I could help avoid doing pushups. McClendon was often struggling with her locker, or her bunk. Or did she have her ruck packed properly and where was her cover (hat)? I began making her bunk while she raced to get her ruck on as the seconds counted down. I'd jump to my spot on the line, both of us smiling with pride as we made the deadline. She was known as my assigned Battle Buddy, but I began to think of her as my friend.

"Cover me buddy" I'd yell as we moved through days of obstacle courses, M16s in hand, notionally shooting at the enemy as our buddy ran to the next safe cover.

"Got you covered, Buddy," I'd wait to hear before running. The mantra playing back and forth and back, as the day wore on and the sun grew cooler against our sweat soaked uniforms. It was August. The afternoons peaked over 100 degrees and we were constantly being told to "DRINK WATER!!!!" in a sing-song tone until we sometimes vomited that water.

When we weren't running, or marching, or doing pushups or the side straddle hop, or shining boots, or cleaning our weapons, or moping floors or cleaning

toilets or showers, we were waiting in lines. We waited in lines in the heat to buy new running shoes after having our arches evaluated. I was a high arch; McClendon had a flat arch. We waited in lines for ammunition and our turn on the range.

McClendon and I both struggled to hit targets, our hands shaking, our arms fatigued from endless workouts. We waited in lines for uniforms, for food, for Army issue glasses. We waited in lines for breakfast; we waited in lines for lunch, and we waited in lines for dinner. And then we waited in lines to throw away the food we hadn't been given enough time to eat. We waited in lines to fill our canteens and then to use the latrine. We waited in lines for shots and Physical Fitness test, and we waited in lines for more Army issue. In these lines, people yelled at us to stand up straight, to face the front, to read our Smart Books, to stop talking, to maintain a military bearing. In these lines we whispered. We got caught whispering. We did push ups. We whispered again. We got caught again. We did pushups again. We were asked if we were slow or if we understood English. We said "No Drill Sergeant" and "Yes Drill Sergeant."

It was in these lines that McClendon and I lamented about our sore feet and necks and who might have

some Advil we could score and the fact that neither of us was any good at memorizing all the required Army mantras. She told me how her mom sent her letters everyday and how she missed her. It was in these lines that a young man named Copas and I talked about the foods we hoped to eat when we got out.

We talked like we imagined prisoners might about basic luxuries. To be able to touch another human being. To open a refrigerator and make a Swiss cheese sandwich with French mustard. To climb into a car and drive away to a beach and watch the ocean waves. It was in these lines that Copas whispered to me that he was gay and afraid about what that would mean for him. Years later, I would read about him in a CNN article, when he became one of many Arabic linguistics being discharged for being gay. But before then, we would sit in the evening in the open air bay shining boots together. He taught me to use wet cotton balls on the toes. We worried together about passing our Secret Clearances; neither of us could remember everywhere we'd lived or traveled and we kept getting asked the same questions over and over until we were sure we'd begun changing our answers out of fatigue and confusion and frustration.

Weeks rolled on and a few soldiers were recycled back to the start due to illness or injury or sent home due to mental instability. Young men and women periodically cried from exhaustion and some swore and screamed after dark in the bays when they were tired or threw things in the bathroom. Sometimes there was group counseling when a drill sergeant would warn against fraternizing with the opposite gender in our co-ed class. Sometimes the men and women would be separated and the women would receive training on maintaining female hygiene in the field. I always wondered if the men were simultaneously being shown depictions of testicles. We would be told that some of us didn't have parents who taught us how to wash ourselves properly and then there would be graphic descriptions and pamphlets on how to keep from getting infections and swamp foot and STDs. Washcloths seemed really important in these instructions, and I decided that despite my good hygiene, I'd better start using one. Flip-flops in showers were also not just a luxury; I began to understand they were as vital as air.

I was 29 in Basic Training and the oldest in our class save one man who was 35 and had been unemployed so long he finally enlisted to feed his family. I'd quit my admirable job performing anti-piracy work for

Microsoft against all good advice from everyone I knew. I joined the Army to become a helicopter pilot, despite the fact that I was a left-leaning vegetarian AND I'd never actually been in a helicopter before AND was afraid of heights. Things tended to work out for me, I'd reasoned, and besides I was bored with the local dating pool and I didn't like a job without an end date. I was fearful of growing roots.

Basic training become in a way like summer camp for me. To wake up for the day with a uniform to put on and instructions to follow and lines to stand in and not a choice in the mix seemed a break from the pressures of making presentations and the daily monotony of working on a computer. I relished the cadences and the ruck marches. Drill Sergeant Baskerville was tall, thin, and dark skinned; he always smiled except when he was being serious for effect. He held his shoulders and head high with confidence and pride. He told us we were smart and strong and he would march beside us singing cadence like a mix of rap and melody. We'd march along and he'd yell, "JUMP" and we'd hop high into the air and land laughing. He'd sing "Hollar back now!" and we'd yell in unison, "WOOOOOOT, WOOOOOOT!"

Drill Sergeant Baskerville became a symbol of

confidence to me. He countered the Drill Sergeant who verbally attacked me in a jealous rage when he found out I was on my way to flight school or another who told the whole class of men and women that women flying helicopters compromises the mission and puts everyone in danger. "I hope you fail," another Drill Sergeant hissed at me, his gray eyes full of loathing. But not Drill Sergeant Baskerville. He wasn't threatened or afraid; he championed women; he spoke of our leadership qualities and our strong physical and mental strengths under pressure. He became someone I looked forward to seeing each day, and though he wasn't but a few years older than I, he became someone I looked up to. He became a reason I didn't give in to the hate and the jealousy or begin to doubt myself.

In the final weeks to graduation, summer was cooling into fall, and McClendon no longer needed me to help with her bunk anymore. Each day I held her feet as she did hundreds of situps until she collapsed with her stomach aching, as she struggled to pass the looming final PT test, which meant we could graduate Basic Training.

On our final arduous ruck march, the sun began to rise and evaporate the dew from the trails and the dirt

road. I, in my mismatched PT cap, and McClendon hauling her heavy wet clothes tucked in a garbage bag inside her rucksack; both of us strong enough and brave enough as we would ever need to be.

McCarthy, Michael
U.S. Army
Captain
Helicopter Platoon Leader
2000-2007
A POS

No one talked about it; the end was near and no one wanted to jinx it. Our battalion suffered the loss of a helicopter and the crew of four in a training accident weeks before we rolled north during the invasion of Iraq in 2003. The loss hung on us but we flew 10 more months, mostly incident free, and accomplished every mission tasked. We flew our last official missions earlier that day, and our commander assembled the whole company in the mission-planning tent. Idle talk in low tones ended when our commander began to speak.

"We did it," he said. We all breathed a sigh of understanding. Our commander continued to speak but many of us were sailing off on the idea, we were done . . . we were going home. For the past year, we served our fellow soldiers each day we flew our aircraft but the upcoming week we would serve ourselves; it was time to pack our helicopters and head home. It is this shared sense of togetherness,

of relying on one another, that I miss most.

As the meeting ended, there was no cheering, no fist pumping or no high-fives; we had been lucky and we knew it. The fortunes of war had smiled on us, mostly. We departed the tent with smiles and a collective knowing that there was just one mission left: our flight south out of Iraq.

Our unit wasn't special; we were like any other military unit. However, we worked together like no other civilian group I know. Deployed, always together, made us a family of sorts.

My time in Iraq was trying, but my unit's togetherness during our long struggle brought me so close to my comrades in arms. That night I was so excited at the prospect of going home from war but now see it as the apex of my 7 years in the Army. We did it; we made it home.

Mendez, Rudy
U.S. Army
Chief Warrant Officer 2
Aviation Maintenance Technician
2001-present
A POS

I am CW2 Rudy Mendez and my story is one of a mother and father, who have stood hand in hand as U.S. Army Soldiers. My wife, Carla, and I have been together since we were both Privates. At the beginning, life was that of two people with no obligatory attachments other than the duties of our jobs. We were both hard chargers and strived to perfect every task and be the best at anything we were challenged with.

Things changed when our first child was born. We were no longer just Soldiers, but we were parents. At the time, I had just been promoted to Staff Sergeant and the responsibilities of learning a new job combined with another life to take care of were painstakingly hard to adjust to. For Carla, it was easy. Her priorities had shifted and now the only thing in life that mattered was taking care of our baby boy.

Eventually, we settled into a rhythm and quickly

realized that being duel military wasn't as fun as we first thought it to be. Our son spent 70% of his first 2 years in daycare. He was literally raised by day care providers but we both knew what we had signed up for and did our best to deal with the situation. Soon, our second child had arrived and she blessed our lives with her adorable smile and beautiful brown eyes.

Still, the deployments never stopped, the TDY trips never ceased, and moving our kids between daycares, states, and houses started taking its toll on our relationship. We fought a tremendous amount because we were working from sunrise well past when the sunset. Little time was spent with the kids let alone each other. We were starting to grow apart. About this time we were moving to Virginia for yet another permanent change of station. This time, we hired on some help. Her parents were unemployed about the same time we were moving so, we drove to NY and packed up the apartment and brought them to Virginia with us. We bought a beautiful 6-bedroom home that would comfortably fit everyone, including her younger brother.

As history repeats itself, Carla broke the news to me that she was pregnant again. This time, we both cried, and I'm not sure it was out of excitement. We both

knew that we would have to start the balancing act of work and taking care of a newborn all over again. Her parents have truly been a blessing to us and our children because now, there is no interruption in their daily lives no matter where mommy or daddy is located.

I know some folks will read this and think, "I deal with that every day in my life." I will say that unless you have served, let alone as a duel military with a family, it is hard to know. You don't get phone calls in the middle of the night because someone's husband is missing, who just so happens to be your Soldier. And after an hour of driving around, you find him in a Walmart parking lot with half his head blown out, but still breathing. You didn't have to hold back the immense emotions that wanted to explode out of you during his memorial service because you are the master of ceremonies. The MC must be disciplined and professional because as you read his biography to his family and his friends who over flow the chapel with their presence. You want to ensure that the words you read are forever felt in their hearts as someone who has given his everything. No, you don't have just your family to take care of.

We have a family of Soldiers who are not just

employees, they are our kids too. And just like raising a child, you must teach, mentor, and guide them to aspire for more and never give up on anything. We are charged with molding them into future leaders by providing purpose, direction, and motivation.

This is the real reason my wife and I continue down this path. We are offered the opportunity to train this country's next generation of Leaders. I have served through the Senior Enlisted rank of Sergeant First Class and am now serving as a Warrant Officer. Carla continues her service as a Sergeant First Class and our jobs have never been more intense and time consuming than they are now. But through our ups and downs, trials and tribulations, we never give up on one another.

As a matter of fact, I am currently writing this story deployed away from my family and it never gets easy. Watching my children grow up on the computer is getting tiresome and I miss being home. It's proven even more difficult for Carla because over our years together, we find that the time we are together, can never be taken for granted. So, when we are apart we are never whole until one of us returns. I cannot capture into complete sentences how through all this, Carla and I are stronger than we ever have been. We

support one another in all facets of our personal and professional lives. I don't believe there will ever be a bond stronger than the one we have built together. For all those who have or are currently serving thank you from the bottom of our hearts and our fellow duel military couples…never give up on one another.

Molly B.
Army wife of 24 years
Mom to 3, one of whom is an Army cadet

We moved 11 times in 24 years--if you don't count the two times we moved to different quarters in the same location (which really should count because you still have to unpack all the boxes). There are obviously many challenges when moving to a new location--not the least of which is making new friends.

There is nothing like showing up somewhere new a few weeks before school starts and having to ask a neighbor who you have only shared a couple of conversations with if they would be willing to be your child's emergency contact should your kiddo be puking at school and the nurse can't get in touch with you.

In each place, I felt a different level of connection to folks I met there--sometimes dependent on how long we were there and others on life circumstances. However, when we moved to Ft. Leavenworth, I met a group of women that would help me become a better wife, a better mother, a better Army team member and overall a better person because they provided me with support when I needed it. This was

right after 9/11 and at the beginning of the numerous deployments that none of us knew were coming. My husband was going on a one year unaccompanied tour leaving me with our three young kids back home. I became a member of the Women of St. Ignatius, the Catholic women's group on post.

Camaraderie exists among military members. The same can be said for their spouses.

Many things could be left unsaid--we just intuitively knew what each was thinking. We shared our faith, obviously, but it was more than that. We shared a true sisterhood which I have not had the pleasure to be a part of since. I have a collection of experiences that left me feeling understood, that I belonged, and that I would be taken care of.

Morford, Z.
U.S. Army
Major
Experimental Test Pilot
2000-present
A POS

When I was stationed in Honduras, we had a very small company of only four Chinook helicopters and fewer than 20 people. This led to a very tight-knit feel to the company. Most members of the unit formed bonds with each other.

One day, I flew with as part of a standard compliment of 4 crewmembers (2 pilots and 2 flight engineers) into a remote part of Eastern Honduras. It was a long, dreary flight and there was little to no radio traffic once we left the airfield. We all chatted over the intercom for the first part of the flight, but then settled into a relatively long silence as we continued interminably over what appeared to be a never ending, unbroken canopy of treetops.

Suddenly, from out of nowhere, a loud, screeching sound came across the intercom; it took a moment to register, but with a moment of thinking I came to the conclusion that it was a single word, "Roxanne!"

About the time that I put this together, the mic had been keyed again and I heard more clearly this time, "You don't have to put on the red light." I looked to my right and saw my other pilot, my commander, with a sly grin on his face. He then quickly keyed the mic again to complete his statement, "Those days are over. [mic keyed] You don't have to sell your body to the niiiiight."

The intercom went silent with only the sound of the blades and transmissions to be heard. After about 30 seconds of dead air and understanding what had happened, I keyed the intercom to screech out, "Roxanne. [mic keyed] You don't have to wear that dress tonight." "Walk the streets for money. [mic keyed] You don't care if it's wrong or if it's right." I then left the intercom silent.

About 30 seconds later, our senior flight engineer joined in by beginning the chorus, and by that point, all 3 of us were contributing to a very off-key and lyrically suspect version of the song. Once we completed our ensemble, the young crew chief came onto the intercom asking what had just happened.

All that had happened was a bit of improvisation to break the monotony of an otherwise very boring

flight, but it had happened in a different way than is often attempted. It was silly and poorly executed musically, but is something I remember to this day as a shared experience where you feel that things just "clicked" to create a sense of camaraderie which is difficult to fully explain. It is this feeling, reinforced time and again with different companies of people in multiple locations around the world, that kept me chugging along in the military much longer than I ever expected.

Peter
Royal New Zealand Air Force
Warrant Officer
Avionics Technician
1976-2013
A POS

A few words from an ex-serviceman on the other side of the world. A couple of years ago I completed 37½ years' service in the Royal New Zealand Air Force (RNZAF). I have had a great time and many memorable periods working with a fantastic bunch of men and women. After several weeks in 'retirement' I picked up a job as a civilian on the same base.

The common denominator? Fellow service men and women! I can say without hesitation that each time I went away I thought I had the best team possible, only to have another 'best' team next time! Whatever the situation, we made the best of things, got on with the job knowing that sometime we would be heading home to warm food, comfy bed, and solid roof over our head.

I often wonder what it's like for civilians. Can they meet someone after 10-15 yrs, say hi, and pick up a conversation as if they'd only been apart for a week?

People talk about service people being 'institutionalised' and 'not knowing what it's like in the real world'. That might be the case, perhaps even for me. However I have lived in a world which relies on 'institutional' training and where we live in confined environments for long periods doing jobs that most people would consider 'crazy'. We have a totally different view of another 'real' world which a civilian often does not understand or appreciate.

Our son has also joined the Air Force. He is now having his own experiences, making short and long term friends. He sometimes comes around for a visit. We can sit quietly for long periods and not say much, but there is that element of shared service despite being in different trades. Even my wife of 30+yrs sometimes feels left out when we talk cryptically about something that has happened.

I remember sitting on a Royal Navy yacht in the middle of the Tasman Ocean, having a long conversation with an older guy who was not really fitting in with the 12-member crew (11 Brits plus me). I was quite happy to sit and chat; he later wrote and thanked me for spending the time chatting and enabling him to get things off his chest. When we hit gale force winds a couple of days later we worked as

a cohesive team under the guidance of the skipper.

I remember sitting in a Huey above the cloud, transiting over water and above a layer of cloud, thinking – we have one engine and can't see the water below us! Oh well, another adventure!

I remember a 10-hour transit flight in a P-3, crossing the equator and meeting King Neptune who fed me a vile drink of eggs and cigarette ash, and having face shaved with the fire axe. Later the crew mixed up some dough, baked a fresh batch of buns which sat in the window to rise in the sun, to be enjoyed later with butter and jam.

I remember hearing on the morning of our Anzac Day ceremonies that one of our Hueys had crashed, hearing that three were killed and one had miraculously survived. One of the dead was a young lad who had been one of my maintenance technicians for three months (yes – same deployment!) One way of dealing with this was to take a selection of my many photos and present them in a booklet to the family, each photo with a sentence about what their son/partner was doing at the time.

And now on a more cheerful note – during another

deployment, I remember teaching English to some local kids at their school which had previously been torched by militants. What started as a small group of 15 grew to… maybe 50 or 60 crowded into the small classroom a few months later. I needed to say a few words of farewell as we were heading home in a few days. Cell phones were working at that time, so I phoned my (multi-talented) wife back in NZ, told her what I wanted to say, she translated into Bahasa to the headmaster, and he translated into the local language for the kids. A truly international and multilingual moment!

I remember being inspected by the Queen during the opening of the NZ Memorial at Hyde Park in the UK, for once carrying a sheathed sword instead of a rifle.

I possibly track events in my life a little differently than civilians. Things like the birth of my boys, the deaths of my parents and other relatives – all tracked and dated according to whatever exercise or deployment was happening around that time.

Would I change anything if I had the opportunity? I don't think so. I have been privileged to work with some truly talented people, visited countries I would never normally think of (or have the cash!) I know I

have made a difference in some of the places I've been and the local population I've been there to help.

I went to a school reunion a few years ago and met some of my old classmates. A lot had not moved out of the area and were self-absorbed in their lives. I'm very glad I did not take up the opportunity to start working in a bank after leaving school.

I'm thankful that one day a long long time ago when I was mowing lawns for an old man, a flight of three Hueys flew over, and I looked up and thought – I wonder what they're all about? Three years later I was fixing them!

Powers, Matt
U.S. Army
Major
Liaison Officer, Commander
2005-2015
A POS

There was one very memorable week in Pakistan. It was in November, so even though we didn't know it, our deployment was soon coming to an end. But we were extremely busy. We had supplied most of the villages destroyed by the floods with food and blankets only for the Taliban to start pouring over Afghanistan Border and cause another humanitarian crisis. We had to evacuate about five towns.

We were doing everything humanly possible to rescue everyone. I personally flew 27 hours that week and even fit 34 people on a Blackhawk for one sortie. Sara, the other flight platoon leader, and I actually flew a lot together that week, and a Pakistani pilot nicknamed Nomi ("sleepy") who had a crush on Sara, was our navigator. He liked to fly with us because we had fun and he could flirt with her.

Anyway, I only had one day off in that manic week and it's how we all spent that day that I remember

most. I did my usual routine on days I didn't fly, got up early and jogged to the flight line from the barracks we were staying in. Sara and I would meet before the Intel meeting to discuss any concerns on maintenance, personnel or anything for the day. Then I made sure the flights took off and there was little to do after that until they came back. I walked up to the airport tower and sat in the lounge. A bunch of Pakistani pilots joined me and we smoked terrible cigarettes and drank strong Ceylon tea. Then we agreed that a cricket match was the best thing to do. They destroyed the Americans, of course. But then I convinced them to play ultimate frisbee. All the crew chiefs and pilots off for the day, as well as the Pakistani pilots and soldiers, played a massive game of frisbee for hours, all afternoon. Then we retrieved the aircraft as the sun set and got our uniquely local food which was actually growing old by this time. Then everyone played cards and talked outside till late and prepped to do the same routine the next day.

That night, while I lay in bed, missing my family, I thought about how many amazing things were happening around me and how I would talk about this week for many years. And I have.

Reitano, Jerry
U.S. Army
Captain
15C Aviation Intelligence Officer
2006-present
A POS

One of the more interesting things about the military is how close you can get to someone or groups of people; then, in an instant, disappear physically from their lives. However, if you ever see the same person or people again (and you usually do run into them eventually), it seems like things pick up again right where they left off.

In 2008, my wife and I moved to Alaska. Not only was this my first duty station in the Army following my basic aviation training, it was also a move to ALASKA! I mean seriously, my wife and I have never lived anywhere but the east coast and now we were going to the furthest point away from our family and civilization.

I had no idea what to expect when reporting into my new unit, or really, what I should be doing. On my first day, I met another Lieutenant who had been there for just a few months prior to me. Turns out, I

was actually supposed to beat him there and deploy immediately to Iraq, but due to some issues moving, we ended up later than scheduled. Robbie took the time to "square me away" and teach me how to succeed in the company as a platoon leader and as a newly qualified CH-47D Chinook pilot.

Eventually, he deployed for a few months, and when he returned to Alaska, my wife and I were there to greet him when he stepped off the plane. When he saw us, he was so happy to be home! He had no family in Alaska and his fiancé was still living in Ohio. We offered our house to him until he found a new apartment and he accepted.

A year or so in the future, and after helping him move into his new apartment, Robbie told me that his fiancé was coming to visit him in Alaska. He then asked a question of me that no one ever had before, or probably ever will: "Could you marry us?" It turns out in Alaska, as long as you fill out a small amount of paper work, anyone can marry people! So once his fiancé came to Alaska, we ventured to Chena Hot Springs, went into the woods, and I proceeded to marry the couple! We then went inside to the restaurant and bar to celebrate their marriage. Ultimately, like everyone who serves in the military,

it was time for my good friend to depart Alaska and move to his next duty station. It was sad saying goodbye, but you tend to get used to it because we always move so often.

About 3-4 years later, I was in Afghanistan when I got a message on my computer that Robbie was passing through my base. I picked him up from the passenger terminal and brought him back to my "room" so he had a place to stay (just like a few years prior!). We ended up playing some PlayStation and hanging out, just like old times.

A few months later, I was headed home on Rest and Recuperation leave (R&R) to visit my family for two-weeks. When my flight home was screwed up and I ended up being stuck at Ft. Bliss, Texas. Guess who was stationed there?…Robbie's wife, the one who I had married a few years prior. She offered her house to me for the night just as I did to her husband years ago. Eventually I made it home and got to see my daughter's first birthday!

Robbie and I still keep in touch every so often via email. We know we will probably cross paths again one day, and when we do, it will be just like nothing ever has changed!

Secosky, Sindie Denise
U.S. Army
Captain
Company Commander
2001-2009
A NEG

I deployed to Iraq the second time in September 2007 for what was to be one of the dreaded 15-month rotations. Trying to wrap your mind around the fact that you will lapse the date you arrive by a few months was initially unfathomable, and I mean that quite literally. I was the HQ company commander for a General Support Aviation Battalion (Ft. Riley, KS), and CPT Angela Borden and CPT Noriko Ambulo were my S1 and S6 respectively, and who also became two of my closest friends. Although a majority of the time we were all stuck on COB Speicher, not seeing any actual action, it still made for a trying time. The days were fairly monotonous, and counting down 15 months felt like a very long time. The three of us got into Crossfit, before it was as popular as it is today, as a way to break up the time, do something different every day, and after a while, used it as a motivation to see how much we could improve small things. One of the memories that sticks the most in my mind, was when we spent Christmas together. Luckily, the

living conditions were much better, so we put a small amount of time into planning and buying gifts for each other online. We ended up gathering in my CHU, watching "Superbad" (I still can't remember laughing so hard at any movie since), and drinking the crappy wine my family smuggled to me in a care package. It was definitely one of my happiest memories in the Army.

If it weren't for those ladies, I don't know if I would've mentally survived that second deployment. I still remember walking the half-mile to work every day, going in my office, closing the door, and crying, for no real reason, except that anyone who's deployed can understand. I can still feel what I felt then, with no way to explain it to someone who hasn't experienced it. Noriko and Angela will always be how I remember my longest deployment. As hard as it was to be there, the bond we built was so strong, it made it just as hard to come home and not see them every day. It makes when you hear about the depression Soldiers experience when they return, I felt it after both deployments. It is like being torn away from a second family that most times, will never come together again in the same way.

I don't keep in touch as much now with Noriko and

Angela, and usually it's just on the holidays when we wish each other well. However, if I ever needed one of them, I wouldn't hesitate to pick up the phone and call.

Shaffer, Penny
U.S. Air Force, now a Contractor
GS12
A&P, Avionics
1986-present
A NEG

My experience on a small base in Germany. The time frame for the whole story is the late 1990s to the first years of the war. This in not about one military unit, this is about an entire community. I happen to work as a contractor supporting Army Aviation on Giebelstadt Army Air Field. I was a cog in the machine that made the magic of this time and place work.

Giebelstadt Army Air Field has a small Germany Community just off post. The town is Giebelstadt, and before OIF, it was hard to tell where the line or fence was between them. On post was everything you would find on any other Army base. Security, Medical, AAFES, Legal, Child Youth Center, Banking, and many other entities that make up a functioning post. This is not to exclude all the Aviation aspects. Many of the civilians from the local area also worked on base. There was a church that was at the center of many activities as there was also a Community Club called The Red Baron. And, shall we say, there were great

ministry capabilities in both places.

The main mission was Army Aviation, UH-60 Blackhawks and CH-47 Chinooks. That in itself is a relatively small group. Aviation having its own risks, let alone flying into dangerous situations. This was the home of the Blackhawks that were shot down by our own forces over Iraq. Several other crews were lost over this time frame as well. More were lost as OIF continued. No mere words can explain the horror the families, friends, and other crews go through when something like that happens. So I won't try.

I have seen other military communities torn apart from various tragedies and never rebound to the point they were before. This community not only rebounded, but became stronger as a whole. The friendships that were forged there remain strong for years to come. People rotated in and out of this duty station. The new folks may not even be aware of the past losses, but they continued the bonding that was started before them. This became the atmosphere of this special place.

This is not a particular story about an individual, but an open letter of appreciation to all that served, in whatever capacity, in the Giebelstadt Community and

were collectively called "Giebel People." I have been deployed all over the world and worked with many different organizations. Never have I worked with so many professional, devoted, friendly and just plain fun people. I must say this was the best time of my life. And I know it was the "Giebel People" that made the difference.

To all the past Giebel People out there: thank you for marching along with me and sharing a collective cadence. The base has since closed and is back in the hands of the Germans. But the legacy lives on in the hearts and souls of those of us lucky enough to have served there.

Shaul, Jonathan
U.S. Army
Chief Warrant Officer 3
UH-60 Blackhawk Pilot
2001-present
A POS

He was only twenty.

'Just a kid', but doing a man's job. When I was twenty, I was out with my buddies, up to no good and looking for trouble. Acting like I was thirteen.

When he was twenty, he was walking down a gravel road, tired, covered in dust and hungry.

When he was twenty, he stepped on the pressure plate and set it off.

When he was twenty, he lost both legs and an arm for people who were perfectly happy to never hear his name or what happened to him. People more comfortable having his name replaced by a number. A statistic.

When he was twenty, he was lying on that gravel road in that 'God-forsaken country' filled with people

who hated him. Well, what was left of him was lying there, not far from the crater in the ground, the calling card of the IED that had been patiently waiting for him.

When he was twenty, his brothers told him it was going to be okay as they tightened the tourniquets on the ragged remains of what used to be three healthy, muscular limbs. Back home these men were his fellow soldiers. Co-workers. Some of them his friends. Over here there was no doubt, no question. They were his brothers and one of them was holding his hand. «Help is coming," his brother said over the ringing in the young mans ears. And it was.

When he was twenty, the helicopter landed nearby on that same gravel road, kicking up sand and dust in its rotorwash, to take him home.

When he was twenty, the helicopter climbed and banked, sunlight streaming in through the plexiglass windows of the cabin doors, washing over him and chasing away the tingling chills that were creeping slowly up his arm.

When he was twenty, with the smell of iron heavy in the air and the medic yelling something to him,

something he couldn’t hear because it had all faded into silence, he let go and the sacrifice was complete.

When he was twenty, I cursed the fact that my country would never truly appreciate or understand.

He was only twenty...

Swartwout, Arthur
U.S. Army
Captain
Company Commander
2002-2007, 2009-2014
A POS

James G, Steelers fan
Gone a year; it still hurts, bad
Wish you'd called sooner

Stefanie Cimoli
Army wife of CW4 Gordon Cimoli
Mother of 3 children

In August 1990, I was a college student in Michigan. Gordon was a young paratrooper in the 82nd Airborne Division - he had been recalled from leave in Michigan where he was to attend his buddy Mark's wedding. Mark was marrying Angie, one of my best friends. Unbeknownst to me, Angie had planned to play cupid with Gordon and me at their wedding. When Iraqi soldiers rolled into Kuwait- their wedding was put on hold.

Mark and Gordon immediately drove back to North Carolina to report for duty. The wedding was cancelled. After local media exposure, a U.S. Senator stepped in and flew Angie and her parents to North Carolina where Mark and Angie were hastily married at an Army chapel – she did not get her chance to play cupid!

A few days later, Gordon and Mark shipped out to Kuwait. It was August, 1990 and Operation Desert Shield had just begun.

Several months later, Angie mentioned this "friend"

and suggested I write to him. After some hesitation, I decided to send him a package for Christmas. I wrote a brief letter, baked him some cookies, and sent it off.

I didn't expect to hear from him so you can imagine my surprise when I received a response via a recorded cassette tape a few weeks later. He thanked me for the care package and talked to me for nearly 2 hours. I was fascinated by his voice. He, like me, was from Michigan, but had acquired a kind of southern drawl from his time down south. I played it over and over. I wanted to know more about him, so I wrote him - every day. Several times a day in fact. Five to ten page letters. I mailed them off one after another and received no response.

Just as I was about to give up, I received eight or nine letters at once. My first lesson about wartime mail – its painfully slow.

As the weeks passed by, I began neglecting my schoolwork and spent hours writing to him and waiting anxiously by the mailbox. When the letters came, they came in groups. I would sort them, read them over and over and sleep with them under my pillow.

Only Angie and my parents knew that I was writing to him. I wanted to keep him to myself. I didn't feel ready to share him; maybe because I was falling for a guy I had never met, whose picture I had never seen.

By Easter 1991, Operation Desert Storm was over and the troops would slowly begin returning home. Angie heard rumors that some guys from the company were returning home – not all, but some. On a hunch, I rented a car and drove from Michigan to North Carolina to stay with Angie. I just had a feeling that I would finally meet my soldier.

On Easter morning, Angie received a long distance call from her husband who promptly told Gordon that I was at his house. Within minutes, he called and we spoke for the very first time. It was a two hour, $400 phone call – but worth every penny. He was in Kuwait at the Khobar Towers and was out-processing the county to head back to Fort Bragg. He was, indeed, coming home!

Only five soldiers from his Company were to return that day – he was one of them. 5 out of 120! I couldn't believe it. When he came off that plane - I would be there to meet him, *literally*, for the first time.

Despite exchanging photos, I was panicking that I would not recognize him when he came off the plane. When he arrived, I was there. Through the crowd of soldiers and family members, I saw him. As far away as he was, I knew it was him- he just had a swagger and a grin to match and he was looking at me. He was the most handsome guy I had ever seen.

In his hand was a red rose and when he reached me, he pulled me into his arms and gave me a warm kiss. Shyness hit us both a few seconds later, but we held each other's hands and just grinned at each other. We were both so overwhelmed with happiness that no words were necessary.

A few hours later, he proposed and I said yes. He had no ring. We had no money, but we both knew we were meant to be together.

When our parents found out we planned to marry quickly, they wanted us to wait. Being young and in love, we decided to get married anyway – without them knowing. With a handful of friends and only Gordon's Grandmother "in the know" we secretly married on May 30, 1991 outside the courthouse in Fayetteville, NC. We had planned to marry in the church the same time the following year.

Within months, our families and friends found out about our secret wedding. I knew everyone believed we wouldn't last. After all, we barely knew each other and we were so very young.

On May 30, 2016, we will celebrate our 25th wedding Anniversary. After a few more "trips" to war and so much time spent apart, I still always anxiously await my soldiers return.

We never had a honeymoon; we couldn't afford one. Instead, my soldier boy, (who retired in 2014 after a 25 year, 8 month career), has given me 3 beautiful children and twenty five years filled with laughter, tears, joy and struggles.

Writing that letter turned out to be the best thing I ever did. I found a best friend, the father of my children and a love to last me an entire lifetime.

Sutton, Brian
U.S. ARMY
Chief Warrant Officer 4
154FL Chinook Maintenance Test Pilot, Examiner
1997-present
A NEG

Military brotherhood is a bond of unique consistency and proportion; engrained by indoctrination, sweat, tears, and heritage; enjoyed and sustained by the less than 1% of the populace, protecting more than 300 million of us.

Al Taqaddum, Iraq, 14 August 2007, Dry Ice 41, CH47D 89-00171, Gone but not Forgotten.

CW2 Jackie L. McFarlane Jr [MP]
CW2 Christopher C. Johnson [PI]
SSG Sean P. Fisher [FE]
SPC Steven R. Jewell [CE]
SSG Stanley B. Reynolds [C]

It is coming up on almost 9 years since this tragic accident took the lives of five great Americans. I can still see it in my head like I was watching it on television. Nothing can erase the memories of the accident, the funeral at Arlington, or the

bewildered faces of the family members and loved ones. I continue to do my job to this day, to the best of my ability to keep others safe through aircraft maintenance. If it were not for my wife, Christie, and my sons, Christopher and Joshua, I could not continue in the profession that I love.

To all my brothers and sisters in arms, remember healing is a day by day event. Some days are better than others and it is ok to regress and then progress again. Communicating with family and friends with common experiences is how we make it. Strong military and family bonds keep us together, military experiences make us insanely unique.

Tamba, Folleh S.
U.S. Marine Corps
Sergeant
0311 Field Rifleman, Infantry Squad leader
2003-2015
A POS

On October 8, 2004, I almost lost my entire squad (13 riflemen, 3 fire teams, and a squad leader) to a suicide car bomber that was driving a VBIED. One of my Marines at the time, LCPL. Bodziony, opened fire with the M-240G Machine Gun killing the suicide bomber. The car still exploded carrying a 1,000lb bomb. It was 25' away from us knocking our lights out. There were pieces of human remains all over the place, including the suicide bomber. Skin was on my rifle when I found it, after I came into consciousness. Later in the day, after the constant fire fight died out and we captured the city of Al-Yusifiah, Iraq (in an area know by the media as "The Triangle of Death"), we saw a famished dog eating charred human remains. I wrote about that day's incident in my war dairy entry below.

Diary Entry: #120: 10 08, 2004
To: E: Our First VBIED
(Vehicle Borne Improvised Explosive Device)

It came mad like a tornado,
fussing and cussing at us,
chastising our iron will,
bundled up in a car bomb
mightily shaking the ground,
knocking us on our faces,
forcing our heads down,
uprooting everything in its path.

It threw car axles,
concrete bricks, rocks,
sand, pieces of windshield,
a transmission, bolts,
break drums, doors,
a radiator, strut springs,
a gas tank, a muffler,
an engine block, a rear view mirror,
and boiling engine oil,
all came flying fast at us.
Shrapnel rain pours down
a million flaming pieces of iron.

First it was the bright flash,
a stinging luminous light,
then the scalding dense heat
with an acute inferno breath
blowing on rolled down sleeves,

penetrating through the fabric,
scorching the bare skin,
charring eyelashes and brows,
stealing my sights like snow blindness.

The ravishing shock wave,
like a lightening bolt,
went rippling from finger tips,
riding through both arms,
making its way into the stomach
tying everything into a knot,
imploding all vital organs.
It fell deep below the waist
hitting the base of my feet.

It slammed my exhausted body
on the ground after I flew airborne,
travelling a long couple of feet in the air,
all in a flash of a split second.
I don't know what happened next,
out went my dimming light
extinguishing into that blackness.

Taylor, John E.
U.S. Army
Captain
Company Commander, Chinook Maintenance Pilot
2006-2014
A NEG

Life as an Army officer and combat helicopter pilot was one of the most rewarding and difficult experiences of my life. I'm continually awestruck at the magnitude of responsibility entrusted to young service members.

Our train-up periods prior to deployments seemed disjointed and overly brief. We were handed millions of dollars of military hardware and the lives of soldiers and crewmembers, told to explore the outer limits of the performance envelope and expand our comfort zone in order to be prepared for war. Hindsight revealed the disjointed training likely saved our lives in scenarios impossible to predict.

I deployed to Southern Asia twice in my Army career. I hated most every day away from my family. Now that I'm out of the Army, I wistfully look back upon my service and ache for the relationships I once had with fellow pilots and Soldiers. We knew the Army

was going to grind the fun out of whatever job we had, but the people alongside us made the task worth doing.

During my last deployment, about half-way through our time in-country, I flew a seemingly mundane flight which I continually look back upon as one of my favorite Army memories:

On Thanksgiving Day, I led a flight of two CH-47F Chinooks on a daytime mission to support a regular rotation of troops within Afghanistan. The Taliban had been inactive recently; it was wintertime and most of the fighters had scattered to wherever Taliban go to dirka-dirka during the off-season. It was an easy mission and forecast to be mind-numbingly boring.

We were based at the regional hub, Kandahar, and home-bound troops were being replaced by a "new" unit at their outlying FOB within our operational area. They were going home; we were jealous as hell. The "new" unit seemed eager and green; we laughed knowing they had a long time to wait before heading home.

For whatever reason that day, I was assigned as the Air Mission Commander of the flight and Pilot-in-

Command of our aircraft. Murphy's Law struck and I was also assigned as the lead aircraft for the mission. (We had an attachment of Hawaii National Guard pilots and crewmembers assigned to us – they were assholes – they loved to play games with the flight schedule and cherry pick the "good" missions for themselves. Anyway – some days before when the schedule was hastily written I was christened with all the duties and didn't realize it until our mission brief).

My flight engineer made the seemingly mundane flight memorable. During our run-up and taxi check he kept reminding us to fly through the test-fire area after takeoff in order to test fire "his" M240B machine guns.

Our crewmembers asked us to "fly sporty" and to help give the passengers a warm welcome on their first flight around Afghanistan. Our flight entered the test-fire area with a gut-wrenching drop and 60-degree banked turn, leveling out with copious amounts of G-forces; the gunners opened up on the M240B's shooting hundreds of rounds into the nothingness below. We jinked erratically through the range and guns continued to blaze. Each aircraft manually deployed bright magnesium anti-missile flares on climb-out from the range (merely for

novelty's sake).

The passengers had no idea what was occurring on board the aircraft. There was no threat, no Taliban were shooting at us, no missiles were flying, nothing was amiss. The looks on their faces were priceless; we opined the ashen-faced senior NCOs and officers were terrified by the prospect of hostile action so quickly into their deployment. Junior Soldiers were high-fiving each other and giving thumbs-ups to the crew; they thought it was cool.

We continued that routine on each leg of our flight between the FOB and Kandahar. The newbies got a warm welcome and the home-bound troops got a memorable send-off. I heard sometime later the new unit had Combat Badge requests approved for "exposure to enemy action" following that flight.

I flew 7.8 hours that day and had a mashed-up cinnamon Pop-Tart for lunch. It was the most fun flight I had during my Afghanistan deployment.

Shortly thereafter, Arrowsmith 35 crashed and I lost a fellow maintenance test pilot. War sucks.

The Army sent me places I never want to see again.

I went on missions I shudder remembering and became a warrior along the way. The Army provided opportunities that I hated at the time but long to experience again. I developed lifetime friendships forged in arduous circumstances.

The Army introduced me to three good friends that are dead now; Rob, Bryan and Sara occasionally visit me in my dreams. I hated the uncertainty of never knowing where the Army would next send me. Now that I'm finally done with service, I miss the flying, my friends, and knowing the Army was always there to have my back.

Ulmer, John J.
U.S. Army
Chief Warrant Officer 4
UH-60 Maintenance Test Pilot
2001-present
A NEG

I was in Jalalabad, Afghanistan in RC east from 2010-2011 with 10th Mountain Division from Fort Drum. We were part of Task Force Six Shooter, under the 6-6 Cav Squadron who was also from Drum. We routinely executed missions that exceeded the comfort level of almost everyone in the unit.

This deployment was quite the departure from the Air Assualt/VIP units I had served in. The Cav didn't understand what a mission packet was, or how to plan one. Most nights we got a quick weather and threat brief from the battle Captain, and we were on our way. That night, I was tasked with providing QRF and to be a chase bird to the medevac. There was a large air assault mission involving 2 Chinooks and 2 Blackawks. The mission was to infill 50 pathfinders and a couple platoons of infantry on top of a 10,000' mountain, north of FOB Joyce in the Kunar valley, which borders Pakistan.

I was pulling a 7,000' cap with the Med bird under goggles, zero illumination, what else would it be? There were 2 Apaches at 10,500' pulling security over the LZ. The LZ ended up being only big enough for one hawk, but the Chinook attempted to land in the rugged terrain that consisted of a 30 degree, right wheel up slope. There was no where to set the aircraft down due to the tree trunks that were left over from the chainsaws the infantry used a week prior to clear the landing zone.

The first Chinook came in with 36 infantry, which was more then they had planned on. After almost over flying the LZ, they slowed back quickly, ran out of power, flew past the LZ and crashed at the top of the mountain. The aircraft immediately burned to the ground, no one was dead, but 19 were injured with the flight crew stuck up there.

The radios starting going crazy with "Fallen angel, fallen angel!" The med bird was directed to head in and pick up the injured by the AMC who was in the C2 bird, orbiting in the Kunar valley at a lower altitude. We quickly climbed up to 10,000' with the med bird, giving him about 500 meters of spacing, he overflew the LZ as it was extremely small and hard to find with the Chinook burning under the goggles. I was then

told to get in there and pick up the pilots.

Even though this was my second deployment to Afghanistan, and I had to been to the High Altitude course in Colorado, I knew the power management and terrain was going to be sketchy. I remember having 1600lbs of gas and my PI, CW2 Brian Gilmore, scrambled to look up the tab data for that temperature and altitude. I came to a slow crawl over the LZ, came down extremely slow and put the helicopter on one wheel.

There was only about 2 feet of clearance underneath of the rotor disk on the right. The CE, SPC David Hoye, said, "Sir if you can hold this one wheel hover, I will crawl under the disc and get these guys." I had never felt so much responsibility in my life after giving the order to get them. My other CE, SGT Mike McArthur, made sure we didn't hit any trees, as this LZ was pretty tight for a hawk. Hoye came back 2 minutes later, directed the pilots under the disc and we were off. The trees were about 75 feet tall. I knew we could only take two people, and even that was stretching it.

As we came up to the top of the trees, I instructed my PI to call out TGT and Rotor as I crest the top of the trees. I figured we could always come back down

slow if I droop the rotor. He called out 865 on TGT and 99, 98, 97, 96% rotor.....I started nosing it over with about 10' of clearance over the trees and applied right pedal as I came forward. The mountain top was not that wide, so I planned on nosing it over and gaining my rotor back, thankfully it worked in a right bank and we regained 100% rotor, flew back to FOB Joyce and safely shutdown.

That night, the Chinook pilots came over to thank us in the QRF pilot room. We could tell they were shaken up and happy to be out of there. That was one of the most rewarding missions I had ever been on, and we all felt a sense of pride that we were able to recover them. At the same time, there was an overwhelming feeling of accomplishment with the crew I had that night. Everyone knew it was a life-changing event, and they performed flawlessly without hesitation.

I'm still in contact with that crew to this day. CW2 Gilmore is now an IP with over 2000 hours and has been accepted to 160th SOAR. SPC Hoye became an SI, and trained at NTC to prepare future crews for battle. SGT McArthur is on his way to SFC. He became an SI. I recently had the honor of writing him a letter for Warrant Officer school.

Mrs. Vikki Pier
Mother of Noah Miles Pier, KIA
U.S. Marine Corps

February 13, 2010, Noah was headed to battle. I was gripped by a fear I have never before experienced – I was panicked, it paralyzed me, made me weep. Noah and his Marine brothers were being prayed for. They battled a physical enemy, I battled a spiritual one.

I continually cried out "I choose faith!" – over and over again – all through the night I fought the fear with my desperate, fervent pleas – "save my son," "protect him," "surround Noah with your angles," "bring him home" – "I CHOOSE FAITH!!!!"

By morning faith had won – then Noah died… Men killed him – thank God Marine brothers surrounded him – Angels carried him. God did bring Noah home – just not to me…

Lance Corporal Noah Miles Pier
Born July 28, 1984 in Fairfax, Virginia
Killed in Action February 16, 2010
in Marjah, Afghanistan

Noah loved his family (Noah has 9 siblings – 4 sisters

& 5 brothers; he is the 3rd child & oldest son)

Proud to be a Marine
Patriotic, loved his country, flag and freedom
Chivalrous
A believer

Loved history, super heroes, the color red

Booming laugh
Grin ear to ear
Big brown eyes
Tall
Crazy calves (muscular)

Loved coffee
Loved to eat: mushrooms, pumpkin pie, lasagna,
cheese cake, honey, hot tamales, and
Peanut butter captain crunch
Proud of his cooking

Go getter, no fear
Adventurous, fun loving, sneaky
Tree climber, wrestling, bike rides
Played cards (palace), video games

Active, difficult to sit still, competitive, FAST!

Loved music, singing in the shower and John Wayne
Black belt in karate, “ninja monkey”

Made the best of negative situations
Involved in a positive way
Selfless

Wu, Michael L.
U.S. Army
Chief Warrant Officer 2
Aviator
1998-present
A POS

On my first deployment to Kosovo in 2000, it was a volunteered deployment. Meaning they only needed a handful of people to go out of the company. During this deployment, our group composed of just 10 personnel to include one officer and one senior enlisted, was pretty tight knit.

Since we were such a small group we just about did everything together. If you weren't part of the group activity, everybody knew it. So instead of letting the one or two people say "I don't feel like doing that," we would say, "It's not easy having pals," which would essentially guilt them into sucking it up and joining the group. This meant going to places you just came from such as the DEFAC of PX. Even today we are still a close group and our saying still has some affect back here in the states.

Anonymous
U.S. Army
Chief Warrant Officer 4
Blackhawk Pilot, Safety Officer
A POS

When I was stationed in Germany, our unit was part of Stabilization Forces (SFOR) supporting operations in Bosnia. My Detachment would rotate in and out on a regular basis. We had four UH-60's, two stayed in Germany and two were down in Sarajevo. Helicopter maintenance was done by a mixture of our own crewchiefs and contractors. The same contractors also supported us in Germany and rotated in and out like us but stayed longer, so you got to know them pretty well. The crews in my Detachment stayed in the hangar with the aircraft and the contractors all rented houses or apartments in town.

On this particular rotation, one of our contractors, who's wife was 9-months pregnant with their first child, came to us one evening saying she had started to go into labor and asked if we could get him to Kaposvar, Hungary (she was Hungarian and was back home close to her family while this contractor was in Bosnia). Kaposvar had a former Soviet Air Base the U.S. was using.

We said sure but would have to make a phone call first. Phone call made, the plan was on! This wasn't going to be a particularly long flight, an 1.5 hours each way or so, direct. But as luck would have it there was a thunderstorm moving in around Kaposvar so we would have to move pretty fast. We got loaded up and in the air. The flight was pretty uneventful until we got closer to Kaposvar and you could see lightening in the distance, of course it was dark and were using NVG's.

The storm was moving in, but we made it, and our contractor got to be there for the birth of his first child (a healthy baby boy). We did it because we were like a family and had to rely on each other and there wasn't much we wouldn't do for each other.

This page intentionally left blank

AB

AB

Anonymous
U.S. Marine Corps and U.S. Army
Helicopter Pilot
1981-2005
UNK

After serving through many years and too many deployments to mention, I came to understand that it is the relationships we develop that matter, both at the time and for the future. As a military professional, the hardest challenges are not the sacrifices made by myself. Rather, it is the sacrifices made by my family who were on many occasions left wondering about my location, safety and wondering when I would return home. Whether my wife, children, or parents, the anxiety for their husband, father and son was real and impactful. God has blessed me with my life, my family, friends and a real relationship with Him with an opportunity to share with others during the best and worst of times. I owe all to Him. Thank you for letting me serve.

Delia, Michael W.
Mississippi Army National Guard
Chief Warrant Officer 3
Aviator: C-23, C-12, CH-47D, CH-47F
1981-present
AB POS

I find it hard to believe now, but looking back my military career has become a long one. I guess I am a dinosaur.

I began my 34 years (so far) in April of 1981, one month before graduating high school. I joined Company A, 2nd BN 20th Special Forces, Mississippi Army National Guard. I am an aviator now, having gone to flight school in 1987.

One of my fondest memories is of a training exercise in 1986. By this time I was a First Lieutenant and Detachment Executive Officer on a Special Forces Team in A Company. I was Airborne qualified, an Infantry officer and Special Forces qualified. I had also finished college. It had been a busy five years.

A Company was located on the main road entering Camp Shelby, Mississippi, a busy training center for guard units from many states as well as active duty

and reserve Army, Navy and Marine Corps units.

Almost every month some unit arriving on post would see our unit sign and stop in to see if we could provide personnel to act as opposing forces for their unit training, after all training is better and a lot more fun if you have someone to fight. Sometimes they would ask for instructors for land navigation, patrol leading, small unit tactics or survival, all subjects that Special Forces soldiers must master.

The really great part of this was that the funds always came from their unit. As a college student I loved getting calls from A company offering me several days of pay to help a unit with realistic training……which usually meant ambushing their convoys, infiltrating their perimeter and stealing their vehicles.
Good times.

This time the unit was a Military Police Battalion. These guys boldly strolled into our company orderly room and claimed we could never get through their Battalion perimeter. They said even if our entire company was available, we could not get through their security. Now, our whole company would have been 4 Special Forces Operational Detachments of 12 men each, so 48 SF guys. Not wanting to make this

too easy we used 2 detachments. It was a guard drill weekend so personnel was no issue.

Rules of engagement for the exercise were laid out and agreed to. The basic scenario would be that one of our NCOs would be their POW. He would be in their Battalion TOC. In order to succeed we would have to rescue him.

Before the cocky MPs left our building we had already sent out a recon element to the training area. Their unit was observed occupying and setting up the defensive perimeter in broad daylight. Our team noted everything. terrain, roads, dead space, likely avenues of approach, every one of their fighting positions, their obstacles, trip flares and where their immediate reaction element would be.

We were to have a four-hour window 2200 to 0200 to accomplish our mission. We split our two Detachments into three 4-man teams each. Each team was given a sector of the perimeter to probe and harass. We were carful to focus on different sectors and occasionally make a loud display with lots of blank small arms fire and grenade simulators. This was done all around the perimeter in order to wear out their immediate reaction force, making them run

from one sector to another to help repel what they thought was a major attack.

There was one point on the perimeter that offered good cover and concealment right up to their fighting position. It was determined that this would be our primary avenue of approach. We also had an alternate but as the night wore on it became clear that the primary would do. My team low crawled through a depression to within 12 meters of this position. We lay there for three hours, our only movement was to disarm their trip flares during the loud probing attacks of by other teams. At 0100 we ceased our probes. Within 20 minutes the exhausted soldiers in the position to our front were snoring. They had convoyed in the day before and then worked all day on their position so they had been up for at least 16 hours. Struggling not to laugh at the now Chain saw like snoring, we slipped into their position, woke them up and advised them that they were now out of the fight. One of our other teams occupied this position and kept watch on our sleepy POWs.

We slipped further into the Battalion area and located the immediate reaction force about 50 meters from the Battalion TOC tent. They were all lying on the ground sweaty and dozing, thoroughly spent from the

long day and constant harassment. Two of our other teams followed us into the perimeter and set up local security around the worn out MPs.

We used a large red marker to draw a line across their throats and were amazed that none of them woke up! Suddenly I heard a vehicle door open near me. Someone was walking toward us and I heard him say over his shoulder toward the vehicle that he needed to check on his reaction force to be sure they were still alert. I had to do something quick. The ROE did not include actually knocking anyone out, so I resorted to plan B……Bullshit.

I walked right up to this guy in the dark and said "Hey man, were have you been?" He stopped in his tracks and raised his .45 (yes we still had .45s then). Now I'm pretty sure there aren't any in rounds in that pistol and it isn't set up for blanks… so I say "Whoa man, I'm on your side, these guys have got us pointing weapons at each other!" He lowered the weapon slightly and then my guys had him. One on each side had slipped behind him and now they had him secured. He was one of their second lieutenants and the OIC of their reaction force.

Now four of us moved to the TOC tent. We crawled

up to the tent and found a corner to pull up and peer underneath. There was our NCO. A couple MP Majors and their Battalion commander were giving him a hard time. All in good fun they were taunting him about where we were and how he had been abandoned by his buddies and there was only 15 minutes left to save him... but their backs were to our little peep spot in the tent. Dumb luck for us! Even luckier, our NCO had seen me looking right at him. Without missing a beat he kept up the conversation saying "Well gee sir I guess you guys are pretty good…." While the shit talking and crow eating continued the three guys with me got into position to roll under the side of the tent. I walked around to the TOC entrance and found the TOC access guard with her head down on a field desk. I picked up her weapon and walked in on the one sided fun poking discussion.

Standing beside our hostage NCO I witnessed three sets of eyes bug out and three jaws drop.

"So, have you MPs been treating my sergeant right?" I said, that's when they realized I was alone…. they thought, so I introduced them to the other three guys on my team who had slipped under the tent as I came in and were now behind them with weapons ready.

Mission accomplished with 10 minutes to spare! Of course our opponents did protest. We were supposed to rescue our NCO and we were still in the tent with them. I was forced to have the Commander escorted out to view his decimated immediate reaction team and then walked out of the perimeter the same way we had entered all the while with our recovered NCO walking with us. Once outside the perimeter with a minute still on the clock I made a believer out of him.

What a blast! We talked about this for years. In all fairness however, I must admit that if there had been real claymore mines in place and our opponents had positioned LP/OPs with NVGs it may have turned out differently.

But since it turned out as it did we were freakin' awesome. AIRBORNE!

After two deployments to Iraq and two to the Sinai some might wonder why this peacetime event is such a special memory. I suppose it is special because it was fun. It was training. The only casualties were bragging rights.

Dietz, Ron
U.S. Air Force
Captain
Weapons systems officer F4 fighter bomber
1973-1979
AB NEG

When I was stationed at Ft. Walton Beach, I flew a training mission with a guy and everything seemed normal. I noticed no issues with him. The next day I flew with somebody else and he flew with another backseater and crashed his plane into the ground, killing both of them.

The investigation showed that he had no idea that he was going to hit the ground. Both occupants of the plane were relaxed and not even trying to pull up or regain any altitude. They obviously weren't paying attention to their instruments and didn't know they were as low as they were.

I wonder if we had flown another mission together that day, if he would've done the same thing to me. In spite of the fact that I had a full set of controls and could've and should've known where we were and took action to prevent a crash. However normally, I was always focused on doing my job and was not

always paying attention to the flight instruments. The day we flew we together, we were staying pretty high and never did anything low level that training mission. so it was possible that he could've not been paying attention to his altitude but we never went low enough for it to matter.

It was only a day difference between life and death for me.

Leigh Boulineau
Wife of Army Warrant Officer

When I first started dating Frank, I watched *The Unit* on the sly, hoping to gain a little insight into Army life. I secretly liked the show. The women's lives were full of a reasonable amount of drama, and the guys always came home after a brief yet heroic assignment away. Of course, that's not how it goes in real life. For one, when the guys leave, they leave for a long time.

Secondly, Frank doesn't do any of that Rambo combat stuff; he's the over-looked pilot in the cockpit. "They never get the pilots' names," he said to me once, and it's true – most articles or news features rarely name the pilots. That's fine by Frank, of course. He wants no part of the limelight.

In the three years that Frank and I had been together, my experience with Army life has been a spattering of events made all the more hazy by his reluctance to engage in the army-encouraged social gatherings. I had made a few friends, but I didn't attend any FRG meetings (Family Readiness Group) and rarely went on post. And, of course, we were not married, which is an anomaly in the Army world.

The wives I met through the Army impressed me with their intelligence, their devotion to their families, and their optimistic attitudes. The wives I met taught, worked in real estate and on college degrees, were full-time moms, and some flew helicopters too. And, unlike the women in *The Unit* or *Army Wives*, they didn't have a lot of drama in their lives, other than the ever-lingering possibility of their spouses' deployment.

Even though we weren't married, I was an Army "wife" too - albeit, an ill-prepared one. That became crystal clear to me when, out of the blue, 2 different friends told me they had sold their houses and were leaving Alaska within the month, just before their spouses' deployment. They originally were going to stay, but then they changed their minds. I can't blame them. Alaska, with all of its beauty and adventure, is a hard place to live.

The unpredictable upheaval is the hardest thing about army living. You make friends, and then they're gone. You get a job, and then you have to leave it. Eventually I would be faced with the same decision. And then I would have to decide whether to stay in Alaska or leave for the solace of family and friends. It wouldn't be an easy decision to make.

McConnell, D.
U.S. Army
Chief Warrant Officer 4
UH-60 Instructor Pilot, Maintenance Examiner
1992-present
AB POS

Even at 0500 the heat was uncomfortable; waking up on my Army cot soaked with sweat has become the norm, not just for me but the other 100 people living to my left and right. My crew and I slept on the east side of the open air, drive through, quonset hut style hangar we called home. We are always the first to see B.O.B. (the big orange ball) making us the first ones to rise from our dreams of families to begin our day. This day, like the 100 days before it, was no different, brush my teeth and see if I can get away without shaving. Of course we ask ourselves what the cooks will try to pass off as food today, I just can't get use to T rations but then again I don't think anyone ever does, at least they are warm most of the time.

My flight crew and I arrive at the aircraft and begin preparing it for yet another day on QRF (quick reaction force). It has been pretty quiet the last week or so, allowing me the time during our 12 hour duty to

conduct maintenance on my 9 other aircraft. After both aircraft and their crews are finished we head into operations for our intelligence brief and weather outlook for the day. Guess what, it is going to be hot again. Awesome, who doesn't like drinking 5 to 8 liters of water a day and only going to the porta-john once all day?

With our crew briefs complete we all head to breakfast with our radios, hoping that the coffee will be hot at least. We gave up on good tasting coffee a long time ago. The best part of that breakfast was the conversations, my crew chief assigned to me was always good for a laugh and he was in quite the mood. With our stomachs still left wanting a delicious breakfast my crew and I walk back to the flight line to finish working on a helicopter that I started working on the day prior. Being a new maintenance test pilot, I was not very good at tracking and balancing main rotors and this aircraft was not making it easy. After our first ground run of the morning we shut down and made our first adjustments to the rotor head. Being on top of the helicopter, 14 feet up, we had a pretty good view of the airfield and it was always fun to critique the other helicopters on approach and take offs.

Today was no different but I had a few choice words about a flight of CH-47s that took off and headed straight towards Falluja. We only had a few safe routes to get in and out of the airfield and that was not one of them. I shook my head, made one more rude comment and went back to the task at hand. Minutes later my radio began to come alive, our quiet week was over.

I sprinted to headquarters as my co-pilot was getting strapped in and my crew chief prepared for engine start. I met the other pilot in command as we ran through the door, no jokes and no smiles because these calls rarely end with smiles on your face. The CH-47 that I had just watched fly away had taken enemy fire and was on the ground. I don't remember running back to my helicopter, I just remember being strapped in and reaching for the start buttons as I told my co-pilot that the CH-47 had just been shot down.

Both engines at fly and my chase aircraft sitting behind me ready to go, we wait for the approval to launch. Every radio call I made ignored and silenced with "standby!", two UH-60L helicopters at 100%, M-60 machine guns prepared to do the unthinkable and 8 US soldiers screaming to go, as I hear on the ICS (intercommunication system) "Sir, there

is someone in PTs approaching the aircraft". Our battalion medic had heard the commotion and with no time to change, grabbed his gear and ran to the aircraft. No one ever told me if he had gotten in trouble, I know that I didn't, because I took him with us. I've never heard anyone complain about having a medic with them at a helicopter crash; he was later awarded for his actions that afternoon.

Moments later we got the approval to launch; before the radio call was completed we where off the ground and pulling every ounce of power out of our engines that they could produce. We flew fast and low, slowing only to land. I don't think any of us had even thought about the fact that the same weapon system that took down that CH could still be in the area, you don't think about it because it is more important to get to the aid of your brothers.

Upon arriving at the crash site we realized that there was a slim chance of survivors. The site of a CH-47 spread over 500 yards is not one you will forget anytime soon. A few more aircraft arrived about the same time and the senior officer took command of the situation. With a MEDEVAC aircraft on the ground there seemed to be no reason for us to be there, as my crew chief came back to asked if we

could start loading the casualties. Without hesitation we discarded our 11 passenger seats, tossing them onto the ground and begun loading the casualties. These soldiers had just boarded the CH-47 on their way home for mid tour leave just moments ago. Five stretchers will fit on the floor of a UH-60 Blackhawk, it took only a few moments to prepare for their final journey home.

With our doors closed, guns at the ready and a big taste of reality we departed the crash site for the morgue in Baghdad with our passengers. I had never been involved in a mission like this and I didn't know the specific Army protocol for this situation but I did know, as we waited for the mortuary affairs personal to arrive, that the soldiers in our helicopters would stay right where they were. So we waited for what seemed to be an eternity but in reality was probably only 10 minutes. If you have never spent 30 minutes in an enclosed helicopter with 5 fallen comrades during an Iraq summer, well there are no words. We could not shut down so we waited. One of my crew members asked to disconnect and go have a cigarette, the other two followed. I found myself alone in my helicopter at flight idle, strange enough so did my chase bird. Our aircraft parked a beast from each other, allowed us to look at each other, no words

needed to be said.

One more trip from the crash site to the morgue was in our future before we could return to our base after the second trip so we could get out of our aircraft and take a breather, but we would have to wait, we had received a follow on mission before we could land. As if transporting 16 fallen comrades was not enough for the day, we now had one more flight to the morgue with two Special Forces Soldiers.

In total we transported 18 Heroes that day, 3 flights to the morgue logging over 8 hours of flight time. A few things happened when we shut down that day that I appreciated with all of my heart. The entire maintenance company was waiting at our parking spots to tend to the aircraft and our flight company was standing by to help in any way they could. My flight gear was packed up, paperwork completed, weapons cleaned and returned to the arms room with no questions asked. They told us just to walk away and go eat dinner.

Unlike breakfast not 12 hours earlier, there where no jokes or friendly banter, only sounds of our plastic forks against paper plates filled with only the Lord knows what. The next morning we all had to sit and

talk to a psychologist before we could return to flight status. Apparently he was not happy with me when I told him “There is nothing to talk about, I did my fucking job and now I need to get back to it. Can I go now?”

Mitchell, Melvin
U.S. Army
Major
Aviation, Assistant Product Manager
2001-Present
AB POS

Over the course of my time in the military, I have had the opportunity to see and do things most dream of. But the memories that stand out the most and are exceptionally special to me are so because of the people I experienced that moment with. In the military, you have two families. One family everyone can relate to, which is your biological family. The other family is not as clearly defined. In the military we refer to them as an extension of your family, and it is those men and women that stand shoulder-to-shoulder with you everyday. This story, my story, is about the times I spent with my extension family.

I remember the day like it was yesterday. It was 20 June 2011, and we were based out of Fort Hood, TX, which was our current home for the time being. To this point, we really liked central Texas. The weather was hot, the tea was sweet, and the people we friendly. Leading up to this day had been a rough time for my family. It seemed as though I had spent

the last several years away from home. Most of the conversations I had with my wife were over the phone and I received updates about the kids via text message or email. Not the preferred way to watch your kids grow up, but at the time it was the best we could do. So what is the significance of this day? Well it was the day my wife dropped me off at the airport as I make my way on another paid vacation.

This time was unlike that last few, because this time I was heading to Afghanistan. My daughter (who was 3 at the time) did not really understand what was going on, so for her it was just another drop off at the airport. My son (he was 5) knew something was not right. You could see it in his face and he was quiet the entire trip to the airport. He knew Papa was leaving, he just didn't know where. As I walked into the terminal, I knew it was going to be hard. My wife and I had said our good-byes many times before and it never seemed to hurt this much. Without a doubt, the kids made it difficult to leave. Saying goodbye wasn't the hard part, not knowing whether I'd ever say hello again was.

I stood at the airport with a group of guys, all dressed like me and having done the same thing I just finished doing. We shared a bond, each one of those

gentlemen just kissed their loved ones goodbye and knew they would be gone for an extended amount of time. There was a dependency to not only watch out for them, but also help to fill that void while away from home. When away from home, your brothers & sisters in arms become that support network to help see you through those tough times. That is what makes that extended family so special. Even when you're miles from home, you're only steps away from a shoulder to cry on, an ear that will listen to you, or a person to share a cup of coffee with.

I spent eight months traveling all across the country of Afghanistan. With me were five gentlemen. My Assistant Team Leader, Captain Jeffrey Sacks. Jeff was a relatively senior Captain at the time. In his former life, he was in the infantry and it was a passion of his. He was recently married and had two girls at home that he adored. Next was SFC Walter Mason. Walter Mason never smiled; he was all business all day, a true professional. He worked hard and he played harder. Unfortunately for me, his definition for play hard was conducting physical fitness. SFC Kevin Waldrip was another member of the team. Kevin was a down home country boy from the great state of Texas. His dreams were to get back to Texas to his lovely bride and settle down on the ranch. The

most rambunctious guy on the team was SSG Shaun Dennis. Shaun had two younger kids, which were his pride and joy. He raved about them all the time and would video chat with them at every opportunity. The last member of the team, and by far the youngest was Mr. Paul Godfrey. Paul was fresh out of college and a newly wed. He was so young that we joked about him having powdered milk on his breath. Paul wasn't in the military; he was a government employee that specialized on explosives. Even though he didn't wear the uniform, he was faced with the same challenges everyone else was facing. But without a doubt, we accepted and treated him just as one of our own.

For eight months we worked, played, laughed, cried, argued, resolved, joked, debated, supported, ridiculed, counseled, and casually conversed. You quickly learn more about an individual than you ever wish to know. Before it is all said and done, because you have spent so much time together you know more about your team than you know about anyone else. This band of misfits grew into a band of brothers. A group of guys that at one point you did not know grew into a group of guys that would without hesitation lay down their life to save yours. A group that I would call my family. No story, or picture could ever elaborate on

the amount of respect, love, and admiration I have for these guys. Unless you experience a life-changing event that will cause you to test your character, courage, and commitment, you may never understand.

This is just one snap shot in time of a period than spans 15 years. Imagine that story, spanning hundreds of years over millions of people. I am proud to be a part of the team and honored to be one of the brothers.

Ross, Stephen
U.S. Air Force
Captain
Titan II Commander Instructor
1983-1987
UNK

1984, 2nd Lt Stephen Ross and my wife at the time.... having completed missile launch officer school and reported to LRAFB I had been on station for about 6 months. I had reported in, selected an apartment off base as no base housing for an accompanied 2Lt was available. My wife and I unpacked and loaded into our first apartment entirely on our own about 10 miles off the base. It was a long few days of carrying furniture and getting set up in our first place. We didn't get so much as a hello from a passing neighbor in the apartments, let alone any offers to assist.

Roll forward those 6 months and on base housing opens up. I fight to get out of my lease and eventually win that battle and make arrangements to move everything again to a small duplex on base. I mention my moving to a few buddies in my unit, never asking anyone for help and come moving day numerous men and women from my unit show up to help load it all into the truck. I drive on base, park in front of my

new housing and roll the truck door up. Before I have the house door opened there are people stopping behind the truck, as they are driving past they simply stop. It continues to happen for the next few hours. Not a single vehicle drives past without people from the base community, my new neighbors getting out of their cars and stopping, going into the truck and grabbing at least one item , saying hello, welcome, and carrying something into the new home.

I am so blown away and immediately I know this is what community is supposed to be.

Stephenson, Tim
U.S. Army
Staff Sergeant
UNK

What I miss most are the people. Making rank never meant that much to me. I always appreciated my fellow soldier that was there with me. I have friends that I have known since 1995 and we still talk. When I retired, I stopped in Mo. to stay at a friends house that I was stationed in Germany with. Granted we hadn't seen each other or talked in 17 years, but the friendship was still there (and so was the beer). Knowing so many people helped me become a better man, husband, and father.

This page intentionally left blank

B

B

Chappell, David
U.S. Army
Major
MEDEVAC Company Commander
2002-present
B POS

One of my most significant memories from any of my deployments occurred 8 May 2005, on my first Iraq deployment. I had my team in Al Kut, a dusty ugly place (we actually had a small tree in our compound, so we felt a little special). The majority of the base was foreign, El Salvadorians, Polish, Ukrainians, and of course the Iraqi Police Academy. There were only about 100 Americans on the base, and as such we all got pretty tight. My team was especially close with the SF team there with us, NG Special Forces, 19thGroup. They always tied us into their planning and set up a SATCOM radio in our ops tuned to their operational freq.

On the morning of 8 May 2005 one of my guys woke me up pounding on my door. The Team had been on a admin run to their home base (it wasn't a high risk operation, so they didn't tell us they were going out) and were hit by an Explosively Formed Penetrator (EFP), a new type of shape charged IED that had

started creeping in from Iran, and would cut through HMMWV armor like butter.

I got to ops and could hear the panicked voices of these professional warriors. I was listening for the voice of the Team Sargent, MSG Rodney Goss, who I usually worked with and was especially tight with, I never heard him on the radio because he was in the HMMWV that had been hit and was unconscious. After listening to them talk to their higher HQ for a few seconds about QRF, I broke in and asked if they had called for MEDEVAC yet (they were out of our AOR, but I didn't really care, they were close enough that having the direct line via SATCOM we could get to them faster). They hadn't sent up a nine line yet, so I told them to give me the grid so I could get my guys in the air (typing this is bringing back the memories of the heat and the dust, the dry scorching wind).

My crew ended up evacuating four of their guys, two were pretty far gone, and the other two were lightly wounded. The two severely wounded died before they got to the hospital in Baghdad, or maybe they were dead before they were even picked up. They were Dan Crabtree and their interpreter "Rock". I didn't know Dan too well, I'm having trouble picturing his face right now, but I remember he was always

smiling in the DFAC and the Gym. Rock was a character; by his nickname you would be right in assuming he was a big guy, always lifting weights and always goofing around. He and his brother (who was an interpreter for the CA team on the base) wanted to move to Canada and run a taxi service.

It was very sobering after my crew got back. It was a quiet AO and we hadn't flown that many missions, let alone for guys that we knew. That night there was a knock on our ops door. It was the medic from the CA team with Rocks brother. Rock towered over his brother in height and mass, but they had the same face, for a second I thought I was looking at a ghost. He had tears in his eyes. They were there to ask us if we would be able to fly to Baghdad and bring his brothers body back so the family wouldn't have to make the dangerous drive. We fortunately already had a routine mission scheduled for the next day and were able to retrieve his body. When we landed back in Al Kut the SF team was there in their green berets to render honors.

I always thought if I got a tattoo I would get an artist to design it and somehow work in a rock and a tree for Dan and "Rock." I lost touch with Rod (MSG Rodney Goss) not long after that tour; I think the last

time I traded emails with him was when I was getting ready to PCS up here the first time. I just looked in global and there is a CW2 Rodney Goss with 19th SFG. I just sent him an email asking if he's the same guy.

Garvin, Stephen T.
U.S. Army
Sergeant Major
15S4S, Quality Control NCOIC F Company, 160th Special Operation Aviation Regiment
1987-present
B POS

The 160th Special Operation Aviation Regiment (TF160) deployed in support of the Army's Special Operations Forces (ARSOF). This would be my first "real world" mission. We received notice our destination was Afghanistan. Our mission was to set up a mobile Forward Area Rearming Point (MFARP) and conduct the first of several helicopter raids. We were to take out visual observations posts (VISOBS); paving the way for access to southern Afghanistan for the ARSOF.

11 September 2001 started out as any normal day. I woke up around 0530, went out to do physical training. My physical training consisted of pull-ups, dips, push-ups, and sit-ups finishing with a three-mile run. I went home and made myself a great breakfast of eggs, bacon, pancakes, and coffee. I did not know that this day would not only change my life, but life in the United States of America, as we know it.

I was in the Quality Control Office planning the day's events as I did every day. Who was going TDY, what maintenance has to be completed, what is the priority, and who do I have that can get this done. I was watching a television in my office, as I listen to it the special alerts start coming in. I stopped what I was doing and all my attention was on the television, I listened.

I sit there watching the events unfold; I cannot help to think why? Why would someone fly a plane into a building? As I am engrossed in the news another plane crashes into the other tower. "What the" I said aloud, then the Pentagon and finally Flight 93 crashes in Pennsylvania. Colleagues from work start pouring into my office and shouting, "Are you watching this"., have you heard America is under attack." I respond "Yes," we need to go and kill whoever is responsible for this." Three days later we received our orders, I am so excited a "real world mission."

The word around the shop was that we were going to Afghanistan. I was so excited, I had never deployed before, this is why I joined the military, and so I could support and defend the United States of America. I gathered up my people and let them know what we needed; we have practiced mock load outs and

deployments many times, everyone was well aware of what we needed to do. Days went by, finally we received the alert order, and it was about 0530 on September 15, 2001. I gathered up my personal belongings and went into work. When I got there, it was like an ant farm, people and equipment moving everywhere. I made a plan to get the QC shop equipment loaded on the maintenance vehicles and I briefed my people.

At 0900, we had our initial brief from the Regiment Commander, the first words out of his mouth were "Boys we are going to war," my heart was racing with excitement. During the brief, we had found out, we were leaving in twenty-four hours. The load up of the equipment on the maintenance vehicles went smooth all we had to do now was wait for our ride. As we sit in our hanger with the doors open, we hear what we all have been waiting for, two Air Force C-5 Galaxies coming in for a landing. We had conducted numerous load outs, from TDY, to just plain training, so it went smooth; nine Aircraft, four trucks, shop equipment and maintenance equipment, we are chalk one.

On the long flight to Afghanistan we only landed once, the rest was In-flight refueling. It was a good thing the DOCs gave us Ambien. Hours went by; I get up

to stretch my legs stopping by the window to look out. I start seeing what looked like an island out in the middle of nowhere, I felt the plane start descending, and we were almost there. Touchdown, we are on a small island of the coast of Oman called Masirah, which boarders the United Arab Emirates (U.A.E.). The doors open, the first thing everyone noticed were the blast of hot and humid air, it is going to be a long and hot off load.

Our short timeline drove the crew chief and maintenance personnel build up teams, we all had a job to do, everyone had jet lag from the trip but the buildup went well. The technical inspectors and I verified that everything is together according to the book, which was an important task, our pilots relied on our expertise, and their lives depended on it as well. We give the thumbs up and sign off the books, the helicopters of Chalk 1 were ready for combat.

We all thought we were going into combat right away, but it did not happen. We waited until November 13 before we got the word that we would be a part of the war. Our brothers the MH-47E had already had their turn during a night airfield seizure on October 19, 2001. On 13 November with less than 15 hours' notice, we start to prepare the Aircraft for our mission.

Our mission was to set up a MFARP and conduct the first of several helicopter raids taking out VISOBS, paving the way for access to southern Afghanistan for the ARSOF. On that dark blacked out night of 13 November 2001, we started loading up two chalks of two helicopters and FARP teams. The load went well everyone knew exactly what to do; we got our preflight brief, as always before a mission we stated the "Night Stalker Creed."

There are two parts of the creed that I remember everyone emphasizing on. "I am a member of the fastest deployable Task Force in the world, ready to move at a moment's notice anytime, anywhere, arriving on our target plus or minus 30 seconds" (NightStalkers) and "I serve with the memory and pride of those who have gone before me for they have loved the fight, fought to win and would rather die than quit" (NightStalkers) this is why I joined this unit I said to myself, I can't believe I was living what is going to be a historic moment for the 160th Special Operation Aviation Regiment.

The creed finished everyone started to load the aircraft, we knew it was going to be a long three-hour flight to our landing zone. It was hard to rest not knowing what is in store for us, as I look around

everyone is doing their final checks, I see the nervous smiles on everyone's faces. The time slowly passed, at T minus 30 minutes the lights inside the aircraft went out and the Infer red light came on, we all knew it was time and went to our battle stations.

This mission was to pull a Skedko down the ramp, aid in the buildup of the aircraft and assist in setting up the MFARP. There was four skedkos, each of them consisting of 24 rockets, two Boxes of ammo and 50 gallons of fuel, the weight of the Skedko was around 500 pounds, so pulling this was not going to be an easy task.

The C130 is flying Nap of the Earth (N.O.E.) low and fast, with a thump we are on the ground engines screaming as the pilots reverse the props to stop the plane, within seconds we had stopped a combat landing. The doors open, I was scared not knowing what was waiting for me, I would be the first one to step off the ramp. I took a deep breath, grabbed the rope and pulling the 500lb Skedko off the ramp and out of the way. Before the last of the four skedkos left the ramp, the crew chiefs started making their descent down and out of the back of the C130. We pushed the helicopter about 30 yards away, and started the buildup. Helicopters were up and running

within five minutes of landing, checks done they were off to destroy the first of numerous targets. Our job was not complete yet, we still had to get back to our equipment secure it and set up the FARP. It was a good thing that just minutes before we landed elements of Ranger and Air Force (STS) elements jumped in and secured the airfield, they were our security.

We set up the FARP in record time; the set up was for two helicopters. The FARP complete all we had to do was wait, as we sit waiting in the black of night on a dirt runway in Afghanistan, we could see off in the distance flashes of light, knowing that was our guys blowing stuff up. Fort-Five minutes go by; we hear the distant noise of the helicopter coming back we all prepare to receive them. The aircraft land the FARP team goes to work, watching them they remind me of a NASCAR pit crew, everyone had a specific job consisting of loading rockets, rearming the mini guns or fueling the aircraft. Mine was assessing the helicopters for battle damage and asking the pilots if everything was ok with the systems. One by one they give me thumbs up, all ok, with all the aircraft rearmed and refueled they were off again.

Once the helicopters took off the second time, our

job was to break down the FARP recover to our rally point and wait. Forty-five minutes into the breakdown of the FARP, the helicopters return, low on fuel and out of ammunition, a successful mission. The C130's started to land, three of them this time. Stopping directly in front of us, their engines at what seemed to be full throttle. While folding the helicopters, rocks and sand from their prop wash pelted us. We had only 15 minutes to complete the exfiltration; it only took us only 10.

Helicopters on board the Pilot in Command (PC) gave the all accounted for sign. Everyone started giving each other high fives; I could not help to feel a special connection with all my Night Stalker family who had just had the same experience as me, a "real world" mission. The C130 powered up, and performed a full power combat take off which was simply amazing, we were off. The three-hour flight seemed very short; on the way back, everyone was exhausted and slept. We make it back to Masirah the mission was a great success, no American losses, and an unknown number of enemy forces dead, 96 rockets deployed, 10,000 rounds fired, and 27 VISOBS destroyed.

Hunt, Maire
U.S. Army
Staff Sergeant
71L/75B Human Resources NCO
1990-2010
B POS

The sense of 'Collective Cadence' in the relationship with my Dad, who is an Army Veteran too, is a bridge across generation gap. My Dad graduated from North Georgia Military College. He served in the Army between the Korean and Vietnam Wars. He was stationed in Korea for 1 year then the Presidio in San Francisco, where he met and then married my Mom. Dad separated from the Army upon fulfilling his ROTC obligation and completed his medical internship in San Diego, where he and my Mom raised their family.

Like my Dad, I am an Army Veteran. I served for a little over 20 years and then retired. While I was on active duty, my Dad and I talked with each other about military service, comparing differences and similarities between our experiences. We chatted about the changes since he served and what remained the same - such as the military's time honored practice of requesting service member's Permanent Change of Station assignment

preferences and then delegating an assignment location at almost the exact opposite geographic location to that requested! After I retired and life circumstances brought me home to live with my Dad, I became more appreciative of our shared military history. I believe our Father-Daughter relationship includes a friendship resulting in part from our military service. A couple years ago, I found my Dad's college yearbook in a box in our attic. When I brought it to him, he was really surprised; he thought it had been lost some time ago. We browsed through all the photos and he pointed out friends and showed me his photograph with the Chemistry Club.

As a daughter, I respect my Dad. As a Veteran, I respect my Dad and have 'marched in his shoes.'

Hutmacher, Clay
U.S. Army
Major General
Deputy Commanding General
US Army Special Operations Command
1978-present
B POS

The most significant mission I ever participated in was Operation REINDEER, executed on 11 June 2003 in Iraq. I was serving as the commander of a special operations aviation task force in the early phases of the war. We received intelligence that there was a significant number of insurgents in the western desert of Iraq who were within days of disbursing into small teams to conduct suicide attacks against coalition forces.

We had less than 12 hours to plan the mission which involved a combined air / ground assault on a wadi where the insurgents were held up. We executed the assault at 0200L. The assault was preceded by pre-assault fires from F-16s, AC-130s, and AH-6 Little Birds (LBs). I was the AMC (Air Mission Commander) positioned in the lead MH-47. As we were on short final on the north side of the wadi, I could see a large volume of tracer fire coming out of and going in. On

the south side of the wadi, I watched two AH-6 LBs diving into what looked like a cone of enemy fire to take out an enemy position that we later learned contained SA-7s. Every LB sustained significant combat damage though none were shot down.

As the Rangers assaulted the wadi, they found it filled with a forest of reeds 8-10 feet high resulting in engagements with the enemy at very close range, sometimes just a few meters. During one engagement, a Ranger squad leader found himself face to face with an insurgent armed with an RPG. They both fired. The insurgent was killed. The Ranger was hit just below the knee severing his lower leg. By the time medics were able to get him to an HLZ for casevac, he was almost dead. My PA pumped him with numerous pints of plasma and kept him alive until we got him to the CSH.

He survived and is now a police officer in the Seattle area and the father of two kids. I keep in touch with him to this day. The battle raged on until the following day.

Only one insurgent survived. We discovered huge stockpiles of automatic weapons, SA-7s, RPGs and suicide vests. The following day as the Rangers were

turning the objective over to a battalion from the 101st Airborne Division, a small enemy force that had been sleeping in a nearby town attacked. They shot down an AH-64, wounding the two pilots. The Rangers ultimately killed those insurgents. In my humble opinion, Operation REINDEER ultimately saved the lives of many coalition Soldiers.

Miller, Jayson
U.S. Army
Sergeant First Class
1SG/15T Blackhawk Crew Chief
2001-present
B POS

I am a Blackhawk helicopter maintainer and crew chief by training, and in 2003 I was a Specialist and deployed with the A co 404th ASB in the 4th Infantry Division during Operation Iraqi Freedom. I was in a unit that conducted mostly phase maintenance and major repairs, aircraft recovery missions and many other missions that were required of us. This platoon was made up of 3 different sections of aircraft maintainers, AH-64, UH-60, and OH58D's at the time. During this challenging deployment, I seemed to find myself around a SGT Joe Liverar whenever I needed someone to get me through a tough moment or event or time. He was a 58 mechanic and often forward with the aircraft but would always seem to find his way back to the FOB when I needed him. I often did not realize that I needed or wanted him around until he showed up and then quickly my spirits changed. Most of the time it was just to listen or offer advice on how to deal with the every day challenges of combat and being away from home for the first

time. He had experience and just had that calming effect on me.

One day in particular in the summer of 2003, we are sent on a recovery mission of a UH60 that was shot down in a riverbed near Tikrit, Iraq. The aircraft was a total loss with no survivors. I had already been on two other similar missions prior to this one, but for some reason this one had more focus from higher so it seemed. There was more pressure to do things a certain way with more precision and timing. As before, I performed pre mission checks that I was assigned and never thought about SGT Liverar coming along since he was a different MOS but somehow before we took off on the convoy, he ended up in the cab of the truck I was driving and said, "you need some help?" I was surprised but obviously felt more at easy having him with us. We were going to have to convoy to the location, recover 100 percent of the aircraft and return at night under blackout driving conditions using ground NVG's which were not the greatest!

Convoy to the location was uneventful but getting down into the riverbed with big army trucks was challenging. We made it down no problem, but getting close enough to the aircraft was tough

because the reeds were taller than the person ground guiding the vehicle! That person was SGT Liverar of course. He always chose the tougher task or most dangerous part it seemed. We managed to get to our parking spot so we could load as much of the aircraft pieces in our truck without having to walk too far. We dismounted and started receiving orders from the NCOIC of the operation. The smell is what hit you at first. Jet fuel, burned metal, burned vegetation. Once we started seeing the devastation of the scene, everyone's mood changed and it no longer was a normal operation. It took a few minutes to grasp the devastation and to realize that we had a job to do. Mortuary affairs had already came in and recovered all of the bodies and personal effects, so we thought. In this instance it was hard for them to be sure all personal effects were recovered.

I was working a particular area and SGT Liverar was not from me, as he always seemed to be close, and I picked up what I thought was a visor from an aviation flight helmet. It was a visor. I had not been too overly emotional about anything to this point but for some reason this piece made me think about the person behind the visor. I kind of dropped down to one knee and looked at it pretty hard. I could see something else in the grass right next to me so of course I

picked it up. It was an envelope with a letter in it. I obviously became emotional seeing this with the visor and the reality of the devastation came crashing down one me. I felt a hand on my shoulder and there was SGT Liverar quickly seeing what was happening and took those items from me and gave them to mortuary affairs. He quickly took me off to the side talked about selfless service, sacrifice and that this is the reality of it. None of that made it any easier to handle, but he also got me focused on my mission at the time. Having him there at that moment allowed me to understand the moment and regain focus on the mission. I could not have done that without him there.

When we returned home from Iraq, he moved to another duty station. After another deployment, I caught up to him again. We quickly continued our bond. He left after a year or so and we have not seen each other since. We do not talk even once a month but a couple of times a year, but our relationship was cemented that day in that Iraqi riverbed.

Park, Jeff M.
U.S. Army
Chief Warrant Officer 2
UH-60 Blackhawk Pilot
2006-2014
B POS

I always have my duffle bags packed. Never fully unpacked my things when I arrive at a new duty station because I will be packing up again in next two to three years. After two to three duty stations and a couple of deployments later, I realize some bags were never opened and some have disappeared all together.

All those people I met and came across in the Army are like those duffle bags I've never opened or lost throughout my journey. Maybe I should have opened those duffle bags to see what kind of person she truly was. Maybe I should have held on to those duffle bags to see what kind of relationships I could have had with them.

But certainly the few of the duffle bags I held on to dearly are the best and everlasting relationships unlike any other outside of the Army.

Phil
U.S. Army
Captain
Aviation Officer (UH-60 Blackhawk Pilot)
2002-2011
B POS

As an Army Aviator, I was placed in a unique position of serving as the Executive Officer for a Forward Support Company. This company did not have the best reputation, suffered from low morale, and was plagued by individual legal issues (drugs, DUI, etc.).

As part of a completely new command team, things began to steadily improve, almost immediately. The soldiers in this unit were now motivated, happy, and felt a sense of pride they didn't previously have.
We were a group comprised of 18 to 45 year olds, males, females, rich and poor, Black, White, Hispanic, and Asian.

You might say they were lucky we were chosen to turn things around, but as I see it, I was the lucky one. I was proud to come to work every day, see these folks grow, and watch them genuinely care for each other and work toward common goals.

Some life lessons like, don’t judge a book by its cover and don’t jump to conclusions resonate with me to this day. The smiles of Echo Company will forever be etched in my mind, and the lifelong friends I gained during my 13-month tenure there will always hold a special place in my heart. We will forever be family.

Solis, Rafael
U.S. Army
Chief Warrant Officer 3
UH-60 Blackhawk Maintenance Test Pilot
2002-Present
B POS

As I took my final step off the back of the C-17, that would be the last time I would see my brother in arms, my dearest friend. You are truly missed and not forgotten. It's been six years and I find myself seeking closure. WHEN!

MICHAEL S. COTE, KIA, 19 September 2009, IRAQ

Thelma Crosby Perkinson
Previously married to F. Perkinson, 36 years
U.S. Army
Private First Class
Supply Train Guard
1944-1947
B POS

My husband and I were part of the young World War II veterans and their wives who took advantage of the superb G.I. Bill that allowed them free college tuition, books, and $75/month allowance. Frank was a Law student at the University of Virginia in Charlottesville in 1948, and we lived on Copeley Hill in a small black Army trailer on a barren hillside of 350 trailers all in a row.

Life settled into a routine of husbands in class or studying and wives working and taking care of all problems and husbands. No cars, no restaurants, no movies, little money. But we persevered. The discipline of the parental "no" mom's apple pies and pin up girls of the movies...all added up to creating this new breed of soldier. The amazing American Warrior. Now, America began to witness seven million disciplined young soldiers hungry for an education, success, and a lot of money bring America along with

them to becoming the richest nation in the world.

Because we walked a great deal and ate healthy foods we were slim and attractive and wore great clothes like in the movies...only they usually came out of the 5 and 10's basements! We were also kind and respectful and our word was our bond.

Life was not perfect but it gave us enough time to grow up gradually and properly. We jitterbugged to Tommy Dorsey's orchestra and be-bopped to Glen Miller's band with cute boys in their coats and ties(and manners) and girls in their three-inch-ankle strap pumps, bright red nails and lipstick and sexy Evening in Paris perfume.

The World War II generation WAS remarkable.
We still are.

Underwood, Bibb
U.S. Army
Colonel
Battalion XO, Battalion Commander
1952-1979
B POS

They were collectively known as Grunts, a Vietnam era word that so perfectly described the lot of the men to whom it referred, it gained universal usage. No green berets, no silver wings, no fancy flight suits. They wore sweat stained fatigues draped from shoulder to ankle like a wrinkled green crust. Their head and face were enveloped in a steel pot with a camouflage cover on which was often written some reminder of a different world, a different time. A girlfriend's or a wife's name might be prominently displayed. A DEROS (Date Estimated to Return from Overseas) date might be indelibly etched in a prominent place. Frequently, the following was boldly copied:

Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I fear no evil, for I am the meanest mother fucker in the valley.

Some had pocket-sized New Testaments stuck in the elastic camouflage band. Each of them had his own

way of dealing with the internal fear that was always present.

"Grunt" was a name which, initially, conjured up disdain or stupidity or extremely bad luck. Over time, tenacity and bravery turned it into a name worn with pride--to the point that many claimed it without earning the right to it. Officially, Grunts were combat infantrymen of the United States Army and Marines. They were drafted off a farm in Iowa; they were African American with an Alabama drawl; they had an Italian name and grew up in New Jersey; they were raised in dire poverty on the reservations of New Mexico; they were just out of college and joined the service before embarking on a professional career; they heard only Spanish spoken in their home in the barrios of San Antonio until they went to first grade; they had dropped out of college and joined up to avoid the draft.

They were on the edge of their future. They were all together and engaged in an endeavor not fully understood. Nobody ever fully understands war. But they were there. Come together in a most unlikely way. Doing things undreamed of months, weeks or even days earlier. They were there to do a job. A dirty job. A job many of their generation shirked. And they

did it. They did it well. They did it at a great sacrifice to themselves and to their loved ones. They were unique. No one who does not experience it can ever know the true meaning of soldiering together in combat. In fact, 35 to 40 years later they are just now realizing the full meaning and depth of what they did for their country. And for each other.

In combat, there is a bonding that develops as in no other circumstance. I don't know if it is love, faith, trust, or some unnamed feeling. But it is permanent. It can not be destroyed by time or pre-occupation. It is as permanent as the color of your eyes. This feeling grows deeper and stronger with time. Today, many of those Grunts will be remembering a fallen comrade. One who stepped on a land mine while walking point; one who took a sniper's bullet right through the name-tag on his jungle fatigues. They will recall with extreme clarity the color of the sun that day, the exact sound of the first crack of the rifle. They will recall exactly what they were thinking just before the gut-wrenching explosion.

They were young, a little angry, perhaps. For sure, a little crazy, for they all thought they were bulletproof. But they were smart, energetic, well trained and, for the most part, well led. Life had not yet marked them

and defined them. It was all in front of them, but at the moment, they were giving a part of that life to their country because they had been asked to do so. Without hesitation, without question, maybe with some doubt, certainly with some fear, they answered the call to serve. They found themselves with a rifle, a rucksack, a steel pot, a canteen of water, and a box of C-rations in the middle of a jungle facing God knows what, just twenty meters away. They were, as has always been the case, the point, the first, out in front; all others were there because the Grunts were there. The enemy's first shot was aimed at them. They had to dismantle the booby traps. They went into the tunnels, not knowing if a rifle or a pistol was pointed directly toward the path they were taking. They were first into the tree line. They discovered it was a hot [enemy controlled] landing zone. They spent days of absolute tedium, punctuated by moments of pure terror.

They had the best supporting arms the world has ever known. The Grunts were supported by artillery that could shoot 17 miles. There were airplanes that could deliver tons of bombs on pinpoint targets in just minutes. They had the best radios available. Their weapons were specially designed for them. Helicopters could jerk a Grunt out of the jungle and

fly him to a hospital miles away. But the single most important thing they had to keep them going--where they placed their greatest trust, that which mattered most, the ultimate reassurance--was each other.

As soldiers who answered the call and did their duty they deserve our deepest love and admiration. The Grunts must know in their mind that they have responded to the highest calling. They have served their fellow man. They put themselves in mortal danger for a cause and for another human. Many made the ultimate sacrifice. The majority of the names on the Wall in Washington, D.C. are the names of Grunts. But those who survived owe no apologies. They sacrificed time that cannot be recalled. They gave everything they were asked to give. It is they who truly understand the meaning of life because they have faced death.

And when they did get back to the world, they once again showed their character and loyalty. Contrary to the popular myths, they did not return to this country as drugged out, traumatized mental wrecks. They were not constantly suffering flashbacks of unspeakable atrocities. They returned and in spite of the degradation and rejection heaped on them by those who did not serve, they wove themselves

back into the fabric of the country as plumbers, carpenters, lawyers, doctors, priests, and retailers. They are socially responsible, concerned, productive citizens. Today, I hope you will take a few minutes and remember not only those who fell in all our wars, but say a prayer for the Grunt who today is in Germany, Korea, Afghanistan, and other far-flung military posts around the world in the interest of peace and prosperity for the rest of us.

Verronica
U.S. Army
Specialist
Telecommunications Operator/74C
1996-2000
B POS

Serving in the Military for four years was truly an honor and a wonderful experience for me. It taught me many things to include discipline, camaraderie, and teamwork just to name a few. It helped me to mold my can do attitude and the attitude of: it can be done, it will be done and to drive on.

There's not only no room to complain but there's also no tolerance for it, you just simply get it done.

As a military spouse for 15 years, I have continued with this type of mind set. There are definitely challenges along the way, and it can be hard at times, but I continue to live by the motto of no sense of complaining because it just makes it worse. I must say that all of the traits that I have acquired as a soldier and spouse have truly helped me with so many aspects of my life beyond the military lifestyle. These traits have added depth to my foundation and I continue to draw from them when need be.

I'll be 40 next year, have 2 sweet kids, a military spouse and am a veteran, yet I am still pursuing a modeling career. I feel that starting a foundation is very crucial and imperative in being successful because one can always draw from it.

Wells, Robbie
U.S. Army
Captain
Chinook Pilot, Officer
2006-present
B POS

Friendships in the military are unlike any other friendships I have ever established. Prior to the military my friendships were built over time, developing slowly, and largely a product of physical proximity and personal similarities. In the military however friendships rarely have the luxury of time. While many military friendships due last a lifetime, others are cut short. New duty assignments, unit transfers, and death often sever these friendships.

While this sounds tragic, an understanding of this reality results in an intensity to friendships in the military nearly unmatched by any in my civilian life. This intensity comes from personal similarities, just like civilian friendships, but the biggest contributor to the intensity is the shared experiences of hardship, struggle, and pain. Long hours, intense stress, deployments, injury, and death are all daily realities and experiences that most individuals outside of the military only share with their families.

Unfortunately the nature of this type of military friendship contributes to routine trauma in the lives of the military members. Military friendships often, not by the will of the individual, but by PCS moves or death are suddenly severed. When a friend moves the friendship remains, but often diminishes over time due to a lack of proximity. When death occurs the grieving process is delayed. Military operations necessitate the delay of the grieving process. This is a phenomenon not experienced by most of the civilian world.

For me this occurred in March 2013. I was deployed to Afghanistan flying a mission as the AMC of a three-ship mission to re-supply a remote MEDEVAC site. When we arrived at the site we shut down the aircraft to facilitate the unloading and loading of equipment and supplies. One of the personnel at the site asked if we had heard about "the crash in RC-East". A storm had kicked up and resulted in the crash of a Blackhawk, killing the entire crew. They were not sure of the specific unit, but knew one of the pilots was a female named CPT Knutson. My heart sank. Sara Knutson one of my closest friends from my first duty station in Alaska. While we were only stationed together for a little over two years she had become like a sister to me. Not the clichéd, sister in arms

military sister, but a blood kin sister. So much so that when we took a trip to Anchorage, AK for a bachelor party, she was part of the group. Sara was family.

In most situations, hearing of the loss of a friend or family member would be accompanied by shock, tears, or some other emotion. In the military, at times, these emotions must be suppressed. We had a mission to conduct and I was in charge of its successful completion. As the crew continued to load the aircraft, I walked off to a dark corner of the LZ and took five minutes for myself. I reflected on the beautiful person Sara was during her time on earth. I remembered how she made me laugh, and the times we had together. When my five minutes were up, I walked back to the aircraft and continued to help the crew. I told my PI that CPT Knutson was my friend. He asked if I was ok and if I needed anything. I told him I would be fine; we had six more hours of the mission to complete. The rest of the night, Sara barely entered my mind. I had suppressed my grief and emotion, being present in the moment in order to care for my crew and my flight were more important.

This suppression of emotion is commonplace in military life. I don't want to say it's haunted me, but it's stayed with me. The deployment made it

impossible to attend her funeral and other military obligations have made it impractical to yet visit her grave, something I will do soon. I've lost close friends and family before but severing my relationship with Sara in this manner made it different. I believe I have closure and have come to terms with the loss of my friend, but the bond I have with Sara and with other Soldiers that I truly call my friends is unique. There is nothing like it in my bonds with civilian friends. My true friendships in the military are closer to the love of family than the love of a friend. Sarah was one of these friends. I love her and miss her.

This page intentionally left blank

O

A., Alyssa
U.S. Army Officer
Major
Battalion XO
2001-present
0 POS

"So, wait, your husband is NOT in the military?" Can't tell you the number of times I've been asked this question. I've always joked that there is enough Army in me for the two of us and wasn't surprised to read recently that less than 6% of male military spouses are civilians. Most of the time, if a wife is in the military, her husband is also. I haven't been able to find Army specific statistics, but comparatively, the Army has fewer females than the Navy and Air Force, so I'm sure the civilian male spouse percentage is even lower.

Neither Ben nor I knew what we were facing when we jumped into the Army life a little over eight years ago. Reality set in quickly when we moved into our first home, an on-post cinder block duplex in El Paso, Texas. Ben started to despise getting groceries as a quick stop for eggs meant some drill sergeant accosting him about his sideburn length. Or how about the time he was told by the gate guard he

couldn't drive on post unless he took out his earring (an offense for a soldier, not a spouse)? That first year was tough on both of us, but especially tough on Ben. He was still trying to figure out being married to me (a full time job for those of you that know me), let alone being thrust into an unfamiliar environment.

We combated assumptions with humor. One of my favorite things was to have him pick me up from work. Not sure why, but after announcing to other male soldiers in the unit that I was NOT married to a soldier, they immediately pictured my husband as a 5'5" 100lb wisp of a man that straggled behind me with a sad puppy face. Imagine their surprise when my bronzed husband stepped out of our car, a 6'5" 250-pounder with Defensive Line written all over him. I'm still laughing at their reaction! Time went on and Ben grew his buzz cut out and perfected a sole-patch under his lower lip in rebellion to Army standards. These subtle changes dramatically reduced the "Hey TROOP!" or "SOLDIER, why you out of uniform?" comments he previously received living on post.

Both deployments, Ben's position became invaluable. During my first deployment, he was a comfort to our Family Readiness Group, an organization dedicated to supporting families while their soldier is away. As the

only male in this spouse support group, he served as Mr. Fix-it and human-kiddo-jungle-gym at meetings. We were stationed in Colorado for my second tour, and Ben became a single dad with an eighteen month old. Where do I begin to express my gratitude for such a task?

We've traded roles recently as he heads off to work while I stay at home with our boys. Thinking back to those first few years, it's hard for me to now complain about Ben's work stuff left in a trail from the door when he comes home or the fact that he lets snooze go off five times before getting up. He never complained about anything during my active duty days, including my sleeping cot to cot with a bunch of dudes during field exercises or his required attendance as the only suit in a room of dress uniforms at military balls. I know that I couldn't have done the Army without him and he's certainly left big shoes to fill.

Alliman, Perry W.
U.S. Army
Chief Warrant Officer 5
153DB UH-60 Pilot, Aviation Safety Officer
1980-2005
O POS

I served in the Army for 25 years. There are so many great stories I could tell you about, but allow me to lift one man from 9-101st Aviation Regiment.
On September 25, 1993, my Blackhawk helicopter was shot down while flying in over Mogadishu. As a result, we lost three men: SSG Eugene Williams, SGT Matthew Anderson and SGT Fernando Richardson. All three perished in the crash and fire. Only Dale Shrader the other pilot and I survived the shoot down and ground fight following the crash.

A year later, SGT Anderson's home town was dedicating a memorial to Matt. Our Battalion Commander approved our trip to Lucas, Iowa for the ceremony. He did not just send a few people to represent the battalion; he sent six UH-60 aircraft to conduct a flyby and missing man formation. Dale and I had the honor of being the missing man aircraft.

After our arrival at Matt's home town, we met his

wonderful family, then proceeded to the memorial park to view Matt's monument and pay our respects. A beautiful flag pole with a marble base that said:
IN MEMORY OF
SPC MATTHEW K. ANDERSON
BORN APRIL 16, 1972
KILLED IN ACTION
MOGADISHU SOMALIA
SEPTEMBER 25, 1993

Several members of the unit left their wings and patches, as a sign of love and respect. We proceeded to the airport, cranked our aircraft and flew a beautiful tight V formation over the memorial. As we passed over the flag pole, I pulled all the power available and pointed the nose of the Blackhawk straight up as we climbed like a home sick angel away from the formation to touch the face of God. After we flew out of view, we rejoined the formation and flew a somber flight back home to FT Campbell, Kentucky.

I tell you this story so you will know the great love soldiers have for each other, and to let you know that even though it has been 25 years since their deaths, hardly a day goes by that I don't think of these men and the sacrifice they made. They Gave All.

Antonucci, Sean M.
U.S. Army
Staff Sergeant
C-27J Flight Engineer, UH-60 Crew Chief, Quality Control NCO
2000-present
0 POS

April 2009, the first time I was deployed to Afghanistan. My best friend, Zach Eddy, and I met in June of 2008 when I reported to Fort Brag. We bonded over the monstrosity of my truck. He had high interests in vehicles like that and we just became friends easily.

It was his 3rd deployment with the 82nd Airborne Division, and even though he was a junior Soldier at the time, helped guide me in what I was to expect. Once we landed in Afghanistan, we became inseparable. Travelling everywhere together as we completed our missions, hit the gym, and moved from FOB to FOB.

A week after being in country, we were rocketed as we were walking back from the gym together. He grabbed me and threw me down on the ground as the rocket whizzed right over our head and hit on the

other side of a T-barrier closest to our chow hall. As we were lying there, he said, " I got you buddy."

I don't know why, but those words at that particular time, resonate with me to this day.

I credit the Army with the ability to bring people together and foster relationships that can last a lifetime. Everybody has at least one friend that they met in the Army, a friend they will remain close with for life because of the experiences that they shared together, knowing that they will have your back consistently throughout your life.

I have met mine.

Arndt, Lori
U.S. Navy
Builder 2nd class
Seabee
1985-1990
O NEG

One of the best memories I have from my time in the U.S. Navy was from basic training. Most of us were fresh out of high school, and had never left home. There was a sense of fear and excitement not knowing what was in store for all of us.

There were so many reasons and stories as to why each of us had joined the military. Mine was pretty simple, I had always dreamed of joining the military and serving my country. I am from a small Kansas town, and at the time there weren't a lot of opportunities unless you wanted to work in a factor, or go to college and to be honest at the time I wasn't a great student.

Our first week was hell to say the least. Girls were crying because they were homesick, and scared to death of our two company commanders who had a lovely way of waking us up every morning, that is if you enjoy trash cans being thrown and screaming at

the top of their lungs. We couldn't get it together at first, our bunks weren't made properly, our gear was stowed wrong we couldn't march in step for the life of us let alone in a straight line. Besides learning to move as a unit we were also learning who the ones who wanted to be in charge, and what they would do to be the top recruit. For the most part everyone got along and made sure that we all passed our tests. We had study groups and supported each other emotionally. It was nice to be a part of a team and, to watch how we all developed. We learned how to trust and work together.

At night we would sit around writing letters to our families, and working on our cadence song for graduation. " We are k120, I got all my sisters with me. Navy life is tough but its just begun, high, high hopes for the future…" I still hear that song when I reflect on my time as a new recruit.

After eight long weeks our entire company graduated. We all promised to keep in touch, and we all figured we would see each other again. We had no clue how large the US Navy really was at that time, our world was confined a small barracks and a section of the grinder. I just knew I had made friends for life, but I was sent to Gulfport, MS to go to Builder school, and

I was the only one from my company who became a Navy Seabee, so I never got the opportunity to see anyone again. I know I wouldn't have made it through boot camp without the support of my fellow recruits. We all raised each other up, and helped transform each other from civilians to a United States Navy Sailor.

No matter how hard I have tried, I have never found that kind of team work and closeness once I left the military. I miss the bond that you have as a soldier, and the respect you get from serving your country. It's like a family member who has passed away leaving a void that only a veteran can understand. The best honor I have ever had was the opportunity to serve my country, and if I was asked to do it all over again I would happily sign on the dotted line.

Baranowsky, Mark L.
U.S. Army
Chief Warrant Officer 3
15T20, UH-60 Crewchief , now 153MI, UH-60 Pilot
2002-Present
0 POS

I was a crewchief with 4th ID on UH-60L Blackhawk helicopter for my second deployment in Iraq. I had a lot of skill doing my job in that place. I had encountered nearly every mission and emotion on the spectrum in that aircraft. It was not until the 25th of December 2005 that I was left with something indescribable inside. The disparity of my idea of what Christmas is supposed to be and what actually happened that day is probably what makes every following Christmas happy and sad at the same time.

The day started off like many other days out there. I showed up to work, preflighted helicopter #582, and received the mission brief. Our mission that day was VIP Support. We expected a long day taking the General around to where he needed to go. The General had a busy schedule. It is imperative that his flight crew be punctual and flexible. During that day our VIP learned that there was just an IED explosion near Sadr City and there were American

casualties. The General told us he wanted to go there and we were going to take him. This was outside of our normal mission. The pilots labored to gather intelligence on the situation and figure out the best way to make it happen. Within minutes we were all airborne and on our way.

I felt a little apprehensive going in to a situation like that. We were going to land in an urban area that had a known enemy presence and very little protection for the crew and passengers. But that apprehension did not matter, it was not time for anxiety or reluctance. I knew I had to do my job and this situation called for me to be more ready than ever. Corporal Wahn and I were responsible for protecting fellow Soldiers and ourselves with our M240H Machine Guns. The pilots up front were very busy taking on the challenge of making the hasty plan to get our helicopter safely to the destination.

The smoke from the blast and fire could be seen for miles. It was a short flight to the site and as we got closer and more details appeared. As we made our approach to the site of the IED, I saw a few damaged vehicles. One of them was an M1 Abrams Tank. The remaining Soldiers in the area had started to establish a perimeter with their remaining vehicles and they

were also finding defensive positions behind mounds of earth, old overturned vehicles, their own vehicles and really anything that provided protection. I can only imagine how hard it would be to secure a site like that in a dynamic urban area. I did not have any time to think about that though. The Medical Evacuation helicopter arrived, landed, loaded patients then departed the area. It was then clear for us to make our approach and land.

After we landed the passengers quickly exited the helicopter and the General walked to the closest group to get more details from the Soldiers that had just lost two of their own. There is a lot to be said for a leader in the Army that values the lives and morale of Soldiers so much that he risks his own life in order to comfort those in pain. As he was there on the ground, my Blackhawk took off and that is where our job got even more demanding.

From the air, our crew had a perspective to help develop the situation on the ground for those troops. The flight crew was relaying information to the ground units so they could investigate gawkers and potential threats. From a few hundred feet above it was hard to tell if a man on the roof was holding a camera or a gun. He was definitely aiming something. This

situation and many others like it were happening all at once. The only thing we could do was inform the ground Soldiers and monitor everyone we could see for any hostile acts.

Once the ground forces heard reports like that a team was assembled and within minutes there was a trail of troops on their way to that location. It seemed like my whole crew was amped up for an eternity, each doing their own duty, but operating like a single unit with the precision that we had all trained for. In reality it was less than 25 minutes. The duties of each crewmember were vital to our success and survival. One pilot had to fly while remaining clear of obstacles and reacting to threats from the ground and avoiding other aircraft, the other pilot was making radio calls in order to keep the air and ground units working as a team. The other crewchief and I had to protect the aircraft while maintaining situational awareness and only talking when absolutely necessary so as to not clog up our communications with something that was not important. Once the call for pickup was ordered, we made our approach to land.

As we came in, I witnessed the General in a group of 10- 20 Soldiers kneeling down together. I'm not sure what could be said to bring solace to Soldiers that

were so close to the departed, but as the General left the group of young warriors, they kept wiping away tears that would not stop.

We took off from that site, got back on schedule, and completed the day. After we took the General back to his base, we landed back at Camp Taji, performed some post mission inspections on the aircraft and prepared for the next mission day. There were many missions after that, but none like it.

After that mission I sought the names of people killed there: Sergio Gudino and Anthony Cardinal. Sergio had been trapped in the M1 that I remember so vividly, and Anthony had been in the HMMWV that was destroyed. The image of that burning M1 that killed Sergio will always hurt.

Even after all these years, I still find myself praying for the family of a man I never knew.

Belin Jr, George R.
U.S Army
Lieutenant Colonel
Field Artillery, Aviation Officer
1964-1992
O POS

I am a retired Army Aviator with 28 years of service on active duty and the Reserve Components. Upon graduation as a dual rated Army Aviator, I was assigned to an Artillery Battalion in the Republic of Vietnam. My tour there was the highlight of my career. This was in 1966 and 1967. Although Vietnam was a long time ago, my flight experience there seemed like ancient history.

I was the proud pilot of an O-1 Birdog. This is a single engine piston driven relic of WW II. I also flew an O-H 13 Sioux Helicopter. Think MASH.

Although I didn't participate in Air Assaults, MEDEVACS or other type missions, flying these antiques in hostile territory was dangerous in itself. Everything I did was single ship. I had many close calls and was lucky to leave in one piece.

The vast majority of my problems were pilot induced.

Being the section Commander as well as a brand new aviator in a two-pilot unit is something that wouldn't happen today. A one-hour checkout in the new aircraft and there you go.

I flew almost every day, 167 in a row at one point and accumulated over 1,300 hours in a year. I even had to fly myself to the Saigon area to rotate home. Left my Aircraft at the Airfield with a note and map for my replacement.

In spite of this I really ended up enjoying the tour. I even thought about extending for 6 months. At the time, you got a 30-day leave back to the states. Because I had a wife and two small children at home, I decided against it.

I still remember my last flight out of Tay Ninh. I was so happy to be going home, but got so choked up, I could barely call the tower for take-off clearance.

When I got out, I missed the closeness that bonds military personnel together. It takes years as a civilian to make the friends and bonds that are developed almost instantly in the Military. Guess its because everyone is in the same boat.

I look back at the futility of the Vietnam War and the others since then as well. Our politicians and civilian leaders are incompetent, but we are lucky to have such a dedicated group of people that continue to serve.

Betts, Guy
U.S. Army
Chief Warrant Officer 4
UH-60 Blackhawk Standardization Instructor Pilot
1989-2011
O POS

During Operation Enduring Freedom, I was part of Task Force Storm based in Kandahar, Afghanistan. We flew direct action missions on a regular basis throughout our twelve-month deployment in 2005-2006 supporting various special operations forces and an airborne infantry unit. Our objective during these missions was to capture or kill Taliban and other anti-coalition forces. Using Apache helicopters as our close air support, we would fly low to search for enemy combatants who would attempt to blend with populations in local villages. The ones we were usually after would typically attempt to run upon our arrival. That was one of the initial ways to identify who we were looking for and thus they had the nickname "Squirters" because of how they would try to get away. I always had a team of special operators or a squad of the airborne troops on board and I would usually land next to a suspected individual or group of individuals. When we saw a squirter, I would

land in such a way that the strong rotor wash of my Blackhawk helicopter would force the individuals to the ground, powerless to get back up with a face full of sand. This enabled the troops in the back of my aircraft to simply step out so that they were immediately on top of their suspected targets. After successful insertion, I took off to allow a quick interrogation of the suspected enemy. Sometimes they would have a guest or two to go home with us when I picked them up. Some of them even went as far as Guantanamo Bay. They were very successful missions overall and I was always proud of the guys I flew with and felt privileged to work with such elite group of professionals on the ground.

On one particular mission, I was flying very low just over the roof tops of some village buildings, searching for suspicious personnel. During one pass, a series of flares automatically launched from my helicopter. We had a system that detected surface to air missiles and automatically launched flares to confuse the missile and therefore protect the aircraft. This was a fairly new system at the time and sometimes the flares would launch due to false indications. No missiles had been fired at me, but the flares did land on the thatched roof of a building. Naturally it burned quickly when the hot flares hit the dry roof. I felt

horrible that the roof of someone's home had been damaged.We completed our mission that day and don't recall specifically how successful it had turned out. However, I do recall what happened the following day.

On this mission, we were working with the Airborne unit who were normally based in Italy. The village was located in their area of operations. To demonstrate a good gesture to the people of the village, the Infantry Battalion commander had the Chinook helicopters fly out a pallet of goodies. The pallet had everything from food, supplies, and even a motorcycle. It made me feel very good that the people of the village had been taken care of in some way. That pallet was just a small drop in a bucket of positive things done for the people of Afghanistan. It's the little things that you don't see in the news that make the difference. I've been deployed nearly four years total. This particular deployment with my unit was the highlight of my 22-year career. This story in itself wasn't anything to base a book upon, but just a snapshot of one that I won't soon forget.

Burnett, Tab
U.S. Army
Chief Warrant Officer 5
UH-60 Maintenance Test Pilot and Examiner
1985-2015
O POS

Over an Army career spanning 30 years, one has the opportunity to observe, experience, or participate in some extremely monumental events or operations. Some of these operations or events shape world politics and the very fabric of the free world and are written about by some of the most famous writers of our day.

One such event that never made it into any best selling novel, paperback, or movie theatre occurred during flight from the National Training Center at Ft. Irwin, California. My crew had been assigned to deliver an aircraft to Corpus Christi, Texas at the completion of our rotation. The rest of the company had left California via Stratair and we departed single ship on our trek to Texas. Somewhere in the middle of nowheresville Arizona, we experienced a transmission chip light and had to land as soon as possible. We identified a suitable field and landed without further incident. We shut down the aircraft

and were about to assess the issue when a farmer pulled up in what can only be described as a "Field Car."

Turns out he was the owner of the land and wasn't too happy about our presence on his property. Independent folks don't take to unannounced strangers. We explained our situation and he offered us a ride to his home so we could use the phone. We contacted the unit and explained our situation and that the crewchief could clear the chip and we would be on our way the following day.

I asked the rancher about any hotels nearby and he showed us to the guest rooms in his home. We tried to decline, but he insisted we stay with him and his wife. That night we ate dinner and told war stories. He had served two tours in Vietnam as a Navy SEAL. He had a soft spot for helos, even if they were painted the wrong color. His son had served two tours in Iraq and one in Afghanistan where he was killed by an IED. We all understood as we were cut from the same cloth and shared the pain.

The next day we arose, thanked the ranchers wife, and headed out to the truck for the ride back to the bird. As we pulled out of his driveway, a convoy of

vehicles followed us out to the aircraft to see us off. When we arrived at the aircraft, there must have been 200-300 people already there. Most of the neighboring town had come out after they had heard about the aircraft in the field.

As we climbed in to leave, the rancher came up and asked if we would pray with him. For that moment we were one family, united in the cause of freedom and all of the things we hold so dear as Americans. We departed with the fanfare, pomp and circumstance of the 4th of July. If you ever happen find yourself in nowheresville, USA, it's not such a bad place.

Bush, Spencer
U.S. Army
Chief Warrant Officer 2
153D/M UH-60 Pilot
2003-present
O POS

I heard the calling as if I was a Warrior in my past life. Now that I am older, I realize it's at the expense of the ones I love, but I wouldn't have it any other way. Many birthdays and anniversaries I've missed and I'm not proud about that, so don't misinterpret my words. My family at times is replaced by others that are in my same situation. We hide regrets through each other's laughter and at times show weakness to our surprise that someone wouldn't turn away from us. We could be thought of as a pack of wolves or tight as thieves, but when the situation arises that is what we were trained for all along. They are my brothers and sisters and I would do anything to protect them from harm's way.

I never was put in any situation that involved me having to worry about anyone beside me before I was in the Army. It was one-sided as if wearing rose colored glasses never to see the depth until it slapped me in the face. Truthfully, even a fight over a girlfriend

was all in vain, because it was more materialistic then realistic. I can say I now have friends I would die for because I feel they would do the same.

We refer to everyone we used to know or not in the military as "Civilians." This is so true because they have never known the struggle. When another veteran runs into another it doesn't matter what war or job they did you will have a connection. "Yeah bro, wet wipes for some of that chili mac instead of this country captain chicken." We have our own language and it's easy to get lost especially if you don't know the multitude of acronyms. Say it's a good brain washing if you want, but its my heart that bleeds Red, White, and Blue.

Butler, Michael L.
U.S. Army
Chief Warrant Officer 4
Aviation Maintenance Technician, 15lA
1987-2012
O POS

It's not easily understood, this relationship. It's not easily explained. But it exists to the point that you trust those serving with you more than you do your old friends from school, even your family. Many times it goes unseen, unnoticed, and oblivious to those who serve until it's over. The commitment, the ride, the tour, the career. All of it over, finished. And just like that you're looking for the connection you had with those who served with you.

How do you explain it? By definition? Maybe by explaining the emptiness? Maybe with an experience? Maybe by comparing it to being on a team?

My way of explaining it has to be through personal observations over the years. Some of which never even realized until later in my career. It's the "Family" (military) that can't be defined unless you've lived it.

So, how do I define it?

Bosnia, 1996. Christmas Eve. For all the Catholics, or even the Holiday Catholics, midnight mass was being held in a temper tent with the Arch Bishop in attendance. It was a jam-packed house, standing room only. The attendees; Catholics, Protestants, Baptists, maybe even some Jewish Soldiers. It didn't matter, we were all there, together on Christmas Eve. One big family!!!!

South Amboy, New Jersey, 2007. Waiting for the Hurst carrying the remains of SFC Benjamin Seban. Killed in action in Iraq. Standing there in uniform an old man yells to me recognizing the Division Patch I'm wearing on my right soldier. This starts up a series of war stories going back to the Vietnam and Korean War. Before I knew it there were more than a few old timers reminiscing about the times they spent in the military. All the things we still had in common; pot belly stoves, GP Mediums, guard duty, burning shit with diesel fuel, the "SUCK", the relationships, the stories, the commitment, the good times, the loss, the pain. One big family!!!!

May, 2014, Tuscaloosa Alabama. Commissioning of 2LT Cameron Butler, United States Air Force. For those of us in uniform, either active or retired army, we almost immediately congregate into one mass

crowed. No one called us together, it just happens. Instinctively we all look and analyze each other's uniforms. Without a spoken word we all know where we've been, what we've done, how long we've served, the awards earned, etc., etc., and what it's taken to get there. We've all lived it. We've all been there. One big family!!!!!

The playing of the national anthem and noticing everyone who, like you, immediately stands to the position of attention. The sound of a sonic boom or loud noise and seeing who reacts with caution or fear rather than curiosity. "Ate Up", "High Speed, Low Drag", "Hero", "Zero", "9 line", "Copy", "Break."

Who the hell knows what you're talking about? Your family does.

The Guilt. Yes, the guilt. Knowing you've still got coworkers, peers, friends carrying the torch while you've cut the cord, jumped ship, popped smoke. We all feel it in some way or another. Some even hang on and go right back at it but with another organization/ employer supporting the same mission.

The sense of loss, emptiness, failing to adapt which leads many to depression, addiction, and even

attempted suicide. All of it in some way related to that "Family" we miss. It's almost a curse for some.

Callahan, Michael
U.S. Navy
Lieutenant Junior Grade
Navy Pilot (MH-60S Knighthawk)
2012-present
0 POS

By far the strongest relationships I've built in my naval career started at The United States Naval Academy. I attended USNA as a midshipman until commissioning as an Ensign and designated Student Naval Aviator May 29, 2012. By far the most memorable of all the days I spent on the Yard in Annapolis proved to be July 2, 2008, Induction Day, for the great class of 2012. Colloquially referred to as "I-Day," this day marks the transitioning point of young, naïve, high school graduates catapulted into a whirlwind of boot camp atmosphere and unrelentingly rapid pace of the longest seven weeks to ever transpire. These seven weeks encompassed the, what seemed at the time, unsurmountable gauntlet of Plebe Summer. Throughout the crucible of that summer, my classmates and I endured the most taxing hardships of our lives, and it was this struggle that caused an interdependence and unit cohesion unimaginable before that fateful July day.

Most notably of that summer, I'll never forget the looks of trepidation and sheer exhaustion hung upon each of our faces the night of July 4th, 2008.

Homesick, scared, and unsure of the ability to endure the weeks ahead, my company mates and I clung erect to the bulkheads of Bancroft Hall. We awaited what was sure to be another grueling hour of disciplinary physical beatdowns taking the place of a previously promised Fourth of July fireworks show-an event sure to be the oh-so- needed inspiring, stress-relieving signal of hope that somehow heart-breakingly never came to fruition…at least for the downtrodden plebes of India Company 17th Platoon. As the night dragged on, each minute seemingly passed slower with every iteration of sweat-soaked push-ups and wall-sits. Suddenly the physical training was abruptly called to a halt, and the company ordered to attention by our commanding officer. She pulled out a printed piece of paper, and proceeded to recite to all of us the following:

Attention to Citation: For conspicuous gallantry and intrepidity at the risk of his life above and beyond the call of duty while senior naval officer in the Prisoner of War camps of North Vietnam. Recognized by his captors as the leader in the Prisoners' of War

resistance to interrogation and in their refusal to participate in propaganda exploitation, Rear Adm. Stockdale was singled out for interrogation and attendant torture after he was detected in a covert communications attempt. Sensing the start of another purge, and aware that his earlier efforts at self-disfiguration to dissuade his captors from exploiting him for propaganda purposes had resulted in cruel and agonizing punishment, Rear Adm. Stockdale resolved to make himself a symbol of resistance regardless of personal sacrifice. He deliberately inflicted a near-mortal wound to his person in order to convince his captors of his willingness to give up his life rather than capitulate. He was subsequently discovered and revived by the North Vietnamese who, convinced of his indomitable spirit, abated in their employment of excessive harassment and torture toward all of the Prisoners of War. By his heroic action, at great peril to himself, he earned the everlasting gratitude of his fellow prisoners and of his country. Rear Adm. Stockdale's valiant leadership and extraordinary courage in a hostile environment sustain and enhance the finest traditions of the U.S. Naval Service."

That was the last night we felt sorry for ourselves that summer.

Comptson, Brett D.
U.S. Army
Lieutenant Colonel
Commander
1997-present
O POS

"So what's it like over there?"

By far the question I always received the most often after my first combat tour in Iraq from civilians, family, and friends was "so what's it like over there?" For the longest time, I really didn't have any idea how to answer that question and, to be honest, I really didn't want to answer it or even think a lot about my experiences.

Then I had an epiphany and decided I would describe what "fear" physically looked and felt like. The very next time I was asked that question, I happily responded, "well let me try to paint a verbal picture of fear for you." I proceeded to describe a situation in which I was at Baghdad International Airport early during OIF 1 and was probably a bit too close to an unfolding fire fight on the north end of the airport in which a Bradley and an Apache were engaging targets. The insurgents started firing mortar rounds at

the Bradley and an errant round flew in the direction of my group. When it went off, it was so close that I'm still amazed no one caught any shrapnel and it was superbly loud. At the exact moment that it exploded, my sphincter apparently decided enough was enough and it was time to call it quits and it literally felt as if it the ol' sphincter expanded to the size of a grape fruit and then literally slammed shut so hard that that I had a hard time sitting down for 3 days (something like a leg calf cramp but right in your pooper). I always ended that story with "now can you imagine being THAT scared!?"

This "fear and sphincter" story usually stopped any further lines of questioning about "what it was like over there" and tended to divert the conversation to some other less intimate topic. I loved the responses I got from folks whenever I gave them my "story", then I started to tell other veterans and servicemen about the story I used to answer the "what's it like" question and it turns out that although I thought my story and the reactions it got from civilians was rather funny... it was actually pretty accurate. Many a vet shared their bodily function reaction story with me as a result, and we would laugh, have a beer and start telling other "war stories" that only we would understand. Last year (12 years after my first combat

tour) I was engaged in this same exchange with a junior officer in my current unit and after laughing about our war poop stories and as we learned more about each other's combat experiences we discovered that during OIF 1 we had literally lived in adjacent buildings on Camp Victory right after the initial US occupation... What a small world!

Franks, Pete
U.S. Army
Lieutenant Colonel
Aviation Battalion Commander
1983-2006
O POS

One of the things I so enjoyed about being in the Army was the opportunity to see so many places around the world. I could cover visits to the Great Wall in China, the Korean Plaices, the Pyramids in Egypt, the Castles in Germany, Budapest, Paris, Washington DC, London, Berlin with the Wall still in place or just the museums in the capitals.

However, this story will be about Babylon. During OIF, the U.S. had a base at Babylon to essentially ensure nothing untold happen to the historical landmark. We had to a mission to deliver some personnel for meetings and return later in the day. I took a Battalion Commander's prerogative and decided to fly on the mission. We spent about 4 hours taking a tour of the ruins and getting a briefing from a tour guide. He spent a lot of time giving facts and some of the things Saddam had done there. I kept thinking about the all the stories in the Book of Daniel that our guide never mentioned (LOL) and how awesome it was to

walk those same streets. The fact they had uncovered the paved main street and the architecture of the structures to include the stables gifs.

Something I knew and had seen in Berlin is the Germans under Hitler had removed the main entry wall from Babylon and it is presented in its entirety in a museum there on the old East Berlin side. The bricks were glazed like tiles today and were beautiful in the royal blue and the animals being in bright gold. The recreation was a poor substitute for the real thing. It is a shame that so much of the city is completely destroyed but to have been there, knowing very few of my generation will ever see it was spectacular.

Gilkes, Sally
Royal Air Force, United Kingdom
Police, Senior Aircraft
1986-1989
O POS

Thinking back to my basic training brings back many memories, mainly happy & funny ones but the one thing that sits very vividly is the fear of "being back drafted." This would have meant not passing all the required standards within six jammed weeks and not passing out with all your fellow intake girls. I think fear is the best way of describing this feeling but talking about this to friends and family it was plain to see they never really understood this, usually just stating that if this did happen then it would be just a slight delay in the process and you would pass out a few weeks later.

But talking about this to your fellow recruits was different. It was plain to see we all knew what it meant. It was more than just the fear of personal failure; it was the fear of watching everyone else completing their training and proudly taking part in the passing out ceremony in front family and friends. These were the girls that you first met when you were greeted by a screaming Sergeant on the first

night of our six week stay, the girls that you laughed and cried with. It was obvious very early on that we needed each other to get through, although this was a personal journey it was also a developing "love story" – because by the end of the six weeks you had grown to love these girls.

So we laughed together, persuading one particular girl (we called her Spud, can't remember her real name!) to go up to the Sergeants office and ask for her "service issue spectacles," we tippy-toed behind her out of sight and waited for the sergeants answer to her hilarious question (bless her, she thought it was a genuine over sight and her glasses we left off her equipment and clothing pick up) we soon ran back to our room when we heard the bellowed command to "GET BACK TO YOUR ROOM YOU STUPID IDIOT!!!!" I don't think she really ever forgive us for that. And we certainly cried together, we did plenty of that. On one of the first nights some of the younger girls who had never been away from home before were very upset, crying and saying they wanted to go home. We knew a priest was due to talk to us that night, mainly about how religion worked within the armed services but he soon realized how upset these girls were. He called us all together and said there was one sentence of advice that would help us through, even the girls not

upset waited for this sentence that would help us get through this ordeal. “Girls, don’t let these bastards get you down.” Well that was it; we were soon all laughing again.

So we really grew together and shared a journey that not everybody would really understand. So on pass out morning, we all stood and marched together, all of us, the original 23 intakes. We had done it. So now looking back even if I have lost contact with some of these girls, we will always have a connection. I will never forget.

Hanson, Jody
Royal Canadian Air Force (RCAF)
Major
Air Traffic Control Officer
1996-present
O NEG

I have made the best friends of my life in the Royal Canadian Air Force (RCAF), and I would not be where I am today if it wasn't for them. These bonds are forged in ways that could never be properly expressed; I can communicate with them via a single glance or motion or can go extended periods of time without contact only to pick up right where we left off at the next opportunity. Where do you meet such amazing people, you ask? As it turns out, in places both ordinary and extraordinary.

Search & Rescue Mission, 300 feet over the Atlantic Ocean and 200 nautical miles off the coast of Newfoundland.

It was here that my crewmembers and I shifted seamlessly into "emergency" mode when the electronic instruments of our CC130 Hercules aircraft cockpit short-circuited and failed due to heavy rain leaking through the cockpit windows. With minimal

reference to the horizon and the nearest point of land 1 hour away, we instantly melded as a team, anticipating each other's needs to complete the checklist and regain safety of flight. We were our own Guardian Angels that day.

Coffee and Story Time at Kandahar Airfield

These two office mates and I developed the daily habit of enjoying a mid-morning "Double-Double" while each of us took turns recounting a personal story of some kind. Not only did it make us feel closer to home, I learned that one was a child trumpet prodigy and the other had a son with Autism, among many other things. After 6 months, these two gentlemen were like brothers to me, reducing how much I missed my own family.

The 1000th Hour in the Sinai Peninsula.

I experienced the exhilaration of flying over the Northern Sinai Peninsula in Egypt as a dear colleague and friend reached her career milestone of 1,000 hours piloting the UH-60 Blackhawk. To share this moment with friends, both military and civilian and from 3 different countries, was an honour I will never forget.

Pre-Dinner Pep Talk in the 15 Wing Officers' Mess at Moose Jaw, Saskatchewan.

For a one-year period, I acted as the President of the Officers' Mess Committee in Moose Jaw. As such, I was required to conduct Master of Ceremony duties for 10 different formal military dinners ranging from 90 – 140 attendees. In addition to helping me write and prepare commentary for the crowd, these two RCAF women attended almost every dinner I hosted and cheered me on as they watched me fight my fear of public speaking. Each dinner was a success, thanks to their support. I couldn't have done it without them.

Harris, Rodney
U.S. Army
Command Sergeant Major
First Sergeant
1988-present
0 POS

This story is about the longest day of my life. I originally wrote this paper for the Sergeants Major Academy as a personal experience paper. At that point it was only one year after the incident and the memories were much clearer and emotions were still quiet raw.

On November 8, 2007 a few of my Soldiers and I were heading to Vicenza from Aviano so they could appear before a promotion board. I was a member of the board they would appear before. We were all assigned to G Company, 52nd Aviation Regiment at Aviano, Air Base, Italy. The trip usually took us about two hours. We departed early in the morning in a van with about six or seven Soldiers and me. The ride was uneventful and the board was unremarkable. After an hour or so of the board proceedings, my cell phone rang multiple times. Initially I ignored it but someone continued to try and reach me. SPC Jackson was sitting in front of the board and SSG

Main was his sponsor, both where from my company. Finally, I handed my phone to SSG Main and told him to go outside and take this call. After a couple of minutes SSG Main returned with a hand written note "one of our helicopters went down." I turned to the president of the board and told him I had to go. I stepped outside and sent SSG Main to round up all of the G Company Soldiers around Caserme Ederle so we could get on the road. I knew there was only one helicopter flying that day. The crew was CPT Christian Skoglund, our Commander, was the Pilot in Command, CW2 Davidangelo Alvarez was the PI, and SGT Mark Lalli was the crew chief. There were eight passengers that day to include LT Derrek Smith and seven Airmen from the 31st Fighter wing. This was a reenlistment flight for a couple of the Airmen.

I attempted to call CPT Skoglund's phone really hoping to hear his voice on the other end. Instead, an airmen answered. I asked him what had happened. He was surprisingly calm and collected considering the ordeal he had been through. He said the helicopter crashed shortly after taking off from a landing site in the Piave river bed. He was the only one that was thrown from the aircraft on impact. After he regained consciousness he was looking around and saw a cell phone. He picked it up to call for help.

The screen of the phone was busted so he pushed the send key and the phone dialed the last number dialed. The phone belonged to CPT Skoglund and the last number he dialed was to check weather before they launched. The phone rang and the weather personnel at Aviano answered. The Airman, I can't remember his name, told them the helicopter he was in had crashed. He did not know where they were. The crash site was only a few hundred meters from the Autostrada. Several drivers saw the crash and called emergency services within a couple minutes of the aircraft going down. The airbase had already been notified the UH-60 was down. By the time I called there were already rescue helicopters on the scene. Some of the survivors were already in route to the hospital, to include CPT Skoglund and SGT Lalli. I told the Airmen to hold on to the phone and don't answer it again. I was concerned Liz, CPT Skoglund's wife, would try to call when she heard of the crash.

After all the Soldiers were rounded up, I took all of their phones and told them what had happened. We took off in the van as fast as we could. Our route would take us very close to the crash site. I called the company and told SFC Berry and CPT Robbins to gather everyone in the company in the conference room and take all cell phones until the families

were notified. After about an hour we were on the bridge over the Piave and we could see the rescue personnel in the river bed. We stopped the van so I could get out. I climbed over the wall and slid down the embankment to the edge of the river bed. The Piave river bed is about a mile wide but the river is usually only a few meters wide unless there is a lot of rain or snow melt form the mountains. That day the river was not very deep or wide. I ran across the large gravel for maybe 200 meters, waded across a thigh deep rea of the river and then ran a few hundred meters more to the site. I was the first American on the site but there were several rescue personnel, two or three helicopters and several Caribinieri. By the time I arrived all survivors, except the Airmen that had answered the phone were on their way to the hospital. There were still three Airmen trapped inside the helicopter, they did not survive, and two more on litters covered up outside the helicopter. The two on litters were USAF CPT Durham and CW2 Alvarez. The last surviving Airmen was evacuated shortly after I arrived. I started asking about the survivors that were evacuated, what was their condition and where were they. SGT Lalli and CPT Skoglund were in pretty bad shape and they were at the hospital in Padua. The others were injured but stable. I called my wife and sent her to the Liz's house so she could take her to

the hospital. After a few more minutes CW4 Stone and CW4 Wagner arrived at the crash site.

While I was walking around the aircraft my cell phone rang. It was Rachel Alvarez, the wife of CW2 Alvarez. She frantically asked me, "is Dave ok? I know he is flying today." I was standing very close to him and CPT Durham, they were on litters, covered with blankets. I tried to not show emotion and responded, "I don't know Rachel, I will call you when I know something." She would call me many more times before we were able to officially notify her.

As it began to get dark I made my way back to the van for the long drive back to Aviano. Shortly after I arrived back at the company headquarters, Marion called to inform me that CPT Skoglund was not going to make it. They had kept him alive until his wife arrived but he was not going to make it. The company was still in the conference room. I had to go in my office to compose myself for a minute. Now I had to go tell the company that the Commander that everyone loved was not going to make it. I remember standing in front of the company and telling them the bad news. Christian was loved and respected by everyone that knew him. SGT Lalli was in the Padua hospital, he was alive, most of the doctors did not

think he would make it through the night but he did! After all of the families in the local area were notified, we released the Soldiers to go home.

Except for a few seconds I was able to control the tears and emotions until I got home and went to bed. I remember laying down next to Marion and closing my eyes. The first image that I saw was the lifeless face of one of the Airmen trapped inside the debris. That is when all of the emotions from the day came out. I cried in her arms for a while. That was truly the longest day of my life.

Writing this paper in 2008 was the best therapy I could ever get. I remember sitting in the bedroom/ office writing. After every few lines I would need a tissue, sometimes I was balling like a little kid. After I finished the paper, I sent it to the families to review before I turned it in to the Academy.

Harritan, Randy S.
U.S. Army
Sergeant
11B4D Infantry Scout Dog Handler
1968-1970
0 POS

He sits on his haunches in the middle of the trail. Nose held high bouncing like a fishing bobber pointing towards the 10:00 o'clock position.

He looks back at Harry but does not move. Waits for orders. Harry's senses go into overdrive. Which way is the wind blowing? How hard? Is anything out of order ahead? A turned leaf, a tuft of grass, an overturned rock? A quick glance encompassing all of his surroundings provides no feedback. The jungle opens ahead of him. A perfect place for an ambush.

Harry gives Quirt the hand signal to stay. The dog will not move. His orders given, he sits tall and rigid. An occasional sweep of the area with his nose. Analyzing.

Having no cover, Harry, as casually as his internal tensions will allow, meanders back to the next man in line. At slightly above a whisper he says, "Enemy

personnel at 10:00 o'clock."

Afraid of springing the ambush Harry does not look back in the direction indicated by Quirt but nonchalantly shrugs and looks around the jungle as if taking a break. He can feel the rifle bores pointed in his direction. Silent. Deadly. Waiting. He wants to flop on his belly and crawl away. His instincts tell him run, but he waits.

"Enemy personnel at 10:00 o'clock" relayed back man after man. No adlibbing, no changing the verbiage. Repeating what is said until the sound dies out along this snake-like string of men stretching along the ridgeline.

Waiting. The interminable wait.

Beads of sweat run down Harry's back. Pools forming in his armpits. Harry hopes the Company Commander is flanking the dinks and will turn the tables taking the pressure from the front. He isn't sure how long he can maintain the subterfuge.

Voices low and mechanical louder with each new voice coming back up the line. "Move out and engage the enemy."

Harry knows that the Captain is under orders to engage the enemy but walking into an ambush? Why doesn't he come up here and engage the enemy? Shit, shit, shit! He turns, recalls Quirt, praises him and again orders him to "search." Quirt will not alert again on these people. He has done his job, at least as far as these people are concerned. Still it is comforting having him out front.

On shaky legs at a snail's pace the column moves out. Watching, scanning the tree-line, moving no faster than necessary. Each step winding the jack-in-the-box awaiting the monster's release. A hundred meters. No-one really wants to make contact but this is the business we're in.

The jungle opens up in a solid wall of fire. Harry and the others are caught in an ambush along their left flank. The noise is incredible. Heavy machine guns, AK 47's, RPG's, all aimed at the Americans and firing at once. Harry dives away from the guns. The ground slopes downward providing some protection. Quirt, as trained, takes his place on Harry's left side and lays down as close to Harry as he can get. Protecting. Doing his job.

The fighting is vicious. Harry goes through several

magazines in a few minutes. Can't stop and conserve ammo. They keep rushing forward. He must continue firing or they will flank the unit on the right. Grass is being cut over his head and falling on him from the enemy fire. They have him bracketed.

The Grenadier to his left is firing 40 millimeter grenades as fast as he can load them. Thank God for him. Helping to keep the enemy at bay. Troops down the line to the left are giving it to Charlie in spades but they are firing in the same direction as he and giving him no cover fire. Chi-com grenade!

On Harry's left side just beyond Quirt. He can almost touch it. It lays there. No ticking, no sound. Just a gruesome inanimate object lying in its own cloud of dust. Time stops. Boom! Quirt takes the full blast. Slams into Harry and then almost as if in slow motion rolls over him. They both are suspended in air. He lands and does not move. Harry comes down with a grunt, loud whine in his ears.

An NVA soldier, a good looking young man with a fresh haircut and clean green fatigues, walks from the foliage thinking he has killed Harry and the dog. He is wearing no hat and is looking over his shoulder talking to other troops behind him. Harry puts three rounds

into his chest and he falls backward in a heap. Legs akimbo. He is lying there dead no more than five feet from Harry. Harry must move.

To Harry's amazement Quirt rises, and on shaky legs assumes his place again on Harry's left side. Time to go. Harry and Quirt move down the mountain then angle to the left in hopes of linking up the rest of the unit. Harry sees movement and yells "It's the Dog Handler" on hopes it is his guys and not the enemy. There is no answer. He moves closer and repeats "It's the Dog Handler." This time a welcome voice says "Come on in, we thought you were dead."

Harry doesn't know how much time has passed. It seems like hours. The entire unit withdraws. Artillery is called. Big guns. 155's and 8 inchers. The ground rumbles and shakes. Metal shards cut through the trees. Cutting them in half as easily as a scythe through hay. Hell has been unleashed upon the dinks. Even now Harry has a certain admiration for the dinks. What brave young men they must be. They know what's coming yet they attack and endure Armageddon. A baptism of fire and brimstone.

Firing stops and the unit moves to mop up. Pieces of human beings but no whole bodies. They took

them. The rancid smell of cordite. Spent brass. Plenty of blood, bandages. It's always the same. They try to make the victories hollow. No proof, no bodies. Always an estimation of kills.

They killed one of us. It is absolute. Not estimated. We have one KIA. Shot through the chest. Lying on his back in a pool of sticky red. Already congealing, returning to the earth. Some wounded, but not bad. We won. Big fucking deal. We won.

A resupply bird comes in, unloads water, ammo. Harry and Quirt hitch a ride back to base camp with the dead man zipped into a body bag. After landing Harry prods Quirt. He will not move. Can't. He died on the way home. He had no more to give. There are two dead soldiers on this helicopter.

The shock is instant and severe. Disbelief. It can't be. He was fine. Harry knew something was wrong. He knew. Harry dismounted and cradled a limp Quirt in his arms and begins to walk with him. His tongue hangs. His eyes are glazed. The crew on the chopper look on. Sympathy in their eyes, saying nothing. What can they say?

It is more than a mile back to the War Dog area. Harry

will not stop. Will not rest. He pushes on to find Doc, the vet tech. Maybe he can help. It's hard to see through the tears. Salty, bitter. Leaving dirt trails on his cheeks. The heaviness is not is his arms but his chest. He thinks he will burst open and spill on the dusty rotten ground. He wants to scream. Run. Run until the hurt stops. Run until all this goes away but his legs won't let him. They are no longer a part of him but simply appendages to move him and Quirt over this God forsaken patch of earth.

Doc meets him at the kennels but Harry won't let him have Quirt. He slides down and sits against a wall holding him. The crying is over. He talks to Quirt as he always has. Thanking him for his protection, his dedication and love for over a year.

Time means nothing to Harry. He has no idea how long he's been there but eventually relinquishes Quirt to Doc. A wound has opened that will never heal. Harry heads for his hooch.

Alone for the first time in Vietnam.

A short time later the War Dog Provisional First Sergeant told Harry that the Battalion Commander of the unit he had worked with inquired about the

soldier named Quirt. He wanted to give him a medal for his heroism during the battle. When informed that the soldier was a large German Shepherd the colonel simply laughed. Dogs were considered to be equipment. Nothing more.

A month later Harry received a letter from one of his dear friends and fellow dog handlers assigned to the 25th Division near Saigon. He said he heard that a dog named Quirt was coming to the main Veterinary Center near Saigon for a necropsy and immediately knew who it was. There was only one Quirt. He told Harry that he met him at the landing pad and accompanied his body to the Vet and stayed with him. Both his ear drums were completely gone, which Harry already knew. This happened in an earlier engagement but not reported. Harry knew the Army would retire him for this so he kept it quiet. He also had severe internal damage. Mortal damage. He was given a proper burial, complete with headstone, in the War Dog Cemetery. Pete said a prayer over Quirt and wanted Harry to know he was treated with respect. Another soldier laid to rest. Gone to flowers.

Good-by Quirt, Serial number 7A97.

Huggins, Molly
U.S. Army
Captain
Platoon Leader, Helicopter Pilot
1997-2011
0 POS

When we graduated flight school in February, we all left knowing our paths would converge again half the world away. The war in Iraq was fresh, and looming on the horizon for many. No matter, we were young, we loved our country, and we were invincible.

Not anymore. One phone call on January 9, 2006 shattered the tidy illusions of safety I constructed in my heart. My best friend was scattered across the desert, along with the pieces of her Blackhawk helicopter and eleven other humans. My husband, also in the desert, was not there to grieve with me, and so I began a slow unraveling.

What do you tell inquisitive people on an airplane when they cheerfully ask you where you are going, and worse, why are you going there? How do you phrase it, turning your red puffy eyes toward them with the fat tears slipping out, this word, this foreign word: a funeral? (That will stop a conversation quickly,

let me tell you).

It was two weeks after her death, all the way across the country. It still flickers across my brain, a collage of too-bright images, some I will cling to always; others, I try desperately to erase.

I don't know how to tell you about it. Do I talk about how I obsessively searched for a dress for the first memorial because I felt like she would somehow know and haunt me from the grave if I showed up looking anything less than my made-up, accessorized best? Only to learn hopping around on one foot trying to put on panty hose (panty hose!) that her old roommate had done exactly the same thing. Do I tell you it was open casket? And that I stood over the casket unable to see the truth of what was in front of me so I just stared intensely at her hair. I looked around for a minute, a peculiar type of uniformed robot, wondering if anyone else knew how upset she would be if she knew what her hair looked like. I wasn't crying, yet.

Do I tell you how my mother and baby sister met me there, a stand-in for the husband, still in Iraq. And a trio of most beautiful women and their husbands, friends from our shared flight school experience.

Also fashionably dressed. And how we got to the funeral an hour early determined to have a good seat. How when the chairs filled up and then the spaces around the chairs overflowed with people and there was no more room for the family, they asked those of us in uniform to come sit on the stage to honor her memory. My heart sank. And all of those people just looking at us, waiting. Me all raw and robotic, determined to hold my crumbling heart together.

How, when they carried the flag draped coffin into the room, and my vision narrowed and all I could see was blood red and bright white stars and I knew this was real and true and unbearable, that's when I cried. And cried and cried. Big choking sobs that cut off my air and took over my soul. I was crying for her. For the life she didn't live, the babes she didn't have. For me. For my sweet baby I had lost three months prior. For my husband. For her husband. I poured out my grief on that stage with each heaving breath.

Or maybe, I should tell you about how, when I was able to breathe, we went to her grave. And we stood a little ways away, to give her sweet family some space, and when the service was over, we walked over, and as one, saluted her one more time with Taps echoing over the graveyard.

There were six of us in uniform-we approached the gaping hole in the ground and moved our arms in concert. A salute not planned, not organized, born of our collective grief. My brothers and sisters.
And to this day, when I hear Taps, I see her shiny coffin under a gray sky and feel the drumbeat of an approaching Blackhawk, flying overhead at one hundred feet, a final farewell. And when that happened, I crumbled again. I kept my salute, and my heart shattered.

Maybe I'll just tell you how we went back to the hotel, the flight-school contingent, and talked and laughed and remembered and hoped for the future and vowed to live well, for her. We went to her parents' house and looked at the mountains she looked at and played with her dog and her horses and started breathing again in the wide-open spaces that defined her youth.
Yes, that's what I want you to remember. And you know, she still makes me want to be a better version of myself. I look at my babies, my Jaime, and think about the mother she would have been. And I think, "I better not screw this up because I have these babes and she didn't get that." I live the best way I know how because she cannot."

Jeanette
U.S. Army
Major
Deputy, EOD Branch / Logisitics
1999-present
0 POS

In 2007, I was assigned to the 192d EOD BN as the S4, against my wishes. I was engaged and had put in my paperwork to get out of the military so I could start a family. My branch manager informed me that I was being redirected from a desk job possibly at the Pentagon to a battalion that was deploying. During my office call with the Battalion XO, he informed me of the deployment and asked if there was anything preventing me from deploying. I told him my plans to get married and immediately start a family. His reaction was, simply put, pissed. He essentially told me that if I got pregnant knowing that we were going to deploy, he'd have UCMJ action taken against me. Of course later I realized that's not possible. But in any case, we were off to a bad start.

About a week or two later, my predecessor and I were conducting a hand off, and there was a task that was completed and sent to the XO. Since my predecessor wasn't around, I went to answer the

XO's questions on it. He wasn't happy with the product and preceded to tell me what crappy work it was and how I missed the [implied] intent and he would just have to do it himself. I've never been one to fight back, talk back, or disrespect someone who outranked me. But in this case, I figured what did I have to lose? Were they going to kick me out of the military? Besides, this was a task my predecessor did, not me. So I stood up for myself. Unfortunately, I tend to lack tact, which is probably another reason why I generally stay quiet. I started yelling back and spoke my mind. I told him, I could do it, but if there was a specific intent he wanted met, he needs to tell me, otherwise I'll do it how I think it should be done. It wasn't said that nicely though. To my surprise, he calmed down and talked me like a human. He sent me off with a clear intent and he was pleased with the resulting product. From that point forward we never had any issues and he actually became not only my mentor, but one of my favorite people. Into the deployment he put his full trust in my ability and piled on the responsibility and even offered me the XO job when he took battalion command. I realized that he was the sort of person that prayed on the weak, but by standing up and fighting back, he found that he could trust me. I would try to pass this bit of info on to the company commanders that came to

me with complaints about him. Those who listened to my advice to stand up to him, quickly earned his trust. Those who were "yes men" even when they shouldn't have been, continued to have trouble.

Sadly, he died of cancer July 19, 2011. I had known of the cancer from a mutual friend (another mentor). Apparently LTC D didn't want me to know he was on his deathbed. Funny, I'm not sure why. But knowing our close relationship, our friend, kept me informed on the sly. Finally, our friend told me to call LTC D because he didn't have much longer. I called and his beautiful wife answered.

She said I just missed him by an hour. I assumed he was taken for a check-up or something. But as she continued to talk, I realized, I had just "missed him." You're dearly missed, Sir.

Johnson, Hans
U.S. Army
Chief Warrant Officer 2
UH60 Blackhawk Pilot
2006-present
O POS

My name is Chief Warrant Officer 2 Hans Johnson. I joined the Army in Oct. 2006 as a 15T UH-60 Blackhawk Helicopter Repairer in the rank of Private First Class. In the last 10 years I have progressed to Sergeant and then transitioned to become a Warrant Officer and I currently fly the UH-60 Blackhawk medium lift helicopter. My story is multi-faceted and triggers a lot of feelings, thoughts, and memories for me. I hope I can bring it together and it will be coherent enough for you to grasp the idea of the sense of community that is felt among soldiers to the most intimate of levels.

On September 19, 2009 we lost Michael Shane Cote Jr. in a helicopter crash in Balad Iraq. Michael was 1 of 45 guys in A Co. 1-52nd AVN Regt (Tomahawks) out of Fort Wainwright, Alaska, that deployed as a company unit to Iraq in February 2009. Because we were not an organic asset to any of the higher commands we fell under we were the "red headed

step child" throughout our deployment. This fact only brought us together even more. We quickly found out that we had to rely on ourselves to make it through our time in Iraq. While in Iraq we had 3 major moves. We moved to Baghdad Int'l Airport when moving into country, then to Basra in the south and ended up in Balad, about a 30 min flight north of Baghdad. The amount of moving and the conex parties to rearrange our stuff for rapid deployment upon arrival was taxing. We all leaned on each other during these times. One day we were sweating in the muggy Basra swamp land heat and we all just started laughing because it sucked so badly, but we were all in it together. We joked about how no one could understand why we thought this was funny in such a terrible environment and hoped we weren't suffering from heat stroke. It was a feeling of security knowing that even if it was the 45 of us against the world in such a place as Iraq that no matter The Suck that came our way we would attack it head on and defeat it...together.

When we arrived at Balad we had been pulling missions for some time. Someone had the bright idea that we needed to do aerial gunnery at night with known incoming weather. "Sir, Yes, Sir" was the typical Tomahawk answer, completing all our missions even if it meant talking on more than we should

have. For being the bastard child of any battalion we fell under, we were heavily relied on. "Those Alaska boys sure know how to get it done" was a common sentiment among those we worked with. Because we had only each other to really count on we worked hard for the guy to our left and right, thus we had an outstanding record of completing the mission. On the night of the crash 7 of our crew chiefs were in the first aircraft and 7 in the second aircraft. That was over 50% of our crew chiefs. The two aircraft were from, and being crewed by, a sister company in the battalion. As always things didn't go as planned and weather rolled in early. We were on a mad dash back to base when we were over taken by the storm. The lead aircraft crashed while trail diverted to FOB Warhorse and landed safely. In the crash only 4 of 13 walked away with minor injuries. Michael was our only fatality.

To do the story justice would take half the night and a cold drink or two. Mike was sitting in the aft row of seats, facing forward, on the far right side. His left shoulder harness, the bolt that secured the strap to the seat to be precise, failed. He rotated to the right hitting his head on the bulkhead. There is an I-beam right there and it pushed his helmet back and split his forehead. He had major head trauma and died

very shortly after the crash in the arms of a guy I barely remember. He came later in the deployment and I didn't much care for him. Mike never left the aircraft and died with his boots on strapped to the seat he was sitting in, in the shit hole of Iraq. The most maddening thing is he didn't die on a mission or because of enemy fire.

Death and the thought of death has different effects on individuals. We had a myriad of emotions at that time. Many wanted to be angry at the battalion, some wanted to yell and scream. Others wanted to be alone or to be with someone close. I deal with fear and the unknown with anger. I have all my life. It is my fight or flight response. I have to consciously control it. I was surprised that at losing my close friend, I did not feel that anger. I felt sadness for myself and my guys, for his family back home. There are many more emotions and thoughts that I will probably never share with anyone because some things are just too personal. Through the roller coaster of the next few days we only had each other.

We had 72 hours to mourn and recover and we were back on mission with our shoulder to the wheel pushing hard. The comradery and shared pain of our group was tangible. We miss our friend, Michael, but

we honor his memory and his choice to serve his country. Though we are not related through blood the 44 men and 1 woman of the Tomahawks are my family. Our shared experiences will bring us together throughout the coming decades.

"We few, we happy few, we band of brothers, for he today who sheds his blood with me shall be my brother..." Shakespeare.

Jones, Keith Michael
U.S. Army
Specialist
11B1V, I carried an M203 on an M16, Honda 250cc Scout
1991-1994
0 POS

SFC Harvey L Moore Jr. was a hero when there were not too many of them around. This was before those fools sent all of you into the endless wars. So, yeah, heroes were rare back then. He had two jump stars and a badass old school regimental scroll on his right sleeve. The only other guys I knew with a combat patch was my team leader Corey Perkins, and our battalion commander, LTC Stauss. SGT Perkins was an impressive guy too, but that's for another time...

Anyway, SFC Moore was something else. He had managed to stay in the ranger regiment for his entire career. If he had done nothing other than that it would be impressive, 'cause he managed it for 14 years. He was in the regimental recon detachment, first and third battalions. He was also an instructor at the ranger course. Then you have combat jumps in Grenada and Panama. OK, he was chasing banana republic yahoos, but still, most folks sat around with

their thumbs up their asses and their minds in Egypt. So for those times, he was a rarity.

OK, you say, past is past, so he got 'lucky' enough for two combat jumps and didn't die...what about now? Well, now he's dead, but I will get to that. When I knew him before he died, he was nothing short of amazing. He found out my platoon was doing a contest for the extended PT charts. I was pumping out 90+ push-ups and cranking out over 100 sit-ups, and both my team leader, my squad leader, and a couple other over-achievers wanted to do an extended scale challenge. SFC Moore wanted in. Well shit then... He beat the hell out of us all...by a lot...

37-years-old and schooled us. Then went off and competed in the best ranger competition. His team won that too. Seriously? As I said...Badass.

So, he was some kind of fucking hero, and at a time when there were not too many of them.

Then some fucking air force pilot drove his Blackhawk into the great Salt Lake and killed him. Damn. I mean God motherfucking dammit. The fucker killed my hero, SFC Moore, our battalion commander, LTC Stauss (he only had one jump star), the RTO, who was a friend of

mine (cant remember his name...damn), and the 3rd BN commander—can't remember his name either.

Well, shit. I want to blame the air force pilot—the army ones all made it—but I am told it wasn't his fault. Hell, he probably had a family too that missed him, but the fucker killed SFC Moore, so fuck him.

So we got on a Chinook in our dress greens with our rifles and our berets (before that chickenshit general gave our black berets to the rest of the Army...), and went to guard his casket.

The amazing thing was that his family didn't even know he was a hero. They didn't know what a jump star was, or what an old school 75th scroll on the right sleeve meant. Shit, they didn't even know he was a Ranger, let alone winner of best ranger and a two time combat veteran. They were amazed that we came to guard his casket—that we held him in such high esteem. Hell, they had never seen anything like us...

If they only knew what they had lost. That's what got me—they didn't even know what they had lost. But I did. And I still do. SFC Harvey L. Moore Jr. was the best of us. Damn...

Kathleen B.
Army wife
Mother of 3 children, all of whom have served in the military

My husband was in the Army from 1964-1992, which made me an Army wife during that period. Looking back on it as a whale – I truly loved it and do miss it now! There was a camaraderie there among everybody that you can't find anywhere else.

We lived on post 95% of the time and this was wonderful, especially after we started a family. It was so safe and secure. The kids always had plenty of playmates and they could go outside and play and you didn't have to worry about them. Neighbors met and became friends right away 'cause everybody was in the same boat!

The one bad year was my husband's hardship tour in Vietnam from Dec 1966 to Dec 1967. Except for an R&R week to Hawaii at the end of June, he was gone the whole year, leaving me at home with our two children, ages 1 & 2. It was a tough year because back then, there were no cell phone calls, texting, or e-mails. The mailman became your best friend, especially when you got a letter or two. Then there

were times that you didn't get a letter for maybe 3-4 days. But we made it through it & Thank God he came home to us, safe and sound.

We did have the opportunity to live in 6 different states during our Army life. Of course, the Commissary and Post Exchange were always a blessing and there again – everybody was friendly. We made so many friends and now some of which we are still in touch with in 2016.

The Army Hospitals always treated us well and 2 of our 3 children were born in them.

So now, looking back, it was a good life and I miss it. But still in touch with it as we are retired near a Navy base and have all the benefits of the military life here.

Kathpal, Madeera
U.S. Army
Major
Radiation Oncologist / Flight Surgeon
2009-present
O POS

I can sum up military relations in two simple words… selfless service. Don't get me wrong, the military is a job just like any other job that has its ups and downs, but I do feel that the community feel of the Army is unlike anything else. The closest comparison I can come up with is a sorority or fraternity. My knowledge of sororities and fraternities come from movies like 'The Skulls', 'Legally Blonde' and 'Old School." My knowledge of military cohesiveness comes from 6.5 years of active duty with one year spent in Egypt and 4 months spent in Kuwait. Whenever I meet someone new in uniform, I ask them why they joined. A common answer is, "they paid for ____." When I then ask why they stay in after their commitment, a common answer is, "the people."

In what other walk of life would a total stranger who volunteered to help with your transition into a new unit offer you their extra car until you get your own, as was the case with one of my new friends? When

else, after spending less than a week with a group of people, would you come together on New Year's Eve with non-alcoholic champagne and stay up until midnight to hug and toast? Finally, where else would you receive cards with family pictures and emails with supportive advice and well wishes from not only patients, but also perfect strangers, who wish for your safe return?

Keel, David
U.S. Army
Chief Warrant Officer 4
MTP, PIC, Air Mission Commander
1986-2012
0 POS

While serving as a MEDEVAC crew at FT Wainwright Alaska, I had a crew of four: LT Garnsworthy was the copilot, SGT Trembling was the crewchief, SSG Winchester was the medic, and I was the Pilot-in-Command. It was a Saturday at approximately 2100 when we started our run-up. Our bird was a UH60A that had just been flown the night before on a mission. The aircraft was our test bird for the pressure refueling of the CEFS. We had been having problems with the CEFS fuel lines leaking when pressure refueled and had stopped the practice for almost a year. The crew the night before had pressure refueled the bird, and if our pressure refuel was successful, that would make three times with no leaks.

Our mission was to perform a training flight while on first up. We performed our pre-flight and run-up with no issues. LT Garnsworthy was running the checklist asked if we wanted to perform the CEFS transfer check now or in flight. We were way ahead on time so

I said, "Let's do it now." I was looking down at a radio when she turned on the switch. We were at 100% and ready to take off after a radio call. After three seconds, the medic said he had some liquid coming in. I asked if it was coming from the soundproofing overhead. It was, so I turned off the transfer switch. "How bad is it?" He said he would have to change his med gear. I was convinced it was a small amount of fuel – that would be consistent with the leaks we were getting before with the CEFS and posed no danger to the aircraft or crew.

I knew that we just lost our training flight and would have to get the back up bird up and checked out. I reached up with right hand and turned the fuel pump to APU Boost and turned the APU switch to on. Instantly, there was a loud boom and the medic yelled, "Fire!" I turned off the APU, grabbed the cyclic, and said: "GET OUT, GET OUT, GET OUT!"

A few seconds later, LT Garnsworthy was across the controls and out. I reached up to pull off the #1 engine PCL and as I did, I stuck my hand and most of my forearm into the fire that was walking across the overhead console. It looked like something straight out of the movie, Backdraft! I couldn't believe what I was seeing. I grabbed the PCL, pulled it off, and then

went to grab the #2 PCL. As I did, the fire and smoke hit the windshield and the dash then enveloped me.

I decided it was time to exit the cockpit.

I unbuckled myself, opening my door at the same time… both failed. I remember having a distinct thought as I was sitting there completely engulfed in smoke and fire that I was going to die. I simply couldn't believe it. I couldn't see or breath, and I was cooking. Somehow, I found myself out of the fire and smoke with my hands on the ground but still hung up by the collective. I wiggled free and while on my knees, reached back into the bird to center the cyclic and then let go. I was afraid that a blade might hit one of the crewmembers. When I looked back to make sure the medic was out, I saw flames shooting out of the entire cabin top. They went up thru the rotor about three to four feet. It was an eerie sight and sound – the engines were off but the rotor was coasting down while passing thru the flames. I then went to run out of the disk to get clear of the bird. As I did, I looked over my shoulder and didn't see any of my crew. I felt my stomach in my throat! I ran back to the bird and found the crew helping our crewchief get out. We had to help him because he had folded his knee backwards trying to escape.

Soon, the ambulance arrived. The driver pulled up no more than ten feet in front of the bird that was now completely engulfed in fire. As they stopped, the first oxygen bottle exploded. I saw the side of the ambulance buckle under the concussion, and the vehicle rocked up on the opposite side tires.

It was later determined that a main fuel line had come loose and leaked fuel over the top of the aircraft. If we had been inflight, I don't think any of us would have been alive when we struck the ground. If I had known it was a main fuel line leak I would have had the crew exit and did a blind shutdown. My biggest regret is that as a Pilot-in-Command, I endangered my crew – something I could never live with if any of us had been seriously hurt.

Killilea, Ed
U.S. Army
Chief Warrant Officer 2
MEDEVAC Pilot
2002-present
O POS

One of my favorite war stories was one of the many times I was put back in my place.

We had just finished flying an NVG MEDEVAC mission outside of Fairbanks, Alaska in January 2008. A man was found freezing to death in his trailer. If was a difficult confined-area landing, since we were near our max gross weight, and we were pretty proud of ourselves when we got back to the hangar.

As we made dinner for the crew that evening, the Pilot-in-Command's father and sister stopped over to say hello. We filled his family in on the details of our mission, and my buddy's sister says, "Hey, Dad. Why don't you tell him that one story about the Huey in the field?"

The father had been a MEDEVAC pilot in Vietnam. On one fateful day, as a result of battle damage, he and his crew were forced to land in a field. Shortly

thereafter, another Huey suffered a similar fate. However, this crew was quickly recovered by their wingman.

The father's crew was unable to get the attention of the rescue aircraft, so they remained in the field with two aircraft, the second of which was still running with black smoke billowing out. Then, as if by some miracle, the smoke stops, but the aircraft continued to run. Seeing this as their only opportunity to evade capture, they board the Huey. The crew conducted a hover check, and was satisfied with the condition of the aircraft to give it a shot. My buddy's father and his crew returned to base in their "new" aircraft safely. After returning to base, the father's unit elected to not report the new airframe that they inherited, and this Huey became their utility bird.

Then one day, a senior officer passed by and noticed the utility aircraft's tail number. "Wait a minute," the officer said, "that aircraft was destroyed a few months ago. I signed off on the loss."

This discovery caused the father to tell their story about what happened that day to the surprised officer. Unfortunately for the unit that reported the loss, they also reported a significant amount of unit property

that “went down with the ship.” However, the aircraft never really went down. Not good news for that commander.

As my buddy’s sister intended, the father’s story brought us back down to earth.

Kruper Peck, Samantha
U.S. Army
Captain
Aviation Officer
2004-2011
0 POS

My time in the Army leaves me quite torn. The words best and worst can't even begin to explain the emotional experience for me as an individual, or that on my family and loved ones. I went to the Academy in honor of a mentor who had pasted of cancer. Dave was everything I wanted to be, hard working, humble, wise, respected. If he felt I should go, I would go, and I did. I went in confident, driven, feeling inspired, and willing to give all I had to prove my worth and dedicate my life to a greater good. I left defeated, emotional drained, uncertain of self-value and direction.

However, diploma in hand, I proceeded to flight school and then Alaska always meeting the standard, but feeling lost. Soulless zombie comes to mind. My time in Alaska brought much sorrow for me. As a single female out of a crushing broken personal relationship, new to a unit where everyone was fighting for flight time, and still feeling uncertain of

where I should go next, I stumbled through every phase of my time there. I made so many mistakes. Far more than this document has space. Besides my short time as an XO, where for the first time as a junior officer I was treated with respect and actually felt like a member of a team, I can summarize my time as the lowest in my life.

I can blame only myself. I thought I could act like a man in every way and that would gain me the position and support to lead troops. I was so very wrong. You think I would have learned from the Academy, but I was stubborn, ideological, sexually modern, and throw in unwed and pregnant: black sheep only skims the surface. Now, later in life, I can see how if I had only approached each situation differently, different words, different direction, different personal relationships, my life might have been completely opposite. I might have deployed, like all Soldiers should at the time, and earned a spot for command. But, I made my bed, and it was one of failure.

Still, I had time left in, and a career course was a must, so I chose MI instead of AV, and it might have been the final nail in the end of my Army career, but now looking back on it, it was the best decision I

made in a time where I felt everything was out of control. At the MI Career Course, I took a Squad Leader position and found myself on a team with three gentlemen. These three men would change my life forever.

Each amazing in his own rite: deployments, tabs, commands, Ranger Battalion time -stellar in every valued aspect of being an officer. They were everything I wasn't. Everyone respected them. It wasn't just who they were on paper, but their spirit, ethics, moral compass, and demeanor. They were the purest of pure and emulated values beyond words. For some reason, unknown to me to this day, they welcomed me. They reminded me that I was worthy, that my hard working nature, and intelligence did exist, and that I had many gifts to give. They taught me the past did not have to define my full future, and that I was good enough to be and do anything I wanted. Those eight months were the greatest of my time in the military. I left feeling hopeful and supported. I left for the first time in nine years feeling self worth. To those three men I owe a great deal of my happiness.

I had one other life-changing event while at the MI Career Course, I met an Egyptian Officer. There were

many foreign officers, most made it quite hard for an unwed, mother, aviation officer to communicate with, but not Soli. He was understanding, smart, and had a drive to learn. I thrived being around him, and he was so loving of my son. To this day we communicate weekly, sharing our struggles and successes. We couldn't be more opposite a Muslim man from a traditional culture and a broken catholic single mother supporting her child and her stay-at-home partner. However, we have so much love and support for each other. Having him "in my arena" has always given me lift to keep going after the changes I want in my life, and striving to be the woman I know some day I could be.

These relationships were the greatest of gifts. Gifts so few get to experience. They gave me new purpose and value. To these men I am forever indebted. Years later I have found my calling. I am now working in outdoor education, managing a team, and teaching clients different philosophies mostly around team and leadership principles and practices. And for the first time in my life I can say I am good at what I do. The most rewarding job I have ever experienced. To watch others grow and find direction, support, and overcome obstacles, most of self worth is a gift from God. To leave work almost everyday with a hug from

client and a tearful thank you for helping them find their own value fills the soul with joy beyond words. And I know if I never met those four men, I might never have found my own value. So here I am former army aviation officer, no deployments, no commands, a mediocre record, and I am changing lives, raising three boys, friends and co-parent with my ex, part of a remarkable family, and I have stumbled into the greatest group of genuine friends. On paper I may look small, but I have the greatest life a woman could ever ask for, full of love, support, and reward.

Kucera, Chuck "FO"
U.S. Army
First Lieutenant
Artillery
1969-1976
O NEG

"Cadence"...Although frequently used in the musical sense, it also means to move together as one.

In 1971, I was an Army Artillery First Lieutenant, just having been commissioned. I was assigned to the "Americal" Division (23rd Infantry Division) 196th Light Infantry Brigade as a Field Artillery Forward Observer (FO) patrolling with an Infantry company in the mountains west of Da Nang in the northern part of South Vietnam. My job was to call in supporting artillery fire when the company encountered hostiles and to also "prep" with fire the areas we were about to move into. Although I wore the crossed cannon of Artillery, I was for all intents an Infantryman.

Successful artillery fire required the utmost in precision, coordination, communication, and teamwork. It's like a fine orchestra with each instrument in perfect harmony with the next. There are three distinct components that must all work

together without fail.

The battery of howitzers cannot see the target as they may be 8 or 10 miles away, so the forward observer is their "eyes." He radios into the Fire Direction Center (FDC) at the battery the coordinates of the target in a precise "Call for Fire" explaining in detail what he needs. Because the battery of howitzers does not understand "Infantry Speak" the FCD, using complex mathematical algorithms translates that call for fire into directions the guns understand....elevation of the tubes, charge of the round, deflection of the tubes, etc. The guns then receive these instructions, adjust their guns accordingly and fire the mission. Depending on where the rounds impact, the FO then can adjust the hit of subsequent rounds by calling back adjustments such as "Left 100, add 100." The precise cadence of this dance can mean the difference between life and death.

If just one party in this three-part chain of communication makes a mistake of just one numeral in a 20 or 30 number sequence, the rounds can land on "friendlies" with devastating effect. Keep in mind that in 1971, there was no satellite GPS and the FO worked just with a crude 1954 French map and compass. This required precision is also the reason

the military uses such words as "niner" for the word "nine" as "nine" can be easily misunderstood to be "five" on a static-filled field radio. "Niner" and the round impacts where it's supposed to..."five" and it lands on top of you.

When done correctly, this dance is a thing of beauty. When done wrong, it is an ugly sight. But my guys were prima ballerinas.

Even with a 40-year civilian career in the precision field of Environmental Engineering, to this day I have never experienced the teamwork and precision of those guys. Today I have almost zero tolerance for someone who comes up to me and says something like, "Hey, Chuck. Did you see that thing on TV about that guy?" WHAT?!! COMMUNICATE CORRECTLY!!

Leon-Guerrero, Anthony "LG"
U.S. Army
Chief Warrant Officer 2
Blackhawk Pilot
1999-2009
O POS

I think that there are two things that can strengthen the bond in a relationship. One is extreme happiness and the other is extreme adversity. My experience in the Army has exhibited the most gratifying and most demoralizing situations I've had to endure professionally and personally. Sharing those experiences with my last unit in Iraq brought us closer than any other unit I've been with during my ten years in the Army.

I've had close ties with other units while deployed to Iraq and Afghanistan, but something about my third and final deployment to Iraq made it distinct. We were a typical assault company prior to deployment; professional and friendly to each other, joking around, etc., but our bond wasn't really established at that point, nothing like a "Band of Brothers" type of situation, but by the time we came home, we developed a relationship that would last a lifetime.

Looking back on everything, I think the bond started a few weeks before we were set to deploy when some of us found out while on "block leave" that our normal 12-month deployment was now extended to 15 months. Personally, I found out through Fox News. Our moral fell through the floor. Soldiers and families were already low-spirited. This news made it worse. This slump reset the playing field and combined our collective disdain for the Army. I look back on it and I think that this is where we first started to become united. Nothing joins individuals better than the mutual scorn for a larger entity, in this case the larger entity being the U.S. Army.

Even though the Army has some negative aspects to it, it also surprises you with unexpected gratification. Some of the best things that I've done in my Army career happened during those 15 months. You can ask any one of the members of the Bluestars and they will most likely tell you the same. I can also say that some of the worst things in my Army career happened during that time as well. The hard work, long hours and sense of accomplishment that we had for our mission really tied us together and set us apart from the rest of the Brigade. Our main mission was large-scale air assaults where we would fly four Blackhawks, four Chinooks, two Apaches and

fixed wing CAS infilling well over 300 troops into the battlefield. Our reputation started to spread and we started to support Navy Seal direct action assaults as well as "other" special operations missions. We had a high sense of pride in the things that we were doing and all those experiences really drew us closer together.

In any work setting whether it is the military or private enterprise, I believe that management really sets the culture within a work environment. The one person who really developed that culture within the Bluestars was our Company Commander, Sam Redding. I've had some good Commanders (and I've had some horrible Commanders) but I can honestly say that Sam was above the best and I'd follow him anywhere, without a doubt. You ask any one of those former Bluestars and they would tell you the same.

The time I spent with the Bluestars during my last year and a half in the Army was a perfect culmination to my experience in the military. The connections we made and the experiences we shared were the highest of the highs and the lowest of the lows. Even with all the hardship, none of us would trade those experiences for anything.

Lindgren, Bradley
U.S. Army
Chief Warrant Officer 2
UH-60 Instructor Pilot
2002-present
O POS

I grew up with Star Wars. Seriously! I had all the toys and don't know how many times I have watched the movies (except for the new one which I have seen three times). I have always considered myself a Star Wars nerd. I'm OK with that. I grew up wanting to be a pilot (and a Jedi) because of Luke Skywalker. Fast forward 30 plus years… I'm a U.S. Army helicopter pilot and pretty good at Jiu Jitsu, so practically a Jedi. I credit/ blame George Lucas for setting me on the path that led me to where I find myself today.

Every pilot has his or her own reasons for going down that path. I've told my story many times in 13 years of service and usually I got a laugh or a funny look. No offense taken if you are laughing now.

However, I recently met one pilot who also credited Star Wars for his desire to be a pilot. I never expected that my story was unique but I think few people have taken their obsession for Star Wars to this level.

He was by far a bigger Star Wars geek than myself! You've probably noticed that I'm speaking of him in the passed tense. He is unfortunately no longer with us. I didn't have time to get to know him very well, though I know he was a kindred spirit. He didn't die in a helicopter crash if you were expecting that. Sadly, he took his own life.

As I said, I didn't know him well. Others knew him better, but nobody saw it coming. The entire Battalion was utterly shocked by the news. The military puts a lot of emphasis on suicide awareness training, but he hid his dark side from all of us. They say that there are signs, but in this case I believe that there were none. "Difficult to see…always in motion is the future… "

I regret not getting to know Dan better. There is a lot of truth underlying the fiction of Star Wars. There is a struggle between the light and dark sides in all of us. Dan lost his struggle for reasons we will never know.

I urge the rest of you to struggle on. "When you look at the dark side, careful you must be. For the dark side looks back." I'm proud to have served with Dan and honored to have had the chance to fly with him. He will always be a member of the Army's Rogue Squadron.

Lockhart, Jesse W.
U.S. Army
Lieutenant Colonel
Commissioned Infantry 11B
1966-1989
O POS

On February 14, 1969 I'm not sure I was even aware that it was Valentine's Day; much less thinking of flowers and candy. But this story is not about me, but a friend who gave his life for me, 1st Lt Gary Lee Miller.

I only knew Gary for about a month before he died. He was born and raised in a small town in the western part of Virginia, Covington, almost on the West Virginia state line. Gary graduated with honors from high school and attended Virginia Tech. At Tech he joined the ROTC program and graduated with an Engineering Degree and 2nd Lieutenant Commission in the United States Army. After commissioning Gary went to the Infantry Officer's Basic course at Ft. Benning, Ga. I don't know what his first duty assignment was but he ended up in Vietnam assigned to the 1st Infantry Division, 3rd Brigade, 1st Battalion, 28th Infantry (named the Black Lions) in Company A.

This is where I met Gary. I was Mike Platoon leader. The time was late January 1969 and although I had only been in Vietnam three months, through attrition, I was the senior platoon leader (which in retrospect was really scary considering the lives I was responsible for at the old age of 21 years old). Gary showed up just as we had lost two platoon leaders,1 killed,1 wounded and Gary was assigned as the replacement to Lima platoon. I was assigned to "mentor" him until he was ready to operate on his own.

It's now February 14, 1969; Lima and Mike Platoon were on a joint mission and had been on patrol for three or four days without any contact with the VC/NVA. Our ambush site that evening was a trail junction with the main trail going north- south and an intersecting trail going east- west. The trails weren't that well used, they looked like any cow path you see in a pasture. I told Gary to set his platoon up ambushing the main trail going north- south. We usually set up our ambushes in a straight line boxed off at either end. The main section of the ambush was covered with claymore mines and the boxed ends were manned with M-60 machine guns.

I set up my platoon (Mike) facing the east –west

trail. I didn't expect any activity that evening and was looking forward to some sleep. Well, that didn't happen. About 3 AM I was suddenly awakened by claymores being exploded and rifle and machine fire going off. My platoon lay in their ambush positions waiting for movement in front of them (like a a football offensive line waiting for the snap). I got on the radio and asked Gary what was happening. He told me that his platoon had seen movement on the trail and had set off the ambush. I remember thinking that I hope they weren't trigger happy because I would be the one to explain to the CO why they screwed up. It was pitch dark so I called for artillery illumination rounds and walked about 50 yards over to Gary's position (that was probably not too smart because the guys had just popped the ambush and would still be jumpy) I was yelling my call sign and telling them to cease fire. I found Gary and could see three or four dead Viet Cong laying in the "kill zone" no US causalities . Since this was Gary's first ambush, I let him call it into Headquarters giving the details and body count.

This is where the mission began to fall apart. The Battalion XO (Executive Officer) wanted a body count confirmed. Gary and I could see three or four bodies but the BN XO ordered Gary to sweep (walk) the "kill

zone". At this time I should have told Gary to wait 5 minutes and report a standard operation reply 5 VC dead carrying AK's and rice, but I didn't, hell, it was 3 AM in the morning and the bodies would have been there at sunrise. What was happening was; in the Army information flows up and down the "chain of command" and the Battalions report to the Brigades who report to the Division for their 6 am General's briefing on to the Corp Headquarters, and this is where the good folks back home got their daily body count for the six o'clock news. Gary and I lined up a squad from our platoons to sweep the kill zone. As the men were searching for bodies, artillery illumination flairs were the only light we had and that wasn't very much. You could barely make out the profiles of the men, I certainly could not identify which platoon was which. Gary and I were standing together discussing how stupid this sweep was when out of the darkness I heard a couple of rifle shots. The shots sounded like an M-16 and I thought the shots were from our men so I yelled "cease fire" to keep someone from getting shot from "friendly fire". The next few moments happened very fast, but over the past 46 years I've slowed them down and replayed them hundreds of times in my mind.

You have to understand the only light was artillery

illumination and the terrain was thin grass about three foot high; there was confusion/talking about the recent ambush. The men's adrenalin was pumping as we searched for additional dead VC. This was not a training exercise; this was combat and people get hurt/killed if they're not careful. As Gary and I stood talking about how stupid this sweep was and what a mistake the BN XO made while he was 10 miles away in a safe bunker… something suddenly hit me in the chest. It reminded me of my baseball days and felt like I had missed a catch of a baseball from a kid and bam it hit me. Next I yelled something to this day I don't understand why other than training and instincts kicked in. I yelled "grenade" and dove to my right. There was an explosion but it was not loud it was kind of muffled. I felt something on my back, a burning sensation. I remember later thinking being wounded didn't feel like I thought it would. It felt like a cut with a sharp knife. My survival instincts kicked in and I immediately started looking for my rifle and through the dirt and darkness I couldn't find it. I looked over at Gary, he wasn't moving. I touched him and immediately knew he was dead.(Gary had covered the grenade with his body) I yelled for a medic and when I turned him over, I could see his shirt was blown open and my rifle lay under him. The Doc looked at Gary and shook his head. I picked up

my rifle and saw that the magazine and receiver were blown up. I grabbed Gary's rifle, checked it out, put in a new magazine and started looking for the VC who threw the grenade. I knew he was close because he had just tossed a grenade at me. I was crawling on my stomach when I saw him. Luckily for me his attention was directed at the men on the sweep. I stood up took care of him.

I went back to Gary knowing that he had just given his life for me. Emotionally his death didn't really hit me for a couple of days. I've often wondered why I reacted the way I did, but in retrospect, I had been calloused by all the death around me and I had had a job as a leader to regroup the platoons to prepare for a counter attack. We didn't know what was out there in the darkness. I had the men gather up the VC's weapons, and both platoons formed a defensive position and we moved Gary's body to my CP. In about an hour or so, the sun started to rise and I started talking to the Battalion CP and requested a dust off for Gary's body. The dustoff came and we loaded the AK's and Gary on the Huey. Lima platoon's men were shaken because they had lost two platoon leaders in less than a month, so I had to remind them that we were still on a combat mission with a job to kill VC's.

Gary was received the Congressional Medal of Honor.

found out that Gary had been honored at Ft. Benning by naming a building after him. The city of Covington named a school and a park in his honor. Gary had been the younger of two sons.

To this day, I go over that night playing "what if" and how things could have come out differently. I get chocked up knowing that someone gave his life for me and I live with that every day.

In those two days February 14 and 15, 1969 in the Army's infinite wisdom, I was awarded the Silver Star, Bronze Star with "V" and a Purple Heart. I had one piece of shrapnel come to the surface in the late 80's and removed. I still have a couple of pieces in my back and memories that forever linger.

I'm sometimes asked by kids if I'm a brave person. I tell them no but I knew and served with some brave men.

McKnight, Brian
U.S. Army
Chief Warrant Officer 4
UH-60 Blackhawk Pilot
2000-present
O NEG

I was a CW2 at the time and deployed on my second tour in Iraq during the 05-06 deployment with the 101st Combat Aviation Brigade. I woke up around 0630 to get ready for my MEDEVAC duty. We had a daily routine to preflight and run-up our aircraft for the 24-hour shift. My crew members met at the assigned UH-60A at 0700 every morning. That day, I got to the aircraft a few minutes early and decided to begin the pre-flight. We had 10ft tall T-wall barriers separating the aircraft from mortar and rocket fire and never thought twice about it. I just finished going through the aircraft logbook to make sure we didn't have any upcoming inspections that maintenance needed to know about or anything that prevent our aircraft from being fully mission capable. I began the preflight and got to the top of the aircraft to inspect the rotor blades and flight controls.

All of a sudden, I heard a type of whistling sound over my head and, immediately, I knew what it was.

Growing up in South Alabama, you know what a bullet (flying though the air by your own stupidity when you were young) sounds like. I remember being really taken back and trying to come to grips with the idea: "is someone really shooting at me?" After a second or two, I tried to figure out where it was coming from when I heard another whistle even closer to me. My survival instincts took over, and I got myself off the top of that helicopter the fastest way I knew how! As I jumped down off that helicopter, my crewchiefs were walking out. They saw the fear on my face and began running back to the ops building with me right behind them. After I caught my breath and finally came to grips with what just happened, I was thankful to be alive and from then own I take more pride in doing what I do.

There are those who never get the warning that I got and they never got to come home alive. To all the fallen soldiers, I thank you for your sacrifice.

McNulty, Keelan P.
U.S. Army
Captain
Commander, UH60 Blackhawk Pilot
2002-2010
O POS

The reason I am writing about this particular event in my United States Army career is because everyday I am reminded of the day, the people, the emotions from a simple memorial bracelet. This was a very hard choice that I have given some serious thought over the last few months. Trying to search through all the great memories, the stories, the friendships and bonds I could write a novel on all the relationship based stories throughout my eight years in the Army. It was a wild ride of emotion, fitting in as a young leader, exploring, building a strong leadership backbone, and of course meeting a lot of people. There are all the stories about early morning PT workouts, going to the field to train, learning all you can about your job and staying proficient in the UH60, and of course all those fun "mandatory social events."

It all boils down to making the decision to reflect on day while serving our country in Northern Iraq during 2008-2009. There is no better place to build a

relationship-based story than in a deployed combat environment. We, the 6/17 Cavalry Division, deployed from Ft. Wainwright, Alaska on July 17, 2008 to July 17, 2009 to support the Northern portion of Iraq with air support from 24xOH-58 observation helicopters and 10xUH-60 for air assault and logistical support. Individually, for me this was the peak of my career because this deployment was everything I had worked for up to this point. From leadership classes in college ROTC, to all the training at flight school this was the climax, a true combat deployment for an entire year facing the challenges of war and the continuous need to remain true to every soldier.

Without getting super detailed about our first few months in country to sum it up we survived the first 60 days. That was always a big number because there is so much logistical concern even getting to place like Iraq, transitioning the old unit out and us in, making those needed adjustments to the battle rhythm, and of course analyze the need of our impact to the country and to the battle space. The bottom line is after 90 days we were set and soldiers were happy with living conditions, the flight schedule was busy, maintenance had their flow, the food was awesome, and we even had access to a very nice gym. Our entire unit was split up between three

different forward operating bases (FOB), which made it difficult to communicate and remain an overall team especially hard for me because my company of 10 UH-60s was split in half with one platoon 100 miles from the other. Again, the daily pace was very busy as we supported the surrounding ground units and moved bodies all over the Northern Iraq desert.

It wasn't until September 19th that the deployment changed drastically. As I came into the briefing area of our tactical operations center (TOC), I will never forget the news that an OH-58 went down in the city of Mosul killing the two pilots on board. Two pilots who were from our unit, friends I had met throughout getting ready for deployment, and two fathers/husbands of families at home. The news was a huge blow to every member of our team and of course the immediate reaction is shock and telling yourself this has to be the wrong information they must still be alive. As minutes passed, I remember thinking of family and everyone back home getting this information and how freaking hard it is not only for the family who lost their loved ones, but for everyone to know the reality of the situation.

Flights were canceled for the rest of the day as everyone prepared for the casket ceremony the

following day and other memorial type plans. Being an officer leading soldiers it truly is hard to not let the emotions get the best of you, but instead to remain the strong leader with some sort of positive outlook on the situation. The next day we flew four UH-60's from our FOB west of Mosul full of soldiers to support the casket ceremony. Taking off that day was very difficult and being in the air flying in the same airspace that we just lost two fellow aviators was tense. After parking our aircraft and hustling to the airfield ramp where the casket ceremony was taking place we took quick orders from the 1SG in charge and given a quick marching order and briefing of the ceremony. There was no time for rehearsals as we were in combat and it was more of a show your support and march in big group of fellow soldiers from the unit. As the C130 was ready to load and the chaplain and guest speakers were standing at the ready we marched out with the casket to show our respect. After about 50 steps into the open of the airfield parking ramp there was a sharp, loud, screech that is the worst sound to hear in open day light while in a combat zone in the heart of Mosul. At first someone yelled, "INCOMING" and like good trained soldiers that we were we all hit the ground simultaneously. After another horrific sound, another person yelled, "SNIPER!" Everyone in formation ran

to nearest cover (which was T-Barriers directly behind us). The sniper that was sitting in a tower in the heart of Mosul grazed a soldier's neck resulting in blood all over the ramp and that soldier getting rushed off to the nearest aid station. The casket did get loaded and the pallbearers did an excellent job with the task at hand.

At this point, the emotions were has high as ever and reality truly set in that these thugs. Terrorist, gang members or whatever you want to call them do not like Americans and want us killed. This moment only brought these entire unit and team more together as one. Throughout the next 2 hours our commander gave us his remarks that were going to be shared at the casket service as well as a wonderful example of staying strong and determined to be a leader and fight through this pain and the next brutal nine months. After this speech and the following weeks memorial service I have never felt more bonded and close to my fellow soldiers willing to finish our daily job and take each hour, minute, and day one step at a time.

Miller, J.
U.S. Army
Chief Warrant Officer 3
UH-60 Blackhawk Pilot
2002-present
O POS

Throughout life relationships come and go. It is normal; you start a job somewhere or move to a new location, meet new people and, thus, a new relationship is born. I think for most people, they will probably stay generally in the same area and maybe only form a handful of relationships throughout their life. The Army is slightly different. You are constantly moving, generally every 3 years, and forced to start new relationships. These relationships become family-like. Because of the sheer nature of our occupation, in my case a UH-60 Blackhawk pilot, you are going to have many shattered relationships. Unlike most people not in the military, it's only a matter of time before you start losing brothers/sisters-in-arms. Sure, everybody knows someone that passes away, but for the majority it is from natural causes such as old age and doesn't necessarily come as unexpected. In the military, young people volunteer to put their lives on the line for freedom and a love of their country, and these lives are extinguished far too early.

I was told shortly after I joined the Army that I would lose people I know; it's only a matter of time. That person was right. This is a list of people, and the date of their passing, I have worked with in the Army who have had their lives cut short for a cause they believed in. This is something most people will never have to experience. They will never have to experience the amount of relationships shattered by death that those of us in the military will. So all we can do is honor their memory.

SGT William E. Brown	23 June 2007
SSG Chad A. Tucker	19 August 2009
SSG Paul R. Jackson	19 August 2009
SSG James R. Stright	22 October 2009
CW2 Nicholas S. Johnson	19 Apr 2012
CW2 Don C. Viray	19 Apr 2012
SPC Dean R. Shaffer Jr	19 Apr 2012
CW3 Brian D. Hornsby	16 August 2012
CW2 Suresh Krause	16 August 2012
CW3 Daniel Koren	14 June 2015

Morris, David
U.S. Army
Sergeant
15T UH-60 Crewchief
2003-2015
O POS

This morning when we were about to do run up, we heard an explosion that sounded like a controlled detonation. Not even 5 minutes later, we got the 3 M's (MEDEVAC). About 5 miles away, a suicide bomber blew up a convoy of Czech Slovakian soldiers some kids and local nationals.. It was like something I have never seen before. An MRAP Cougar completely blown apart, bodies everywhere. We only got 4 of the 9 people. We tried to take an Afghan kid, but the mother wouldn't let us... they were outside of a medical clinic. We landed in a grass field outside the perimeter. I was locked and loaded pulling security because we weren't inside the wire. Then SSG Dickey came to the aircraft gave me the 2 sign – which means 2 litter patients. I didn't know they were dead bodies until they were loaded into the aircraft.

The first guy was literally body parts stacked up on a litter – a litter wrapped very poorly in that silver emergency blanket stuff. There was blood and burnt

parts. It looked like hamburger meat wrapped in burnt uniform. His head was half gone and oozing brains and fluids all over the place. I got some on my boots. The guy's feet were pointing down and not the right way. His body, or what was left it, was sticking up. His left leg wasn't attached. His left arm was gone. It was a horrific sight.

The second guy wasn't covered really at all. I could see his leg was just set next to everything. He was just mutilated and burnt from his waist down. He also had no arms - they were lying on the litter. His face was caved in. When I got him inside, I saw air and puss bubbles coming out of where his nose should have been. I thought he was still alive, and I started tearing up, but then Dickey came in the aircraft and I snapped out of it. I secured myself and got in my seat. I was looked at these guys and thought, "what the fuck can I do?" But then it set in they were dead.

A few days after this, I was invited to the memorial service. My Medevac duty was covered so that I could attend. I really can't find the words to describe the service. It was nice to gain some closure, meet some of the friends of the soldiers we picked up. See pictures of the people we brought home; be thanked for what we did.

Nazario, Waldemar
U.S. Army
Staff Sergeant
CH-47 Instructor
2000-present
O POS

One of the best times I've had in my military career was to get stationed in Alaska. I was there from 2006-2010. During that time frame, I have the best chain of command a Soldier could ask for. I did not know how close people would get due to being so far away from family. To this day, I stay in contact with most of D Co 1/52 Whitehorse. For my story, it is hard to just pick one. I remember we got called up for the flood relief in Pakistan. They worked the dog poo out of us in those 4 months. In all that time, our moral stayed pretty high. We didn't have any kind of shops to go to or places to eat. Food was from a MKT, much to be desired. It was straight maintenance 24/7. Even though we were run ragged, we felt that we had a purpose. Don't get me wrong, I was glad to get back to that -40 degree Alaska temp. Shortly after I got orders and PCS'ed.

Not a day goes buy that I miss the people that were stationed up there with me.

Purser, Nicholas
U.S. Army
Staff Sergeant
Flight Paramedic
2004-present
O POS

Being stationed in the Mohave Desert was unlike any experience I have had in my 12 years of military service. In my line of work, we learn how to take care of people in the most austere of environments, who are experiencing the most traumatic events of their lives. While some may classify Fort Irwin, California as austere among other things, the job I was assigned to do was very different than anything I had done before. I was responsible for the care of people in the event an emergency arose, no matter the circumstances. Not only did we respond to training accidents for the combat forces operating in "the box" but here, I was working car accidents on one of America's busiest highways, responding to lost hikers, ATV accidents, and a number of medical emergencies that were all too unfamiliar to me, including transporting neonates to the nearby children's hospital. There were no hostile forces, our equipment wasn't painted OD green or Tan, and we had very specific guidelines for our scope of practice that are usually waived in

military medicine. To beat it all, I was the most senior medic in the detachment and it was up to me to not only learn the mission, but to make sure the other guys were compliant and knew their jobs. Liaising with Sherriff departments, county fire officials, and hospital systems unfamiliar with our operations was an everyday occurrence and it was up to me to make sure we got it right.

One instance that stands out above all others is the day we were all hanging around the company area right after a shift change and I had just assumed the duty as the" first up medic." The base that day was hosting a cycling event of some sort and one of the riders was involved in a rather serious incident. We got the call that the EMS crews were bringing the patient to our helipad so we prepared for the mission like any other. What we didn't expect, was the patient had suffered a life threatening head injury and several other pretty severe injuries that required surgical attention at the area's trauma center. Now, patients who suffer these types of injuries are usually found unconscious but not this time. I remember the look in his face when we began evaluating him and receiving the patient report from the ground team. I had treated several hundred patients before and with that much experience your job tends to be

muscle memory; but in this case, here was a guy who was genuinely scared, severely injured, and it was undoubtedly a race against time to get him to the care he needed. Just before loading him in our aircraft, I asked him a series of questions including his name. He was unable to give me clear answers but when he responded by squeezing my hand, I told him he was going to be okay. He went unconscious shortly inflight. Now at the time, flight medics in the army were not equipped to handle such a patient effectively and the best medicine tended to be jet fuel. However, for a lack of better terms, playing with our equipment we devised a way to stabilize him in such a manner that about every 5-10 minutes we had to continually readjust our interventions to keep him from "crashing". We were turning one thing up and down while we turned another down then up. It was truly a demanding and exhausting effort for our team but he arrived and made it through his recovery without much of a long term deficit from the accident.

About two months later, I was I was invited to a "hail and farewell" event by my battalion commander. When I arrived that evening, there was this 6' 3" gray haired CW5 standing next to the Commanding General of the base. My Battalion Commander introduced us and when I shook his hand he

immediately began to sob. All he could do was say thank you. An unusual and first for me, this was my patient from that day and he had asked if he could meet me. During the social hour, I was brought up before the crowd and awarded for my efforts that day. I remember him trying to find the words; bruised up and his leg in a cast, he stood there emotionally and told everyone that the last thing he remembered was this flight medic standing over him holding his hand and saying everything was going to be okay.

Until that day, I had always viewed my job as just that, a job. I've never sought recognition and I never will but to get to meet someone who I was able to truly make an impact on and to be able to stand there was the most rewarding experience I've ever had. At the time, I was at a crossroad and had questioned whether or not I was ready to make a career change but after that, I knew, that was what I was put here to do. I'll probably never leave emergency medicine and I will never forget that day. It has made such an impact on me. That day has put so much into perspective for me and while my job can be overwhelmingly difficult and traumatic at times, the reward of saving a life is like no other experience and each one is truly unforgettable.

Ring, Jake
U.S. Army and Alaska Army National Guard
Captain
Commander, UH-60 Blackhawk Pilot
2003-present
0 POS

I find myself feeling alone. Just like I always do, and like I've always been.

Growing up on a small farm half of the time, and in cramped apartments and sublets the other half, I got comfortable being alone. It's where I go when times are tough. I didn't want that to be my life. I wanted a life of meaning, and challenges. I almost ruined it, in a tantrum of stupid anger at the world, but it turned into the best thing that happened to me. "I don't think you can do it" became the best thing my father ever told me. I went to West Point because it wasn't who I was. It was who I wanted to be. Or at least who I thought I wanted to be.

I was still alone. Four thousand of the nation's best, all spit-shined and muted gray. In my room, working on a problem set, cleaning the sink, grinding away. One day at a time, and one day it'll be just one more day. Then it was off to the Army. Just listen, and learn. So

much experience and knowledge. And so much youth and stupidity. Company Command. It's like having a huge crazy family, and you're the head of household. Thirty years old and a single dad for two years. I loved it, I hated it. I just wanted to go back to the farm. Home didn't feel like home anymore, but Alaska did. The crisp, cold, clean air. The unimaginable expansive sky. I was a kid again, full of wonder. Yukon Ho!

Alone again. Struggling to find a place to live. Craigslist will do. Resumes disappear into the dark. The guard worked out though. Pick up a flight here or there. Go to school. Plan B is starting to look like Plan A now. But hold onto your dreams. Stay the course. The funny thing about small towns, they know you don't belong. All of Alaska is a small town. Small talk. I have no idea. Second semester Anatomy. He's sitting behind me again. Funny meeting you here. Yeah, I'm a vet, too. I know you were downrange. I bet you were a medic. You're the only other one in here that understands this stuff.

There's other vets, too. Some familiar faces. Sonny got out a few years ago, mechanic from the Med. Used to live with two of my guys. Logan's a hunting and fishing guide in Petersburg last I heard, and who knows what Richard's up to. Used to throw lit

cigarettes in the fuel trucks. Diesel won't ignite when it's so cold. Glad nobody told me about that until it was just a funny story. Facebook is a savior, but Sonny doesn't have it. Took me a while to track him down. Says Logan wants to sell his plane, needs work, I should buy it. He'll help me out. I buy a plane. It's Alaska. This is why I'm here. This is normal.

I got a job now, full-time, my Plan A. Flying helicopters in the real world. Working on the North Slope. Two weeks at the edge of nowhere. Sometimes I miss Afghanistan when I'm up there.

It's not what I want, but I'll get there. This company is going under, but I get another job. Still not quite what I want, but it's better. Roommate is getting married. Try to find somewhere else to live. Things weren't this hard in the Army. But I'm not alone. The guard guys are there for me when my transmission goes out. "I got a car, bud, as long as you need it." Molly takes good care of my dog while I'm at work for two weeks. He's got a second family, he's so happy. There are vets too. Sonny had Andrew over to help on the plane. Marine. Infantry. Got out a few years back and moved to Alaska to handle sled dogs for Dallas Seavey. Spent his summers commercial fishing. Alaska, this is normal. Shows me his homebuilt ADS-B receiver. You

have no idea how cool that is to me.

I’m not alone. I’m home.

Ripley, Stormy
U.S. Army
Chief Warrant Officer 4
MP Squad Leader, Aviation Safety Officer
1986-2013
O POS

Between 1989 and 1991, I served in the country of Panama as a U.S. Army Squad Leader in a Combat Military Police (MP) Company. When I arrived, I was just one of three female MPs in the Company, later we got a few more. Most of the women went to the other MP Company, which was the Law Enforcement Activity (LEA). The LEA Company had many admin law enforcement sections, such as Traffic Patrol, Investigations, Crime Prevention, K-9 Patrol and Desk Sergeant duties, etc, but that was not where I wanted to be. I had just PCSed (an army move) from a place where I did basic traffic duties, answered domestic calls. Special Response Team (SRT) and some Border Patrol duties at Yuma Proving Ground (YPG) Arizona.

Now I wanted to do more Hooah stuff in a Combat MP unit. After getting my orders changed from LEA to 534th MP CO at the in-processing center, I hit the ground running, (really) running. My first day

is another full story for another time, but involved putting the handle on my Riot Control Shield I just got from CIF, and putting my Ballistic Helmet together, as I was meeting my Squad and waiting on a UH-60 to pick us up to go to the riot or the bus full of U.S. kids held hostage by Panamanian Defense Force (PDF) Dignity Battalion troops. We referred to the Dignity thugs as Ding-Bats. They were the special group that worked directly for Noriega, and did some of his dirty deeds for him. Not all the PDF were bad, but some of the PDF were also DBs, and they were bad.

Our Platoon was prepping to do Jungle Patrol training, which was for preparing us when we conducted squad level patrols, which we did the real patrols mostly at night in the Jungle line around Fort Clayton, and sometimes other locations. The actual mission was part of Force Protection. On this day, it was just training with the Platoon. The Jungle line, which is very thick (not triple canopy) but probably double or more than single canopy. All I know, you need a Machete to cut your way in and to where you want to go. It's very dark, even on a bright day, so we had illumines material sewn on the back of our hats, for the person behind us to see, when it got too dark.

The weather in Panama is very humid; it rains like

clockwork each day at the same time, except for a couple months in the year called the dry season. If you wear anything too tight in your clothing or equipment day after day, it causes Jungle Rot Rash in that area. Two places MPs got it, was where we wore the blousing bands for our pants above our boots, and also our pistol belts around our waist.

Prior to going into the Jungle Line, we were checking our equipment, (tactical radio, weapons, but no ammo since it was just training), although we carried ammo on real patrol duty. Put cammo on our faces, and wore jungle boots and army boony caps. There were a couple of items we did not have with us this day that I sure wished later we did have. Other equipment for the patrol was the compass and map, held by a Soldier up front next to point, and also the machete handler. (Remember, this was back in 1989) we were not carrying GPSs back then.

One by one, our entire Platoon in a straight column trail was swallowed up into the Jungle Line behind Fort Clayton. Once we were beyond the entrance, every step we made forward, was from the one machete cutting a way for us to go. Of course we had to practice our noise discipline – no talking, only whispering and hand signals to someone close to you.

We were not as far in for distance as we were in for time. I was positioned in the middle of this long trail of people, when I heard one of the guys up towards the front yell.

I could not see him, but his voice was getting louder and closer. Pretty soon, he runs past me, which there is not much room to pass; it's just a trail that was cut. Then another guy goes running by, and then another. Meanwhile, the rest of us are just standing there wondering what the heck? Finally, the next guy is screaming, "Killer Bees, Killer Bees, Run, Run."

Well now, why couldn't the first or second guy have passed that information on? We had been briefed (a little) about these very bad Bees, but we were about to get a better educating. We are now all running back the way we came from, but it is still only enough room for one person in straight trail, not side by side. I wish I could have been timed for a PT Test, even with my weapon and full gear, I think I beat all my records.

One guy who was behind me thought he might be able to run through some thickets of the Jungle to the left of me. He had Bees on the back of his neck, I was still ahead of him and could hear the Bees buzzing

behind my ears. Somehow I was able to run faster. Meanwhile, the guy who thought the Jungle would open up for him, ended up running right into Black Palm. Very, very bad stuff, it cut into him like he and his uniform and leather gloves were butter.

For the moment, it was just everyone for themselves; just get out of the Jungle. Finally, one by one, the Jungle spit most of us back out the same place we went in. We were gathering at an opening between the Jungle line and a road that was next to the Chow Hall, about two blocks from our Company. Something I had been told at the in briefing and had probably seen on a scary movie, was that Killer Bees will keep chasing you. We all thought that the Bees would stop once we were out of the Jungle, but nope, here came a huge black cloud of them exactly where we had run out, they were like a pack of little pissed off Kamikazes. So, we picked the equipment and weapons back up and started running again.

Now we are running up the road towards the back of the Company. It just happens to be a few minutes before lunch, so there is a long line of Soldiers outside the Chow Hall, but the doors are locked. Now they see what is coming, and start banging on the door and windows to get inside. Of course, no

one opens the door before the exact time of lunch, so now the lunch Soldiers are running, but more in different directions. The thing about Killer Bees, at least the ones in Panama, they can sting over and over again.

Finally, most of our Platoon makes it to our MP Company, and run inside the Day Room.
It's incredible, the Bees were just flying around the back parking lot outside the door, waiting for us to come back out, or I guess they were looking for a way in. Killer Bees are very tenacious. (A little history about how Killer Bees came into existence). Some Mad Scientist or Rouge Veterinarian decided many years ago, to cross breed some Honey Bees with African Worker Bees, with the idea of making a Bee who would aggressively make Honey faster. What the world got was a really pissed off Frankenstein Attack Bee that has migrated from Africa, across the oceans, across South and Central America, now into part of the United States. I've lived all over the world, and have never seen a jar of (Killer Bee Honey), so the DNA cross breed project did not work as intended.

Now that most of us are in the Unit Day Room of our MP Company, everyone is trying to account for people and equipment, and pulling stingers. We

determine there is one person missing. It's one of our senior Sergeants whose wisdom was not always understood. We started asking around, who saw him? One of our young Soldiers said he last saw him sitting down in the Jungle.

What do you mean he was sitting down?

While everyone else was starting to run, he sat down, and grabbed my arm and ordered me to sit down too. He said that if we sit down and be real quite, the Bees won't bother us. But Sergeant, they were coming at us, lots of them.

So what happened next, how did you make it back and he didn't?

After he ordered me to sit down with him, I told him, "with all due respect SSG, ...F@!#...That!", and then I pulled away and started to run. When I looked back, he was covered with Bees, so I went back to try and help, but when I reached out for his arm, the Bees started getting on me, so I ran. Do you think I will get in trouble for cursing him?

Well, you did say with all due respect first, so I'm sure you will be fine.

I learned later, that a few guys had circled back into the jungle from a different entrance, and recovered SSG. M, who was covered with Bee stings. Out Platoon Leader got stung in one of his eye balls, which was not looking too good. When the ambulance drivers and medics, who had some Panamanian Medics with them, learned about the SSG just sitting down, they started laughing as they were pulling stingers out of his head. One Panamanian Medic said that sitting down and being quite only works if the Bees don't know you are there already. Once they know people are around, it is too late. It won't work anymore. So, they hauled off the SSG to the hospital, where he had a long stay.

During our AAR, those of us who had been in the middle or end of the column, learned the machete had gotten dull from the wet jungle, and ended up pulling instead of cutting a vine, that ripped through the entire Bee Hive.

Well, we all know now, once the Killer Bees are out of the ripped open hive, they become even more angry than their messed up genetics have already made them. If only they could have aggressively made honey at that moment, it would have been everywhere. Another thing we learned from some

infantry guys who had experience Killer Bees on their Jungle Patrols, is using a White Smoke canister, confuses the Bees, long enough to put allot of distance between the runner and Bees. In future Patrols, we carried White Smoke canisters, had two Point leads, one for navigating, and the other to just look for Bee Hives. We also added two machete carriers up front. One of my AAR notes to self, is always keep my head net in my cargo-pocket, so at least I can protect my face from stings if we ever get attacked again.

As the motto of the Jungle Expert course taught in Panama, No Obstacle Too Difficult..."unless" its Killers Bees and Black Palm. Killer Bees and Black Palm are Difficult Obstacles!

Ruhlen, Terry
U.S. Army
Lieutenant Colonel
Battalion Communications Officer, Section Chief, Special Operations,
1968-1971, 1978-1997
O POS

"You son-of-a-bitch, are you trying to get me killed!" That could well have been the expletive released from my little brother Verne's mouth as we discussed the possibility that he would be re-stationed alongside his big brother. I had been in-country about three weeks after Verne who arrived in Vietnam in late summer of 1970.

Verne enlisted right out of high school. He was not the typical military guy but he didn't want to hang around that farm any more than I did. The army seemed like a safe bet for him where he would no longer be confronted with the monotony and hard work associated with milking 50 cows twice a day combined with a myriad of other engrossing tasks my father always seemed to pile on our plates.

We were two of ten kids who grew up together on a medium size dairy farm in up-state New York. We

would work fifteen hour days, sometimes in the blazing heat of the red hot sun out in the hay field and other times in -20 degree weather, often the norm in the middle of winter in a small, rural village south of Buffalo.

I had already been drafted and by now knew beyond any shadow of doubt where I was headed after boot camp. Finally realizing I could easily be getting a one way ticket punched to Southeast Asia, I volunteered for every conceivable type of training that could extend the opportunity of living to see another day and protect fellow soldiers: Airborne, Special Forces, Infantry Officer Candidate School - it made perfect sense to me.

Got my Green Beanie about the time I had orders confirmed to that country that everyone dreaded to have attached to their name. I had actually been on orders for a couple of months as I was finishing training at Ft. Bragg, North Carolina. Ft. Bragg was a whirlwind of activity – long days and long nights, then a hastened departure.

On to 'Nam with all of the initial in-country prep training then out to the field for the ultimate assignment with the 101st Airborne Division in Military

Region One, or I Corp as it was aptly named. By now most of our Special Operation Forces had gone home. My conversation with Verne was short. He was a truck driver down in III Corps and was constantly on the road 12 to 15 hours a day, sometimes seven days a week. The stress in his voice was telling as I advised him to speak to his commander about a transfer to my unit in the 101st Airborne Division. It shouldn't take more than a few days, I said, and he would be on his way soon.

By now I was out in the middle of I Corps on a Fire Base (FB) assigned as a Communications Officer for an Infantry battalion. I had a platoon of operators and had the responsibility of maintaining communications and communications equipment for the battalion both in the rear and in the field. I primarily operated from the forward base moving from the base to the field and handling any related task the commander determined necessary of which there were many.

After a week with no news from Verne, I made contact with him and found a dejected young man. Not only had his CO said "NO", he said, "Hell NO, you ain't heading no where! It'll be a cold day in hell before you get outa here!"

I wouldn't tell you exactly what passed through my mind when I heard this response but had it been verbalized it could have resulted in an immediate court martial and a trip to Leavenworth.

We all know that the First Sergeant is the guy who really runs the unit, so I made a quick call to Verne's Top Hat. The short discussion centered around the Army and its decision to send two brothers into the same combat theater at the same time. The discourse ended on a positive note and I was assured that Verne would be on his way within a day. Two days later, he arrived. It was great to see that little runt who had been a bane in my butt growing up.

Verne and I spent our remaining time, both in the 3/506th, I at the Forward Operating Base and in the field and he as a generator repairman. He made an occasional visit to the fire base to service some equipment but spent most of his time in the rear where the bulk of the maintenance took place. I was comfortable with that having assumed the role of big brother taking care of the one guy who had been the biggest pain in my rear during our younger years. You see, in a large family there is a pecking order. The next older brother is your biggest pain in the ass, and it is your obligation to maintain the tradition and lord

it over the next guy in line - Verne for me. Only Verne had a real knack for reversing the protocol. I can remember all too vividly when the little guy always seemed to slip out of the guilty side of our spats and squabbles with me being sent to the woodshed on many an occasion. Sometimes we both went!

I did ask him one day why in the heck he ever joined the army since that wasn't a likely part of his psyche. He replied, "I always wanted to be like you!" It was the same thing he said when I once asked him why he decided to play football!

It was a humbling response for me to hear from this guy……. Verne and I survived our stint together and we both grew a lot.

Several months later, our battalion was the first of the 101st to receive stand down orders and Verne was picked to be a member of the honor guard which would retire the colors. This meant many a ceremony for both he and his contingent.

We soon received our orders to return stateside at which time I would head home and he to Ft. Campbell to finish his stint. Since he had continuing obligations as part of the honor guard, I began stand

down procedures and actually headed to the states ahead of Verne.

My route home took me to Ft Lewis for out-processing then on to Pittsburg to meet my family. I would join the civilian ranks. As I was waiting in the terminal at O'Hare for my connection to Pittsburg I heard the brisk marching of what I perceived to be a squad of grunts marching through the terminal. It was the honor guard given priority status to move directly through to their connection and on to Ft Campbell.

As the unit neared my gate, Verne caught my eye all dressed in spit shined boots with all the regalia. "Ha-ha, you son-of-a-bitch", I heard him laugh as he smartly passed by and on to his final destination. Yes, I think I'll take that I thought as I breathed a long sigh of relief! The cocky little bastard was home!

Simmons, Edward C.
U.S. Army
Chief Warrant Officer 4
Aviation Safety Officer
1996-2016
O POS

It was hot as any other day over Bagdad flying our Iron Horse Express routes. These were scheduled helicopter flight routes to different Forward Operating Bases or FOB's in the Bagdad area. Some of was would half joke about the answer we would give if someone back home asked what was it like flying in Iraq. "Take a hair dryer on high, point it at your face to replicate the wind while flying. Then throw some dust/sand mix in between you and the hairdryer to replicate the take off and landing!" The Iron Horse Express was somewhat boring for flight crews or worse, predictable for the enemy to take advantage of. Same spot twice a day at the same times, every day. Predictable. Nevertheless, we did it because the alternative for these Soldiers, support personnel, contractors or whoever was on board was to get on a ground convoy. Ground convoys were even more dangerous then due to the Improvised Explosive Devices (IED'S). They have been particularly bad at that time since they have advanced from normal

explosives to shaped charges that were able to rip through the armored vehicles. They would get hit and have casualties every day.

This day, though, we received a mission to pick some troops at a FOB that was under mortar attack. Their building had burned down in the night and didn't have cover to protect themselves any longer. Our flight landed to take them to another FOB and the soldiers were loading in an orderly fashion. There was a sense of urgency but nevertheless orderly. Suddenly, I heard a loud explosion and a crack in my cockpit. I looked over at Dave my co-pilot and saw that there was a hole in his door window. "Dave are you OK?!" I asked. Dave answered back "I'm good, but Jesus, the shrapnel hit me in the face, and look! It's right there on the center counsel! A piece of hot metal had torn through the plexiglass on Dave's side of the aircraft and that bit of plastic slowed it down enough so that when it hit his face, it just bounced off and landed in between us in the cockpit. Every one else OK? Both my crew chiefs and the second aircraft crew answered back all is well. At this point every one was really getting in quick! We took off out of there for the 10-minute flight to the next FOB and dropped of the first load of Soldiers.

What happened next is a moment that I will never forget about the Soldiers I work with and the culture and values we hold dear. As the Air Mission Commander, I am ultimately responsible for the action and the safety of the flight. We had to go back and get the rest of the Soldiers still there unprotected. I thought that it was prudent to ask the flight if there were any issues on going back. At the time, the intent of the question was to see if there were any mechanical issues or aircraft damage, but I think what came out was a little more general. Everyone answered without any bit of hesitation to go back and get the rest of them despite the danger. They were all so eager to do the right thing and help those who needed us the very most. It was a pure moment of how truly beautiful humanity can be.

That was years ago, but I see that same spirit in our Soldiers every day. And I just realized that's what I will miss seeing that the most when I retire from military service next month.

Smith, T.
U.S. Army
Lieutenant Colonel
Aviation Commander
1992-2016
0 POS

The 2013 Colorado floods was a natural disaster occurring in the U.S. state of Colorado. Starting on September 9, 2013, a slow-moving cold front stalled over Colorado, clashing with warm humid monsoonal air from the south. This resulted in heavy rain and catastrophic flooding along Colorado's Front Range from Colorado Springs north to Fort Collins. The situation intensified on September 11 and 12. Boulder County was worst hit, with 9.08 inches recorded September 12 and up to 17 inches of rain recorded by September 15, which is comparable to Boulder County's average annual precipitation. My unit, 2-4 GSAB, was directed to provide assistance to the Boulder County and State of Colorado Emergency response. With less than 2 hours notice, the 2-4 GSAB Mustangs launched 3 x CH-47, 3 x HH-60A, and 1 x UH-60L (C2) aircraft to Boulder to provide life-saving assistance.

The team that launched was a hand-selected

group of the most seasoned crew-members in the Battalion. We had no idea on the conditions, living arrangements, or sustainment options; we launched to make a difference.

Upon arrival, we quickly interacted with the local authorities, and started rescues of men, women and pets within 2 hours of arrival; in fact, we executed the first NVG rescue in the history of the State of Colorado that night.

Over the next 3 days, the team slept in an old hanger, ate with first responders, and simply flew our asses off; we rescued over 1,200 American citizens. These citizens needed us on the worst day of their lives, and the 2-4 GSAB Mustangs provided that assistance. Throughout the experience, I made lifetime friends with the local first responders, guys like Mitch Utterbach, and Dave Zader.

It took a team, we were simply part of a larger rescue effort, but the team that came together those days in Boulder, CO made a lifetime of difference to a score of Americans. It was the highlight of my 20-year Army career, and I will never forget the effort given by the flight crews, the heroes in the FARP, and the countless first responders with whom we worked.

Stokley, Michael Lee
U.S. Army
Specialist
15F Aircraft Electrician
2006-2012
O POS

Like many others, I met my best friend during my time in the U.S. Army. When I arrived to Fort Wainwright, Alaska, on August 1st, 2007, this guy wearing board shorts and a hoodie walked into my temporary barracks room:

"What's up, dude, I'm looking for private Stokley."
"That's me, who're you?"
"I'm Sergeant Bush, I'm gonna be your team leader."

I don't have to tell you I quickly turned red and snapped to parade rest and began laying on the military bearing pretty thick. "Relax, dude, it's a 4-day weekend, you hungry?"

He gave me a ride to building...let's see, wasn't it something like 3410 or similar? Anyway, he drove me to our barracks, helped me to carry everything I own, 3 bags, to my new pad and said he'd see me in about an hour. I didn't plan on telling him I only had a couple

dollars to my name and I was just gonna have water wherever we went. He ended up getting me dinner at Chili's and we went to the fair with a bunch of other guys from our Platoon.

SGT Bush taught me how to make birds fly. SGT Bush thought me how to fix helicopters. He was patient and thorough in his training and I have not forgotten anything I learned from him. I went on to teach young soldiers the same shortcuts and tricks and methods that he taught me.

SGT Bush never gave up on me. Ever. Even when I gave up on myself. He even said it, "I'm not giving up on you, so you're for goddamn sure not giving up on yourself!" He knew how to motivate and inspire me. He would have me so pissed off that I would push myself just to spite him. In all things, turning wrenches, running, rucking, fishing, soldiering, SGT Bush saw in me things I've only just recently discovered for myself.

I followed SGT Bush, figuratively and literally, pretty much everywhere. There was a time, the summer before my first and only deployment, that you didn't see one without the other. A true dynamic duo, well, trio, SGT Chris Ward wanted to be cool like us, so we

let him tag along. And when the time came to pcs, he did 5 months before me, I went ahead and followed him to Hunter Army Airfield, Georgia.

He was and is the truest friend, the most inspirational leader, and the closest thing I've ever had to a brother. He was the third person to hold my first-born son and he is the godfather of all three of my children.

When I was contemplating joining the Army, my dad told me that I'd never forget the bonds I make with the men I would serve with. He was right. There are few that I maintain contact with, but all of them hold a place in my heart reserved for the dearest and most influential people in my life. SGT Bush, now CW2 Bush, stands out to me. He was not supposed to be my friend. He was my boss. He was not obligated to spend extra time with me to help me meet physical military standards. That's what special pops was for. It was not his job to help me with emotional problems while simultaneously breaking the law to keep me out of trouble, but he did. I wasn't just a number to him and he made sure I knew it. I can say the same for a lot of people I knew. He made me want to be a better soldier, later on he made me want to be a better husband and a better father, to this day, his influence over me has made me a better man.

Strasser, Jennifer
U.S. Army
Chief Warrant Officer 3
Blackhawk Instructor Pilot
1996-2009
O POS

July 2008 was month 10 out of my 15-month deployment in Iraq. It was an especially hot time of the year (temperatures exceeding 130 degrees daily) and we had been extraordinarily busy. I was a Blackhawk helicopter pilot, and yes, as a woman, I flew all the same combat missions as the men. Our typical day lasted 12-16 hours with up to 10 hours being "outside the wire". We did this ten days in a row with one day "off" for the entire 15 months. Needless to say I was chronically fatigued - emotionally and physically. Although the 30 guys in my unit were like my brothers, I was the only female around and sincerely missed my girlfriends. My two best friends Nikki and Beccah lived across the airfield and after considerable coordination, 1-2 times a month I was able to see them for some much needed girl time.

On 02 July 2008, after an extremely long and hot day, my sister informed me via messenger that our father had been instantly killed by a drunk driver while

walking in a cross walk in Colorado. Needless to say I was shocked and overwhelmed. My Army family instantly stepped in to help comfort me and arrange for me to go home. I'll never forget my friends Beccah and Nikki's reactions. Both were out on night combat flights when their Battalion Commander radioed them to tell them what had happened. Nikki was understandably unable to return to base, however as soon as Beccah landed she grabbed the commander's vehicle and was in my room consoling me. Although I was in a stunned state, she helped me get my things together and get me out to an aircraft that would bring me to Kuwait for the beginning of my journey home. On a side note, my trip from Iraq to Kuwait was quite interesting. Beccah's Battalion Commander had Special Operations friends that were flying a small plane from our base in Tikrit to Balad to transport enemy/ terrorist detainees. He called in a favor and had that plane waiting for me to expedite my travels out of Iraq. (It's humorous to think back to now, but in my numb state, I had to crawl through a bunch of stinky detainees, with zip-tied wrists and bags over their heads to get to my seat).

During the two weeks I was home for my father's funeral, my unit consistently emailed me to check on me. Nikki and Beccah, although still busy in Iraq,

kept calling and emailing me as well. When I returned back to Iraq, it was overwhelming how much love and support I received ...even from the brothers that normally enjoyed teasing me. As the only female in the unit, I hated to show emotion in front of the guys, but it was almost unavoidable when the biggest, most obnoxious guy in my unit gave me a big bear hug upon my arrival back to Iraq.

It had always been my dream to fly in the military. I left for the Army the day I graduated high school. I knew it would be an amazing adventure, but didn't realize the wonderful family I would gain. The support I received from my Army family on this particularly difficult time of my life is something I'll never forget. If I'm being completely honest, sometimes I feel as if I'm closer to my military family than I am to my blood family. Just recently I was reunited with Beccah and was able to attend a ceremony that made her the commander of a unit. I couldn't help but get emotional thinking about how much we've gone through in our 10 years of friendship. We've been through extreme highs and lows; attended both of each other's weddings, and have experience births and deaths together. She's just one example of the many close bonds I formed in the Army. It's a bond that can't be explained and something I've sincerely

missed since leaving the military. It's a sentiment that is echoed in numerous war movies and books from active duty soldiers to veterans. Although we're now all scattered throughout the country and in different phases of life, we formed lifetime friendships that will never be forgotten.

Sullivan, Kevin
U.S. Army
Chief Warrant Officer 3
153DD UH-60 Aviator, ALSE OIC, Safety Officer
2003-2009
O NEG

Our new battalion commander for 5th Battalion, 158th Aviation Regiment came to us from the 160th Special Operations Aviation Regiment. The 160th is the Army's high speed aviation unit that caters to the Special Forces, Delta Force, and other secret squirrel units. Needless to say our new battalion commander, the BC for short, was a high speed officer, one who was coming to command 5-158 to get his command ticket punched in order to get promoted. We all feared that he would try to make our battalion a mini-160th, but he promised to not to. That is a story for another time. This story centers on the morale building efforts of our new commander.

Billy, code name Noodles, was the junior wobbly-one (Warrant Officer 1, lowest rank on the officer food chain). As such he got tasked with jobs no one else wanted. One particular tasking assigned to Noodles really got under the skin of all the Warrant Officers. As part of the morale building the BC imported to

our battalion, a wagon was introduced. This wagon was to be cared for by Noodles. This wagon was painted Army green (to match our helicopters) and was given a replica tail boom complete with tail rotor. Poor Noodles was to bring that wagon to all social events, and guard it with his life once there. Normally this would prove hilarious and full of funny antics. However, at the annual Christmas Battalion Ball, Noodles showed up dressed in full Dress Blue uniform, bedecked with ribbons and awards; his wife decked out to the Nines in a beautiful dress gown, hair and makeup professionally done; and the wagon.

Noodles had to guard that wagon the whole night, for fear someone would abscond with it. At some point during the Ball, a picture of Noodles and his wife was taken. They were seated with the wagon with a look of utter and complete abject sadness. After that photo was seen by nearly every Warrant Officer, it was pretty unanimous that the wagon had the opposite effect on morale. The wagon was now seen as a demeaning object meant to humiliate our fellow Warrant Officer and there was a sharp drop in morale. Soon a plan was hatched to rid ourselves of this wagon and avenge the honor of Noodles. In the tradition of military operational security, no word of the plan is breathed to the BC.

The UH-60 Black Hawk helicopter is a combat aircraft capable of hauling 11 fully loaded combat troops into the face of battle. The Black Hawk can also carry up to 8,000 pounds slung to a cargo hook on the bottom of the helicopter, a procedure known as sling load. To simulate carrying loads of varying weights, the Battalion had several large concrete blocks that were used to practice sling loads – a 4,500 pound block and an 8,000 pound block. On one particularly beautiful day sling load training was being performed. Crew chiefs were being trained on guiding the helicopter to the concrete block, hooking the concrete block to the helicopter, flying with the block attached, and positioning the block back on the ground.

After several real training iterations, a large crowd had gathered. The Black Hawk would make a slow approach to the concrete block, with the crew chief in the helicopter verbally guiding the pilots to the block and helping to maintain a steady position over the block. The muffled staccato of four rotor blades spinning at lightning speed is all that is heard. Meanwhile, the crew chiefs on the ground would be at the block ready to hook the heavy metal shackle and slings to the helicopters cargo hook, fighting the gale force winds of the helicopters rotor blades. It was a professional display of coordination mating

an 8,000 pound concrete block to a hovering 17,000 pound monster. After hook up, the helicopter slowly lifted the block off the ground and began a traffic pattern. The wagon magically appeared.

Flying through the air at a steady 80 knots, the crew chief would call out any sway, sideways motion, or oscillation of the concrete block. The helicopter was midfield on its downwind leg. The wagon is pulled out onto the grassy training area. Before landing check – tail wheel locked; parking brakes released; crew, passengers, and mission equipment secure – and the Black Hawk makes its base turn. A slight breeze slowly spins the faux tail rotors on the wagon. Base to final; the helicopter and concrete block slow to 40 knots and make turn towards the grassy training area. Soon the slight breeze becomes a hurricane gale force wind as the Black Hawk approaches the wagon. The wagons faux tail rotors are spinning nervously. The crew chief expertly guides the Black Hawk pilots to the grassy area. Slowly the wagon comes under the shadow of 8,000 pounds of humiliation.

The Black Hawk hovers for a good half minute, as if contemplating the fate of the poor wagon. A split second that seems to last forever, the shackle is released from the helicopters cargo hook, the slings

slacken and fall to the block, and the block…the 8,000 pound block falls to the ground and crushes the wagon. A mighty cheer erupts from the gathered crowd. High fives are exchanged. Satisfied smiles are everywhere. The faux tail rotors, all that is visible of the wagon, helplessly list in the wind. The wagon is flattened! The Warrant Officers rejoice!

The damned wagon is gone.

Tedder, Steven G.
U.S. Army
Sergeant
Squad Leader, Aerial Rifle Platoon
1968-1972
0 POS

It was almost eerie looking at the sky. A reddish glow radiated from the sun. Sunset wasn't far off and the contrast of the red sky outlining the green foliage of the rubber trees throughout the base camp was a sight that made me pause in my tracks. I wished I had my camera, this would make a great picture. Later I would think about the old saying "Red sky in morning, sailors take warning. Red sky at night sailors delight." Too damn bad I wasn't a sailor this night.

It had been a long, tiring day. I was walking down the red dirt road at Quan Loi that encircled the airstrip, heading to my hooch. We had departed early that morning for the AO and had made several insertions. We must have walked several miles through the bush most of it triple canopy and I was hot, sticky and just worn out. My jungle fatigues were coated in dust caked on by the dried sweat, my hair was still damp under my Boonie Hat. On top of that I smelled like a wet, mildewed rag.

At least my stomach was full. We had returned just before the mess hall had closed for the evening meal and went directly there after being dropped off the Slicks. Now I was headed to the hooch, still wearing all of my gear and carrying my rifle. My thoughts were centered on one thing and one thing only, stripping off these clothes and getting to the shower before we ran out of warm water.

Our shower was a simple affair. Just a small open-sided hut that would hold up to four men with a water tank on top that was filled every morning from our water truck, we didn't merit an immersible water heater like I had seen at other base camps. We just depended on the hot sun. To conserve the warm water, the 1st Sergeant had bannedanyone from taking a shower during the day. Showers were allowed in the evening after chow was the rule. No exceptions!

Before reaching my sanctuary the siren started blaring and in the near distance several people yelling. I came to a quick stop and just stood there. Now what? The siren was only used in an emergency, which usually was for incoming or a ship was down. If it was incoming, the siren going off was always preceded by explosions from rockets or mortar rounds impacting.

My mind swirled with ideas on why the hell the siren was going off. No explosions and I thought all the aircraft had returned with us.

I had decided that I should get to my assigned bunker on the perimeter and as soon as Istarted to beat feet in that direction people started running towards me headed to the flight line. Leading the pack was WO2 Richard Fleenor. "Flea" looked like something out of a cartoon. He was soaking wet wearing his combat boots, wet O.D. green underwear and carrying his flight helmet. Apparently he had skipped the chow hall and gone straight to the shower after returning from our mission. Before reaching me he yelled that the "Ash & Trash" had called in a May Day and had gone down.

I had flown on many Combat Assaults with "Flea" as the pilot and dressed or not I wanted to be on his aircraft. I followed his lead and we went to the farthest revetment where a crew chief was untying the main rotor. "Flea" climbed in the left seat and I took my seat on the floor behind the right seat. We were the first onboard. "Flea" immediately hit the start switch and the big turbine engine began to whine.

In no time at all the flight line was filled with Pilots, Grunts, Crew Chiefs and Door Gunners. From my vantage point I could see everyone running full tilt to their aircraft. Toan untrained eye it would have looked like a startled flock of birds getting away from a hunter once he's fired his first shot. In reality it was like a choreographed exercise. In no time at all we had the co-pilot, crew chief and door gunner strapped in and ready to go. Six grunts from the Aerial Rifle Platoon had also joined me filling the slick up. There was little organization with the Grunts. They just picked a ship and climbed on.

Normally the pilot would run up the engine a minimum of two minutes before coming to a hover. Not this time, I guess "Flea" wanted to be first. At least he showed that he was in a hurry and didn't have time. It was just a big assed scramble at this point. Normally the Slicks waited for the Loaches and Cobras and would follow them out. Because of the way the revetments were laid out everything was backwards. We were first off; my crazy pilot had won the race.

As "Flea" put the nose down, we picked up speed and in no time we were climbing over the southeast perimeter. Through the opposite door I saw the most

magnificent sunset of my life. The sky was still tinged in red and the sun sank on the horizon, only the top quarter was visible. I looked over to Fleenor and was struck by how many pimples he had on his back and how white his skin was. He really needed some sun. I started to laugh but instead just shrugged my shoulders, another crazy sight in Nam. I can still see him there, sitting in the left seat behind the armor plating with his flight helmet wearing only his underwear.

Normally after takeoff we would climb up to 2000' altitude. This was the "safe" zone from small arms fire. Unless of course they had either .51 cal. or 37mm's.

Our altitude never got that high. Before we cleared the town of An Loc located four miles south of Quan Loi we saw it. With the exception of the door gunner sitting in the well on the left side, we all saw it.

At first I thought it was the biggest flare in the world. It was such an intense blinding white flame concealing the Huey that it had once been. I swung around on the floor with my legs dangling out of the aircraft holding my 16 in my right hand. I silently said a

prayer hoping that the people on board had escaped. Looking back for our other Slicks I only saw two Cobras at our seven o'clock came up fast. I expected we would circle the area and wait for the other Slicks, instead it looked like we would be going straight in. This was confirmed when I saw the crew chief and door gunner cock the charging handles on their M-60 machine guns and point them outwards.

My three guys on the center seat scooted down on the floor in preparation to follow us off the skids. As if on signal we locked and loaded our weapons, ready to unass the aircraft. This is when your stomach would tighten up just enough to get your attention. No grab-assing, no talking. Just grit your teeth and concentrate on the job at hand. Just looking straight ahead ready to deal with whatever was to be. We had done this too many times to count and had become very proficient.

By now the sun had sunk under the horizon with just a hint of light. The fire from the downed Huey was so bright we had no problem seeing the ground. The aircraft came straight without circling. When we were 5 feet off the ground Mr. Fleenor flared the nose up slowing the ship. That was our signal to jump off.

When making a CA (Combat Assault) we would not actually land, done correctly the skids never touched the ground. Coming to a complete stop was hazardous to theaircraft and crew. The pilot needed to attain transitional lift and get back up where he belonged. This is also why the doors were locked back on all of our Huey's, if they haddoors.

As soon as our feet hit the ground we set up a perimeter around our LZ (Landing Zone). Finding a large bush that offered some cover I immediately knelt and scanned the area. To my left the Huey was still burning brightly with a thick plume of whitish grey smoke lifting straight upwards in the black sky. Even now, forty-five years later I can still recall that horrible scene. Even though the flames made a dull whooshing sound and it was fully engulfed it was sitting on its skids as if the pilot had landed it there.

One of our two Cobras circled overhead, reflected by the light of the burning Huey. He was no more than 200 feet above us. I could not see his partner but from the sound of it I knew he was flying higher, ready to roll in with his rockets if needed. For the next twelve odd hours there would be a pair of Cobras from our Gun Platoon circling overhead protecting us. Just another of the perks to being a grunt in the

Air Cavalry. As I ran over to check the rest of my men I heard the other Huey's coming in. They too made a beeline straight towards us. I was surprised to see three of them flying in trail. Normally we only had three Slicks with seven men each on a CA but I guess that under the circumstances they were bringing the whole platoon. At this point we had no clue as to what caused the ship to go down. It could have been ground fire or a mechanical malfunction. I assumed ground fire just to be safe.

Standing in the light from the burning Huey I held my rifle overhead with both arms extended showing the lead pilot exactly where to drop off the men. As soon as everyone was off and the ships had departed I ran over to Sergeant First Class "Happy Jack" Jackson standing with his RTO (Radio/Telephone Operator), Spec 4 David (Reb) Rutland. They both were staring at the burning ship.

By this time the flames had changed from the bright white to a smaller, orange/yellow color and the smoke had turned oily black, wafting over the ground. It was no longer recognizable as anything made by man. The struts had given way and were completely consumed as was the main body and tail boom.

After reporting to Happy Jack that I had set up a partial perimeter with the men I had from the first ship in, he asked if I had searched for survivors. I replied that I hadn't and he showed me where he wanted the perimeter using the rest of the platoon. I asked him whose aircraft it was as I was under the impression that all of our ships had come in earlier when we returned from the AO. His reply was that it was ours, that it was the Ash & Trash coming in from Di An. He then took off with the RTO to search for anyone that may have survived.

Without having to be told the platoon had already formed a good defensive positionaround the crash site. Not surprising as this was in our job description. In the past 13 months that I had been in the Troop we had secured dozens of downed helicopters.This was different though, never a burning Slick, never with so many men on board.

After making a head count of how many men we actually had on the ground I made my way over to my friend, Spec 4 Donald "No Dot" Bates. Donny was the M-60 Machine Gunner assigned to my squad. He had been in-country almost a year. He had a twin brother, Ronald (Dot) Bates who was also a grunt in our unit. Ron had been drafted and deciding that

where Ron went Don also had to go, he volunteered for the draft and here they were.

Pretty soon Happy Jack and Reb came back to where I was lying in the prone position next to Bates. He stared down at me and said "Tedder, come with me, I need to show you some weird shit". He told Reb to stay and I got up to follow, noticing that Reb stank of puke and seemed a little lost.

I got up and followed him through the dark, passing around the still burning Huey. He asked me if I had any idea where we were and I replied, "Not exactly, somewhere south of An Loc near Highway 13". He said "That's right, we're practically on top of one of the old French forts surrounding An Loc". He said that he and Reb had found a lot of concertina wire and a concrete bunker just past the Huey. He thought that the pilot must have been trying to land it inside the fort as it was pretty wide open.

Still following him we passed around the rear of the Huey. As the flames diminished the smoke had turned oily black and was wafting across the ground instead of going straight up as before. Passing through the smoke we both started running to get through it as fast as possible. The smoke carried the

smell of burning flesh. It was so thick that it stuck to you, invading your body and clogging your nose.

We came to the edge of the fort and he stopped. I could just make out the bunker that he had described earlier. He shined his flashlight downwards and told me "Look at this poor bastard" He explained that when they had found him earlier Reb had upchucked and that he needed help getting him out of there.

Looking down was the body of one of the guys on the Huey. His body was frozen in the crawling position with his arms extended and one knee bent. He had got tangled up in the barbed wire and had burned to death. His back and legs were burned horribly from the heat of the fire. I could tell that he was part of the four man crew as he still had his flight helmet on which was also partially burned away exposing his skull, the hair and skin having melted off.

It was pretty difficult but the two of us managed to push down the old rusty wire using our boots and pull him out by his arms. Turning him over we discovered that his face, chest and stomach were untouched. He had compound fractures on both shins. We discussed how he must have been fairly high up when he jumped out to avoid the fire.

The weight of his chicken plate (laminated armor plate worn by Army aircrews to protect the chest and/or back) had to have helped cause the broken legs.

Removing the chicken plate Happy Jack pointed his light at the name tag above the pocket on his shirt. We knew who it was, Green. "Do you know him?" asked Happy Jack. "Oh yeah, he was a crew chief, hell of a nice guy". Oh course we always spoke in good terms describing those we lost but I meant it in this case. I had been his platoon sergeant for a short while and had gotten to know all the guys in the Lift platoon. Vernon Green was an extremely nice guy. A lifer like myself.

After wrapping the body in my poncho we carried him towards the front of the now smoldering Huey and placed it on the ground. Happy Jack and I were joined by SSG Middleton who suggested we do a perimeter check.

At some point while checking my squad I discovered that no one was near the area where the stinking smoke was blowing low over the ground. No big deal, Bates M-60 had a good field of fire on one side and the other side was covered as well.

During my check I came upon the number one screw-up in my unit. Spec 4 Schrader.Schrader was out of position, not surprisingly, and was talking to one of the FNG's (new guys). I heard Schrader telling him, "Yeah, we do this all the time, you think this is the first bunch of "Crispy Critters" we've pulled out". That hit me like a load of bricks. I had never heard that term before. Crispy Critters? The only other casualty they had pulled out burned was my friend Flieger who had been killed two months ago. Was he talking about him?

I had never cared for Schrader, he was a screw-up and a worthless piece of shit. Without giving it any thought I reached down and grabbed him by the arm and stood him up. "Come on shithead, I need you over here". I then pulled him along to the area where the smoke was still rolling. I yelled, "You will stay right here and you will not move, if you do I will personally blow your goddamn brains out!!!"

I returned to my position next to Don Bates and he asked me why I had done that with Schrader. I replied because I could therefore I did. He laughed. Not long after Happy Jack came over and asked the same thing. I told him how Schrader had been out of line and trying to impress the new guy with his being a

badass. I also reminded him about (the incident with Schrader's mom and the Congressman). He agreed and PFC Schrader stayed there. Luckily for him the smoke finally dissipated to nothing.

Even though it has been 45 years I can still recall that awful night. Once we had recovered Green we all just laid there on the perimeter waiting for daylight. You couldn't see more than five meters. Once the fire had burned out it became extremely dark. Clouds rolled in from the west masking the moon and stars. As the fire was still burning I could see large black lumps inside being consumed by the flames. You knew that what you were looking at were all that remained of your comrades. Comrades that were no longer human.

My thoughts turned to the guys around me. I was worried that some of my other friends had been on the Huey. It had only been ten days since the ambush when Kipo, Dien and Captain DeCelle had been lost along with 12 other men wounded and medevac'd out. Several had returned, even Tennessee (Bruce Dykes) who still wore a cast on his leg from being shot in the calf and foot. He just up and left the 95th Evac Hospital and came back, to be with his "family".

Half of the guys in my squad had been in-country a year. Well past their normal 12-month tour. They were draftees and had decided to extend their tours for a few months in order to get an "Early Out" as soon as they returned to the "World". The other half were mostly FNG replacements for the guys lost ten days ago. But even with all that had happened lately we had responded like soldiers when the siren went off. One minute, I was walking to my hooch thinking about a shower and 12-15 minutes later I was jumping off the skids into this little piece of Hell. A Hell complete with flames and brimstone.

As soon as the sun came up a Huey landed in the center of our perimeter. Major Rafferty the Troop Commanding Officer got out and SFC Jackson and SSG Middleton saluted as he approached them. I was too far away to hear what was said but Sgt. Middleton yelled for a few guys to help the crew unload the cargo. The Major had brought out a few cases of C-Rations and a bunch of body bags.

Not surprisingly no one touched the rations, many of the guys had emptied their stomachs during the night. We didn't know it but the horror was going to get worse. At this point Sgt. Middleton came over to me and said "Tedder, we are about to earn our stripes.

Happy Jack wants the NCO's to get the bodies out. He doesn't want the men to do it. We can spare them that".

I followed him over to where Major Rafferty and Happy Jack were and the Medic joined us carrying a Back Board used when extracting wounded men with broken backs. Unbeknown to me he had requested that Happy Jack radio in to Quan Loi that it be included with the body bags. I was about to learn just how smart a Medic he was.

We also learned from the Major that no one from the Rifle Platoon had been on the aircraft. That the pilot was WO1 Goelz and WO1 Bennett was the co-pilot. I had flown many insertions with them and knew both pretty well. The four of us, Jackson, Middleton, "Doc" and me were given repelling gloves to wear and set to work. Doc also passed around a tube of mentholated crème to put on our upper lips to mask some of the smell. It didn't quite do the job.

The three guys that had been sitting in the cargo compartment had been crushed by the engine and transmission when the walls had given way. The four of us had to manhandle them off. The three were stuck together and we used our hands to pry them

apart. The door gunner was the easiest as he was still lying in what had been the left well behind his M-60.

Mr. Bennett and Mr. Goelz had be pulled out of their armored seats by hand. Surprisingly, they still were in human form, unrecognizable but you could tell they had once lived as men. Goelz's right leg made a popping noise as we were lifting him out. His leg just plopped out of its socket. One minute I was holding both legs and the damn thing came off and I had just the leg.

As soon as the last bag was zipped we stacked them on top of one another in Major Rafferty's Huey. A few minutes later the Hueys came in to carry us back to Quan Loi. Upon reaching my hooch I stripped off my uniform and gave them to Mama San telling her to burn them.

I stayed in the shower a long long time, ignoring the cold water and using a lot of soap. I even washed the inside of my nose and mouth but it would be a while before I could no longer smell it. It would be even longer before it no longer bothered me, especially at night.

Years will go by and you will see big changes in your life but the memories never truly
fade and go away.

In Memory of:
WO1 Steven William Goelz, 21
WO1 Thomas Evans Bennett, 21
WO1 Clarence Dean Hakes, 30
Spec 4 Vernon Andrew Green, 20
Capt. Joseph Michael Wilsher, 29
Spec 5 Craig James Jakel, 23
Spec 4 Michael Henry Keys, 21

Threatt, Robert B.
U.S. Air Force
First Sergeant
K-9 NCOIC, Security Supervisor
1964-1984
0 POS

In my opinion, the Air Force love exercises, especially playing with weapons and other high value merchandise. At least a week in every third, sometimes second, month, there is a base alert/ exercise. Normally, these exercises last a week or more of twelve or more hour days. There have been times that I didn't see a real bed for two or three days. Usually I would take a snooze when and wherever I could and then continue doing whatever is required. Being a sergeant of many varied talents, it is possible to be assigned to perform duties anywhere and to change to something entirely different at anytime. However, when it came time, in the simulated war scheme, for uploading and downloading the fighter aircraft with real or practice nuclear weapons, I usually had the job as lead convoy commander.

My job, even when I was the K-9 NCOIC, was to lead the lead weapons convoy and lead other wartime scenarios. That involved selecting eight to ten men

to be on the team, ensure our equipment is in order and, at the start of the convoy, brief my men and the weapons personnel, about what, how, where and the vulnerabilities of the mission. Make sure the two man policy is adhered to at all times and everyone is aware whether we are carrying real or practice nuclear weapons. It is a huge responsibility, to say the least, and I always took the job seriously, although some, who did not know me real well, didn't think that was the case. Reason being, I loved to joke around and act goofy. This was an attempt to make the job at hand fun and to keep everyone awake and alert.

Embedded in the Security Police Squadrons is a Quality Control Unit that does nothing but try to make your day a very bad day as well as asking stupid questions, testing everyone. These guys are like Internal Review of police departments. No one like them yet most people want to be apart of them. I guess the personnel think they do nothing all day except, on occasion, give out stupid written exams and oral tests. Otherwise, they are seldom seen. I did not condone them to be around my K-9 people unless they were K-9, in which none were.

One particular night, in the middle of a week long base exercise, the head QC Sergeant came to me to

inform me my convoy would be attacked by his men somewhere along the convoy route. He went on to inform me that we would be graded on our response, etc. I, in turn, informed the Sergeant that I would be escorting live nuclear weapons and it is unwise to play around with the "Real McCoys". I went on to tell him I didn't mind playing his little games with fake weapons but never with the real ones. He said the attack would happen. I told him we always had real ammo, never fake ammo and we will use it. He laughed and said he know I joke a lot and told me he was serious. I had him follow me.

He walked with me to my circle of men to listen to the briefing. I gave the briefing, according to written policy and then informed the men of the QC attack. I then told them that if attacked, shoot any and everything that moved. I stared at the Sergeant and said to my men that if any man failed to protect the weapons by not firing, I will fire on them. I told them that I joke around and do all sorts of other things but I do my job and don't play with real or fake weapons.

All the blood seem to drain out of the sergeant's face and he started to shake, "Do you realize who I am and what I can do to you?"

Looking him straight in his eyes with a smile on my face, I said, "I know exactly who and what you are. You are a dead ass hole if you or anyone attacks this convoy. Do you know who I am and understand what I am saying?"

"You are going on report and will be removed from duty."

I couldn't help it but I snickered and said, "Try it but I don't think so." To my men and the weapons people I hollered, "Load up! Lock and load! Safety off!" The Sergeant left the building in a huff, mad as hell. Needless to say, the convoy was not attacked and, as I later found out, the sergeant was reprimanded for wanting to do such a thing.

The convoy went from aircraft shelter to aircraft shelter whereby my men formed a semi-circle, with the shelter being the open end and the weapons wagons in the middle. A low-boy motorized forklift would drive up to one of the weapons wagon with one man walking beside the low-boy to form the two man policy. They would slowly pick-up a weapon, slowly turn toward the aircraft, drive to the aircraft and attach the weapon onto the wing of the aircraft. There is a security police guard at each aircraft shelter and

when the low-boy cross the opening of the shelter, the guard would pull a rope across the opening and my convoy team is released to go to the next shelter.

At one shelter, a British ORI inspector walked up and I went over to talk with him and just chew the fat. My back was to the convoy, which was about 15' behind me, and all of a sudden I heard this heavy metal object hit concrete and bounce three times. It seemed like everything went in very, very slow motion. We all froze for 10-15 seconds and didn't even breath. I slowly turned around and saw one of the weapons on the concrete still rocking from one tail fin to another. It had fallen off the low-boy. As I looked at my men and the weapons personnel, not one mouth was shut. Everyone had their mouths open, eyes wide and no one said a word.

I calmly put my radio to my mouth and said "Charlie One, Charlie One to Control."
"Control. Go Charlie One."
"Broken Arrow, Broken Arrow, Broken Arrow."
"Repeat Charlie One. Did you say Broken Arrow?"
"That's a ten-four. Broken Arrow, Broken Arrow, Broken Arrow. This is not an exercise. Repeat, this is not an exercise."

Treece, Richelle Marie
U.S. Air Force and U.S. Army
Major
Commander
1988-present
O NEG

Did I ever tell you the story of how we named our daughter?

The month after we found out my husband had cancer, I found out I was pregnant with our first child. The week of his last chemo treatment was the same week my daughter was going to be born. I was always tired and there were times during those 9 months I really just wanted to give up, but I knew when my daughter arrived the chemo would be over and things would be better. In the Army, you sing cadence to run; it keeps you moving and gives your heart the motivation it needs to keep the body going even when all you want to do is stop. Cadence helps to keep your team together. It builds a team and breeds warriors.

We decided to name our daughter Cadence. She was our motivation, our reason to keep going and not give up - she was our cadence, she kept me going when

all I wanted to do was stop.

That's part of what I'm trying to put into words. I've always had a pride in the military, that knowledge that I belong to something so much bigger than myself. You may not know a persons name, but if they wear the uniform you share a bond. I think the dawning of that realization came to me when I graduated basic training and I had my first retreat. It all came to me while I stood there saluting at attention watching that flag some down that so many people before me stood in the same place I did. Some of those people went to war and some of them died, but we all started in the same place. We were willing to say yes.

Years later, it wasn't until my husband got sick that I saw what the military truly did for me. It gave me the life skills and the capacity to survive when things were so hard. Training showed me I could do things I never thought possible. The challenges I faced through chemo, pregnancy, miscarriage, his son's suicide and my mom's death. I look back now and know that if I didn't have the foundation and spirit that the military instilled in me, I don't think I could have kept my family together through those dark times.

Twomey, Patrick
U.S. Army
Major
Battalion Surgeon, Medical Service Corps
2007-present
O POS

I remember was when our water pipe burst in the clinic. I remember getting called at about 5 in the afternoon. I had left for the day and was actually out running the perimeter trail when I got the call the clinic was flooding. I immediately ran to the clinic but called the maintenance crew on the way, and COL Lyons just to let him know. When I arrived at the clinic, my medics on duty were working furiously to control the flooding. A few of the other officers and I jumped in to help. COL Lyons actually showed up even before the maintenance crew and jumped in as well. After the water was shut off, we all stayed and mopped everything up and not one of us left until the clinic was clean. I realized how great it was to work in an organization that even though we have a rigid rank structure, when a job needs to be done, we all pitch in to help.

Vos, John R.
U.S. Army
Captain
Forward Support MEDEVAC Team Leader
2004-present
O NEG

My family. God bless them. They are supportive of my military service to the end. They have good intentions, but don't always understand the type of community, the mindset, and the tenacious ability of Soldiers to poke fun even at the most sentimental gestures. During my first deployment in support of OIF, my family decided to run a 5km in my hometown, and in my honor, wear shirts labeled "Team Vos". On the front in bold stencil font were the words "Team Vos". Squarely centered, was a cartoonish Blackhawk helicopter surrounded by red stars. The intent was to portray my name and aircraft in a patriotic theme; it came out as a something My Little Pony may have thrown up. Nonetheless, the gesture was sincerely appreciated and I still thank them today for their support.

But there were left-over shirts. And there were pictures on social media.

Despite my protest, my loving, but slightly nefarious, wife decided it would be a good idea to send the left-over shirts as part of a care-package. Even today, she still argues that it was well-intentioned. I beg to differ—something dastardly was going on here—I am pretty sure there were requests via Facebook unbeknownst to me.

I anxiously tore open the box when it arrived, expecting to see pictures of my children, candy, potato chips, water balloons—the usual. In complete confusion, I held a shirt up to examine it in the dining area of the compound. Without skipping a beat, one of my NCOs exclaims "Holy shit Sir! That shirt is awesome!" He immediately grabbed a pile of shirts and started distributing them to everyone present. Soldiers began to parade around the compound talking about how cool it was to be on Team Vos and if you did not have one, bad news, you were out of this very exclusive club.

I relayed to my wife the embarrassment and pleaded to never again send another package with those shirts. The daily torture of being greeted in the early morning hours with someone wearing an oversized shirt as a night-gown, no pants, maybe some socks, and asking how I like their morning attire was starting

to get old. I am a good sport, but unfortunately, so is my wife.

A few weeks later, I flew back to the headquarters element on a logistics flight. During the stay, I received not one, but three care packages. Instead of waiting until we got back to the Forward Operating Base, I decided to open them up at headquarters, because, who knows, there may be some beef jerky lurking inside. I was wrong. Three boxes of Team Vos shirts. Some were not even shirts. Some were tank-tops. Some were sweatshirts. Some were bandannas. Painful. I am not sure what happened in the next few seconds, but there was a flurry of hands and shirts and, I think, tighty-whities, being hurdled through the air. Complete chaos. One lucky Captain, quickly donned the tank-top version and sprints out the door to the commander's office. Despite my efforts, there was no stopping him. I could only cringe and wait. Painful seconds of silence elapsed, eventually broken by my commander screaming from the top of his lungs "VOS! GET YOUR ASS IN HERE. NOW!"

I sheepishly walked into his office, put myself at the position of attention, clenching my teeth trying not to laugh (or cry–don't know which).

Behind my red-faced commander, was the captain, doing a happy jig wearing the Team Vos tank-top over his ACUs. The tongue-in-cheek ass-chewing ensued. Beginning with the poetic importance of being a team player, about being a band of brothers (and sisters); it finally ended with a very clear demand: "Where is my damn shirt Vos!? Why is your commander [speaking in third person] not wearing one right now, Vos!?" I told him that all shirts were gone. Unacceptable. I had 30 seconds to produce one, in his size. Unfortunately, the aforementioned captain was all too ready to offer his up. This only worsened the situation: "See Vos, this guy's a team player…you should follow his example". I hate that guy.

As the word got around about these damn shirts, the company became divided between the "have" and the "have-nots". I was forced to sheepishly go back to my wife and ask to send more. She obliged.

When the shirts were evenly distributed among the company's 124 Soldiers, the commander decided that there was one more joke left in this nightmare.

During a morning formation, four Soldiers were set off to the rear office. The commander brought each one up individually. "I understand," he began, "that

there seems to be a misinterpretation of the company PT uniform policy, so I have decided to have these four fine Soldiers display the proper attire. The first is the standard gray T-shirt and black shorts." A Soldier from the back of the formation runs to the front of the formation and proudly displays his uniform as described by the commander. The next Soldier wore ACU trousers and tan-t-shirt. The third was a Soldier wearing the company T-shirt.

"The fourth acceptable uniform is a last minute entry," he exclaims with a sly grin. "If you have been so lucky to have received one of the Team Vos shirts, you are also allowed to wear them when conducting PT in and around the compound!" A roar of laughter erupted as a Soldier proudly displaying his Team Vos shirt sprints to the front of the formation and does a dance ensuring all can see.

I could only bury my face in my hands.

The Team Vos shirt still haunts me today. I still get pictures on Facebook or texts with former colleagues proudly wearing this ridiculous piece of attire. Some would take offense to this, but in the Army, in this unique community, we consider such embarrassment a badge of honor.

Webb, Philip Ray
U.S. Army
First Sergeant
Army Instructor
1984-2005
O POS

Excerpts from the keynote speech at a Memorial Day ceremony at Rehoboth Beach…

"…I would like to honor my own Soldiers I lost - pay respect to their families for it was their loved ones who made the ultimate sacrifice in the defense of our Great Nation while deployed in support of Operation Enduring Freedom."

We got the call that one of our Blackhawks, Falcon 083, was down. Those of us in the command thought that when we got to the downed aircraft site, we would find a hard landing. There would be some aircraft damage, and crew just shaken up a bit. Not the horrific overwhelming site of an aircraft on fire; totally destroyed. The medic that was with us sat huddled in a ball leaning against the HUMVEE tire shaking, going into shock at the sight of the scene before us. I realized then that everyone has his breaking point. With the help of others like LT

Mike Rovins, SFC John Smith (Smitty), Doc Shu and SPC Bernard Roach, our rescue mission turned into a recovery mission. I will never leave a fallen comrade. I have one picture of 083. I only look at it once a year. If it's a school day, I usually tell the LTC I work with that I will be taking a sick day so I don't have to be around anyone. Yes I keep telling Smitty to expect the crew to be hurt and in shock, but that we would get them back to Udari.

When 866 crashed in Korea in 1989, it was the same thing, except they were lost one valley over from where they should have been during an in-country goggle orientation flight. 866 was destroyed, but SGT Merrick made it out with burnt arms and broken legs. LTC Warne broke everything on his right side: collarbone, arm, wrist etc. CW3 Haney has less then 3 weeks left in country. He died in his fucking seat. MEDAVAC would not go in because the new wires were not marked on the map. CW3 Barrier heard the MAYDAY call and took 879 to the site. That crew hit the same wires, as testified by PFC Moore (we called him "little Moore") remember hitting the wires getting caught in them. CW3 Barrier was able to back the aircraft out of the wires while WO1 Wofford, right some flight school, was screaming they were going to die. Little Moore stated that CW3 Barrier

reached over punch Wofford in the face and calmly stated, " Shut the fuck up. Make a radio call on guard. I'm kinda busy over here." They were able to make a controlled crash to the ground.

That was running through my mind on the way to 083.

"My soldiers never made it to Delaware, except to arrive at Dover Air Force Base in a Flag Draped Caskets. They never saw, or were able to enjoy the beautiful beaches like the one behind me here in Rehoboth…"

Wietting, Jonathan
U.S. Army National Guard
Sergeant First Class
Battalion Fire Support NCOIC/Forward Observer
1988-1997, 2007-present
O NEG

During my deployment to the Sinai Peninsula in 2010-2011, I was the Medical Platoon Sergeant for a National Guard Artillery Battalion. The active duty Aviation Company on post was short flight medics, and they were looking for volunteers. I was picked. As I went to the orderly room to meet and greet, I was a little apprehensive. I had been in the military both Active and Guard for over 15 years and I knew how the two components could get along.

Any misgivings I had were very short lived. They were appreciative that I would take my personal time to help them, and they welcomed me in. I soon became "one of the family" and I was even initiated into the company. I left the Sinai with new and lifelong friends and I can still say I have brothers and sisters from that company all over the world.

In my now 19+ years that still remains the best experience of my military career.

Wilson, Matt
Royal New Zealand Air Force
Corporal
Aviation Refueller
2003-present
O POS

One day, a few people from work had the day off at the same time. We got thirsty. A couple of quiet lunchtime drinks in the barracks lounge turns into drinks outside on the lawn. A lot of people are drawn in as they walk past after work... it happens.

Later on that night, one man had a glass in his hand. He was being helped to a chair to sit down for a while when he tripped. Naturally he put his hands out to cushion his fall. Unfortunately, his glass fell from his hand and smashed on the concrete path. Even more unfortunately, his reactions weren't as fast as they normally were. His fall was cushioned by the shards of glass entering his neck.

Within 30 seconds, 90% of the people there had managed to perfect their disappearing acts. Luckily, among the people that stayed was a medic or two. We had the guy moved inside onto a couch. A medic had her fingers in his throat. The scene got

tidied up amazingly quickly. We called an ambulance of course. Which meant we had to inform the front gate, the duty people, and the MP's.

The next day, we went into work and told our Warrant Officer what had happened and that he would probably be hearing from some very high up people. Our Warrant Officer said, "Good teamwork. Not your fault. We'll see what happens."

A few days later, we had an Orderly room in front of the Base W/O. 22 people, 1 Admin girl as an escort party, and all the usual presenting and defending personnel. That's a lot of people in one office. After a few people managed to avoid the charge, the only charge we were found guilty on was drinking outside of barracks. Six days Confined to Barracks, which isn't really too bad if there are 12 people. Good company. Extra duties get finished quickly.

Apparently, this charge has set a new record in the Air Force for the amount of people on charge at the same time for the same charge. As always, there are stories about "The Dirty Dozen" charge. I'm always happy to clear up the rumours.

Oh, and the guy lived. He has a rather scarred neck

now. His surname is Stads... now he's commonly called Stabs.

Woodward, David
U.S. Army
Chief Warrant Officer 4
UH-60A/L/M Blackhawk Maintenance Test Pilot
1987-1995, 1996-2014
0 POS

I was on my fifth tour in the Global War On Terrorism, my second to Afghanistan. I was the senior warrant officer and maintenance test pilot in the flight company that I was assigned, getting to the company only a few months before we deployed together. It was a bit rough trying to establish myself in this group that had known each other for a while. Although they weren't in the same company then, most of them had been deployed together previously about one year prior.

Flash forward to two-thirds of the way through our deployment together and I woke up one morning with what felt like a congested right ear. Walking into work, I decided I was okay to fly that day, but if things weren't better tomorrow morning I would go see the doc. Well, they weren't.

I was pulled off flight status until I cleared up. I wasn't responding to decongestants, and a few days later

and I was starting to become dizzy and have full-blown episodes of vertigo. I was given a hearing test that morning which I failed miserably. That afternoon, I was seen by the ear, nose, throat specialist on the airfield, and he requested an immediate evacuation out of country for "sudden onset, profound, sensorineural hearing loss."

I was informed that something like 80% of people evacuated out of country never return. My command had to sign a release stating they understood this as well. I was fairly shaken up about my personal situation. Would I recover? Would it require surgery? Was this the end of my flying career? I was also worried about my teammates, my family, that I was leaving behind in Afghanistan.

When I arrived at the hospital in Germany, I was treated like just another patient, no close ties to anyone for comfort. I kept in contact with my company. Talking with them helped keep my spirits up. After a few treatments and hearing tests, the doctor decided that the damage had been done. I wasn't responding to the treatments. They recommended return home to the U.S.

But my home was in Afghanistan with my adoptive

family. Luckily, my first doc had a vacation planned and the second doc was willing to entertain the idea of returning to Afghanistan. I wouldn't be able to fly, but I could still manage the maintenance for my company.

Before the doctor and my commander spoke, I conveyed to my commander that my mental and emotional well-being was also at stake and that I would be much better off in Afghanistan. If I went back to the States, I would be constantly worrying if someone got hurt because of a poorly maintained aircraft or fault I could have found, not to mention that I had no friends back at our home station as they were all in Afghanistan.

My commander stuck up for me and I was returned to Afghanistan having been gone only about two weeks. My unit was glad to see me back, and I was respected and thanked for what they called my selfless service. But I thought, I am being completely selfish because I couldn't stand to be away from all of these wonderful folks.

Yousif, Evan
U.S. Army
Specialist
15T Black Hawk Crew Chief
2004-2012
O POS

Many years have passed since my last deployment, but even to this day, there are some memories that have never left me. I have been in fire-fights and completed many assaults on terrorist groups, but even after seeing all that death there was only two moments that will never leave me.

The first on was during operation iron harvest (January 08). The back story was we were after a cell that was placing IEDs on the main road near the northern edge of camp warhorse. It was a waiting game; we were waiting for him to use his cell phone. After about 8 hours of waiting, we finally tracked the call and moved out with 3 full loads of soldiers. About 1 min from landing, we had to determine which building of the 5 he was most likely holding up in. As we approached, we started taking on small arms fire. We landed, and the soldiers made their way to the center of the small compound. As we lifted off, we did circles around providing cover fire and watching

for squinters to exit the compound.

As we did our patterns, the groups split up to clear the outer building and then it happened. One of the buildings exploded killing 6 and injuring 4 others. Once the dust settled, my aircraft landed to pick up the wounded and transport them to warhorse medical pad. On the next turn, we picked up the dead. The problem was we also had to pick up and ex-fill the troops on the ground. I can remember the bodies being stacked next to me one on top of another. Not the normal way we do things, but as we took off I was kind of in a daze, having just worked with these soldiers for the past week doing these pickups and to see them there lifeless was really hard to comprehend.

I remember reaching in my flight bag where I always kept an American flag. Placing it over the bodies with help from their commander, who was sobbing in the front seat with one hand on their bodies just praying. We transported them to warhorse and waited for our fallen heroes to fly them to Balad airbase on their journey home. As I removed all the seats to make room, we had no resources to clean up the blood on the floor of the helicopter, so I took my extra pair of socks (I always keep a pair of socks and underwear

in the bag, always be prepared), and used my water bottle to try and clean up what I could.

We received the call to get ready, they are bringing the fallen soldiers; we started the APU and waited. Moments later the battalion and support groups were waiting to say goodbye. As the soldiers came, we prepared to receive them. It was like the air was still gone and everything was quite.

All I remember is the priest walking and I saw his lips moving but did could not hear what he was saying. The one thing I did notice was a single soldier who was more upset then the rest. As the last body came to my helicopter, the Battalion Commander left his post in front of his troops to get this crying soldier and walked him to the chopper. It wasn't until I saw his name plate that I realized they had the same last name.

Once the ceremony was over we took off it was a quite flight to balad no one talked not even a word. We landed and unloaded the bodies and made our way back to Camp Speicher, due to the heat the blood started to make this terrible smell. Till this day, the smell is still in my head every time I think of this moment.

This page intentionally left blank