# AT THE END OF A WAR STORY

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ABSTRACT

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War stories play a large part in the American cultural consciousness. Each war has its own narrative, of triumph or tragedy, that casts shadow over any individual person's story. The stories that fit the overarching narrative are acknowledged or rewarded. Those that fail to conform are left out. The War on Terror has resulted in a narrative of tragedy: isolation, Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder, and damage. Cultural pursuit of "war stories" that conform to this mold has created distance between military and civilian spheres.

Here, I outline the cultural conceit of a "war story" and illustrate its failures in addressing the narrative needs of military and military adjacent populations. I then describe the methodology and practice of ongoing oral history project that blends the concerns of cultural rhetorics, narrative theory, and oral history. And finally, I examine the kinds of storying that have resulted in the course of this project and the work these stories do in a communal framework. In doing so, I seek to create a framework for future scholars that seeks not just "war stories" but a comprehensive narrative that acknowledges nuance beyond trauma/triumph.

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**Exigency**

—nightmare will consist of the rap of white-gloved knuckles against the front door. Your nightmare is everyone's nightmare. Use charms to keep it at bay with: yellow ribbons and blue stars and red candles in front windows and—

—you will be wearing his battered Tarheels tee on the Tuesday you overhear a woman talking about how she saw you in the Commissary, buried up to your elbows in sour green apples (his favorite fruit) and crying, and—

—forgive her, forgive them all, because everyone's living the same nightmare, and—

—they've been in blackout for three days now while they contact the families of the dead and you're praying that it's not him, that it is *anyone* but him, and the guilt of such prayer is enough to gnaw but not enough to stop and—

—your fingers slip into the left front pocket of your jeans so you can pull out your own nightmare-banishing charm: a cat the size of your thumbnail, one front paw raised up, painted white and wearing a curlicue smile. You were told that a beckoning cat saved an emperor. Surely this cat's mate, tucked into his rucksack half a world away, can save him. You breathe deeply and the phone rings and it's his voice on the end of the line. "I love you, I love you, I love you," you sob and—

—live in fear that one night, maybe tonight, the white cat will lower its paw and walk away into the twilight and on the porch there will be two men in dress uniform, and your—

## Chapter One

## The Failures of War Stories

When people ask what it's like, being a military brat, I think of how it feels to always be watching my dad's back disappearing into the floodlit night toward a school bus painted black like a hearse. I think of the found family that flies halfway across the country to watch me graduate. I think of potholes, and slamming refrigerator doors, and pairs of boots lined up against the wall of a gym to tally up the dead. I think of small towns where the most interesting things were Hail & Farewells and Change of Commands. I think of praying that when the line went dead it was someone else's father, *anyone* else's father, because I'd do anything to deal in guilt instead of grief. I think of homecomings. I think of all the memories I don't have.

And mostly, I think of how impossible it is to tell the story people want to hear.

### Telling the Wrong Story

Eight people have asked me if my dad ever killed anyone "over there." My fingers flex, curl in, and my knuckles ache with a punch I haven't thrown. People only ever ask questions like this when they want a specific kind of story. (Running across a dusty battlefield to save a downed comrade, a crying baby, a dying country.) Option A: they want something heroic. Option B: they want something ugly. I'll never be able to decide which story is worse.

It doesn't matter. I don't know that story and even if I did, I wouldn't tell it, which is what I say through a smile that's really just baring my teeth. Feeling spiteful, I add that only civilians ask this question. In doing so, I make "civilian" the foulest word in my vocabulary. I don't regret it.

This is the failure of a war story, embodied.

Suppose one draws back from these eight, who are easily vilified and easily dismissed, to look at the broader culture. Flip through a newspaper, see: the failures of the Veteran's Administration (VA) to properly care for an ever-growing population of wounded. Go to a theater, see: *American Sniper* and *Hurt Locker*. Read an award-winning book, see: here are the broken, the lost, the dying of America's wars. There's a coherent narrative being constructed about the series of wars and engagements known colloquially as the "War on Terror". It's one of consumable grief that encourages questions like, "Did you ever kill anyone?"

America has been at war since 2001. But this is not 1943. We are not in a state of total war with propaganda on street corners, restrictions on paper and coffee, and thousands of citizens in detainment camps. Nor is it 1965. We are not in a nationally unpopular war with protests in universities, drafts to be accepted or dodged, and hundreds of politicians deciding the best way to fight a war from their D.C. offices. It's 2017, and the War on Terror continues to wage while the rest of the country has long since moved on.

As of 2009, over 1.9 million troops had been deployed into combat (*Returning Home from Iraq and Afghanistan*, 17). This number has only increased in the intervening eight years. And no one comes back from the war whole. There's post-traumatic stress disorder. There's lost limbs and lost friends. There's traumatic brain injury. There's lost hearing and lost memories. There's survivor's guilt. There's lost, lost, lost.

Journalist David Finkel, Pulitzer Prize winning journalist, outlines the dilemma as such in his book *Thank You for Your Service*: "Home now, most [soldiers] describe themselves as physically and mentally healthy. They move forward. Their war recedes…. But then there are others, for whom the war endures." (30)

And indeed, when they come back, they deal with all the things they've lost. Sometimes they stay in the military, where at least everyone understands, and they try all the current techniques meant to compensate for what's been lost: frequent psychological evaluations, support groups, motivational posters. All with debatable results as suicide and other destructive behaviors remain at a high among service members and veterans. Sometimes they leave the military and go back to a 'normal' that forgot there was a war.

Regardless of where the service member ends up one of the greatest struggles they face is how to put words to what they lived. If they should put words to what they lived. If they can put words to what they lived. Each person works to create a framework that they weave their stories onto. They try—and fail, and succeed—to translate their experiences into something that can be understood by their community, their family, and ultimately themselves. A successful framework has room for new stories and new understandings. It can last decades and withstand the way grief is always rediscovered.

Storytelling in this mode must be understood to be always-already a communal act, one that "reaffirms [the storyteller and audience's] belonging as a community" (Livo & Reitz, 14). It's tempting, in modern Western understandings of isolated trauma and individual triumph, to situate this project entirely onto the singular (storyteller) rather than on the communal (storytellers). Yet in order to push back against the failure of war stories—the failure to create as an individual a narrative framework—one must engage with story as community, and therefore with (being at the end of) war stories as communal.

There remains extreme exigency for this kind of reimagining (war) stories and the purpose they may serve for traumatized populations. I have born witness to and participated in the creation of this process time and again. From that, I feel I can claim that military and military

adjacent populations who succeed in creating a narrative framework also tend to succeed in reintegrating with 'normal' and/or 'civilian' life. Furthermore, I feel I can claim that the complexities and paradoxes of these stories must be acknowledged not only by individuals but by broader institutions, including those academic institutions that seek to work with this population, in order to conduct ethical research.

The purpose then of this project is three-fold. First, to outline the cultural conceit of a "war story" and illustrate its failures in addressing the narrative needs of military and military adjacent populations. Second, to describe the methodology and practice of ongoing oral history project that blends the concerns of cultural rhetorics, narrative theory, and oral history. And third, to examine the kinds of storying that have resulted in the course of this project and the work these stories do in a communal framework.

**Including Rhetoric**

Academic work with military and military adjacent populations, currently referred to as veterans' studies, has thus far been restricted primarily to already established points of contact. Medical and psychological studies dominate the field. Journalism (and journalistic long form texts) make up another significant portion. These are followed, in vague order, by creative non-fiction, oral history, and classroom composition. Myriad other disciplines contribute on occasion but in such small numbers it would be difficult to call them a definitive approach within veterans' studies. While all disciplines that make up veterans' studies serve a valuable purpose, areas of silence remain. Rhetoric(s) stands poised to make visible those silences.

First, clarification of terminology. The name "veterans' studies" carries with it a specific implication of the population: one of military service members who have retired, received a discharge, etc. This reflects a larger truth within the field, wherein established points of contact

mean that most research does have to do (near) exclusively with that population. However, it is used in this work as a disciplinary catchall for any work that deals with military or military adjacent populations. This includes current and former service members of all military branches, their immediate families, and civilians who are employed by or otherwise work closely with any of the military branches or military affiliated organization. It's important here to recognize that if one considers soldiers the center of this field, then the further a position is from soldier the more nebulous a connection it might be, so that someone who's grandfather served in Korea may or may not be included into "military adjacent" based on a number of variable contextual factors.

Second, a clarification of culture. The modern American military is one that in some ways would be wholly unrecognizable to the American military circa Vietnam or even Desert Storm. The modern American military is a standing volunteer force, many of whom choose the military as a career and many more of whom serve for two to five years, that makes up an estimated 1% (Sapolsky) of the total US population. Most active duty personnel (and their immediate families) live and work on or near military bases/posts. Over half of them are married and nearly half have at least one child (*Returning Home from Iraq and Afghanistan*, 21). Much social activity focuses around military sponsored events and groups (Hail and Farewells, Change of Commands, Wives Clubs, etc.). All these factors lend to a close-knit community that relies primarily on the in-group for support and views the out-group with, if not suspicion, then at least a certain amount of wariness. To ignore this, or to focus on the individual, does criminal disservice and fundamentally misunderstands the function of the military. Researchers hoping to work with this population outside of individualized contexts—treatment either medical or psychological, or in a civilian context such as a classroom or program—must understand both this sense of community and of accountability to the community.

It would be impossible to enumerate all the contributions various rhetorical practices and ways of knowing might contribute to our understanding of veterans' studies. With this in mind, this project has chosen to focus on three rhetorics that best apply to both the practical research and the intellectual and ethical questions of said project: oral history, cultural rhetorics, and narrative theory. Each rhetoric is based primarily upon keystone texts that are further examined in Chapter Two and put into practice in Chapter Three. These rhetorics also blend and overlap, informing one another and the research, while creating a kind of meta-story to this work. In brief, the reasons for choosing these three rhetorics are as follows.

Oral history represents both the (starting point of a) methodology and the methods employed by the practical research. The initial project was a collection of nine oral histories as told by current and former military service members and their spouses. Oral history provided not only the means of research, but also provided frameworks for interpreting said research. While oral history work is often perceived as archival and therefore elitist (Ritchie, 156) it can also serve as a means of preserving and understanding community (Ritchie, 223) through collaboration and restorying.

Culture rhetorics serves as an interpretive and intellectual framework. Powell et al in *Our Story Begins Here* articulate cultural rhetorics as a methodology and practice based on four points—decolonial, story, constellations, and relationality—that serve to move from a singular mainstream rhetoric with "alternatives" to a way of meaning making that takes in "as many stories as possible…[with] a solid understanding of the relationship between those stories." Cultural rhetorics thus provides academic language for understanding and contextualizing what the oral histories had elicited.

Finally, narrative theory broadly contextualizes storytelling and its attendant concerns. (E.g., the use of storyteller for individual and community, the ways and means of storytelling, and the ways in which story can be articulated as a dynamic subject.) By calling attention to the performative reality and communal nature of storytelling (Livo & Rietz, 204), narrative theory makes explicit the connecting and shifting understanding of teller and listener when it comes to storying. It also provides a more explicit link between oral history and cultural rhetorics than might otherwise be articulated.

**Researcher Positionality**

I am a military brat. More specifically an Army brat. The term refers to a child who grows up within the military culture as a result of parents who actively serve in the military. It usually does not apply to the children of reserve members, and almost never applies to children born after a service member has been discharged or retired. Like most identities, it comes with its own built in signifiers and assumptions.

See: military brats are (supposed to be) adaptable, self-sacrificing, disciplined. They know how to dress for Purple Heart ceremonies and they automatically put their hand over their heart for the national anthem. They prioritize the whole above the individual.

And: Army brats punch at least one bully in their lifetime as a rite of passage. They say SNAFU and FUBAR before they know what that means. They do obstacle courses for Family Fun Day. They hug the wrong person's legs at least once as a child because everyone looks the same in camo. They learn what not to say to civilian kids. They mock and prop up the Air Force brats by turns. They protect their own.

I try to articulate all the things that make up this identity but it is one that, for me, is twenty-four years in the making. It's a shared identity, constantly renegotiated, that stands in a

liminal space. Because it's true that I am not a soldier and I have never served in a combat zone. Yet it's also true I am not a civilian either and I never will be. The war found me across oceans and continents and it's made a home beneath my breastbone.

This makes me, like other military brats, an insider/outsider. I am in-group. The weight of shared language, history, and geography ensures this, whether I join a service branch or remain in the civilian world. I am out-group. There are places I've never seen and things I've never experienced because I am not a soldier. Because I will never be a soldier. Because my dad's eyes are haunted the one time I mention joining the military, maybe, one day. Because there are some boundaries of experience I cannot cross.

Due to my in-group status, I approached this project with intrinsic knowledge that would be generally unavailable or difficult to access for the civilian researcher. I am familiar with military vocabulary, social nuances, and the geographical spaces of military bases/posts. Furthermore, I possessed relational connections with people who, by their own admission, would be unavailable to civilian researchers. These are obvious benefits of my positionality.

My status also led to some results that, while positive in the context of this project, by nature cannot be replicated. During the course of interviews, I was at times called upon to recreate stories, an act only possible due to shared life experiences. Similarly, recommendations I make later in the text—as to mutual vulnerability, a sense of accountability, community building—will likely be difficult for civilian researchers to recreate.

## Chapter Two

## Dealing in War Stories

I'm singing a song I've already forgotten the words to. It goes like yellow ribbons on oak trees—or were they maple trees, saplings really, lining a suburban street?—and coming home to a bluesy guitar strain. It's a song off one of my dad's CDs. The ones he bought because repressed nostalgia is about singing these songs while waiting for his father to come home.

My mom stands in the front hall crying. In her hand is her red cellphone, and she says: "You remember Sergeant Wyles? Corey." She doesn't wait for me to answer. It's good because the words are hung in my throat with ribbons like nooses. "He and Cooper died. There was an IED. They're…they're going to ship them both back."

Sometimes they don't ship the dog back. At least that's what I've heard. So it's a thing to be grateful for, that they're shipping the both back, that they won't be alone in that plane. I can't think beyond that because it's not real beyond that.

I make dinner. I write down the reminder for her to call the rear detachment officer about the funeral. I count up the dead: a twenty-two-year old sergeant with a dusty grin, a bomb dog who stole dinner rolls from the mess hall, and a boy who listened to songs on the radio about coming home.

### Defining War Stories

I know what a war story is, intrinsically, but I can never find the words that'll explain it to other people. (Civilian people.) When I try, it comes out like:

A war story is the man in my class who cracks his first genuine smile when I say, "Marines, huh? They like that haircut you got now?" Because we're the only ones in this room, in this building, who're speaking the same language. There's relief in his laugh and later he asks

if he can write about his time in the service. I say yes, of course, no need to ask. So he says that he's just worried, because civilians don't get it, they never do. (I am different. I have been different from the moment I spoke his language.) "I get it," I say, "You'll find a way to make them get it." This might be a lie. We both know that. A war story is watching him for signs of PTSD and cracking jokes about the Chair Force and wondering what might've happened if he ended up in another class.

That is a war story, but it's not a war story in the way that other people understand it. To be a war story, a good one, there needs to be triumph or trauma or both. But those are shaky terms, so they need defining.

In a war story triumph means the Hollywood glamour. It's heroism through sacrifice, and bravery, and honor stripped of its and greyness. In a war story trauma means the individual (anti)hero. It's Post Traumatic Stress Disorder, and dead comrades, and questionable choices made on dusty battlefields. In both, it is the "thankyouforyourservice" that bleeds together.

One might say that a war story happens at the intersection of triumph and trauma. Yet intersections, as noted by Powell et al., "[trap] subjects who are literally held in place, skewered" while obscuring the myriad, shifting relationships that make up storying. The image is a visceral one—pursuit of a war story, of a definable point and meaning, pins the participant down. Makes their boundaries legible while ignoring the human cost. This intersection is a fairly recent invention, one that owes much to historical narratives of war and to the modern conceptions of the War on Terror.

*Historical*

Discussing war stories, or at least contemporary American conceptions of such, requires some historicizing. Wars carry with them an overarching narrative—of failure, of success, of

forgetting—that overshadows any single individual story. How wars are narrated and storied effects the broader culture, and vice versa, leading to the necessity of context. When speaking of the contemporary War on Terror, veterans' studies, etc., there are two wars that provide the most expedient lens by which to examine historical war stories. World War II and Vietnam are in many ways the defining American wars of the 20th century in terms of continuing cultural impact. Both wars had a definitive hand in shaping the field of veterans' studies, in large part due to the fact that they represented opposite ends of the triumph/trauma narrative.

Veterans' studies, or at least the precursors of it, began in the wake of World War II. Works such as Studs Terkel's *The Good War* and Paul Fussell's *Wartime* blended the academic lines. The questions they had—about what two world wars in scarcely two decades could mean, about what was owed to the dead and to the living, about what it meant to live through hell and come home—couldn't be answered by standard modes. Later, in the wake of the Vietnam War, veterans' studies gained another academic jolt. Around this time came the heavy focus upon medical and psychological approaches in clear response to the shattered psyches and bodies of those returning. While these wars shaped the field, they also shaped the American cultural idea of what it meant to tell war stories.

Paul Fussell wrote in *Wartime* that the veterans of World War II struggled with the "Norman Rockwell'ing" of their experiences. It was a process by which the country placed a shiny, heroic patina over returning service members without allowing them the darkness they'd faced. This conceit of the "good war" pushed a narrative of triumph that often conflicted with soldiers' lived experiences. Giving stories contrary to the narrative of a just war won rarely had the desired impact. Despite this divergence coming to light over time, particularly as more veterans shared their stories with oral historians and the like, the narrative had already been set.

WWII remains valorized in the cultural canon—the recent critical success of brutal but triumphant war movie *Hacksaw Ridge*, about a heroic medic who earned the Medal of Honor during WWII, attests to that much.

Tim O'Brien wrote in *The Things They Carried* that the veterans of Vietnam struggled with the fact that no war story allows for "some small bit of rectitude [that] has been salvaged from the larger waste." This time around, the country would not allow for their soldiers to feel anything but the grief and the madness. Focusing on trauma reinforced the distance between returning soldiers and the civilian populace, even as veterans found themselves shuffled into a critically underfunded Veterans' Affairs office to deal with said trauma. Writing of the era reflects the sense that any kind of "accomplishment" on an individual level—beyond sheer survival—could not be acknowledged or placed onto the larger tapestry of the war. General sentiment seems to have softened in the intervening years, but interestingly the frame of trauma remains. Veterans of Vietnam are now all too often objects of pity.

Certain factors affected the narrative created around each of these wars. WWII was just. Vietnam was not. WWII ended in a resounding victory for the US on all fronts. Vietnam did not. But the wars shared similarities that often go unacknowledged. The draft was used in both wars. Nonetheless, WWII was marked by "patriotic volunteerism". Vietnam was marked by "draft dodgers". The narrative frame is so complete, so overwhelming, that it's easy to forget that the situations were vastly more complicated than the history books would suggest.

These historical war stories continue to shape our modern American ideals of war. There's a sense of hunger for the glory of a war to make the world better, and a sense of horror at what war can do to both soldiers and civilians, and an understanding of what it means to see both of those writ large on the cultural conscience.

*Contemporary*

Gaining a broad contemporary understanding of American war stories is, in some ways, less straightforward than historicizing. In large part this has to do with immediacy—the war is still not over, though certain engagements are, and thus we are continually reinventing what exactly the narrative of this war is. It also has to do with the sheer length of the war which led to a shift in which mediums are used to codify it. Thus, the below is an attempt to contextualize the modern American war story while acknowledging its' gaps and unknowable.

The "War on Terror"—here defined as the engagements of Afghanistan and Iraq since 2001 and 2003, respectively, though acknowledging that other engagements have resulted and fallen under the same umbrella—has been going on for nearly sixteen years. It's considered an ongoing engagement, despite troop "rollbacks" in 2014, and one that seems unlikely to end anytime soon. The early days were marked by fervent national support verging on the jingoistic. By the time the Surge began in 2007, it had slipped from the front page of the news to somewhere around page five. And in 2017, many have forgotten that we are still engaged in an active war.

In many ways, the war's length makes it feel both inevitable and inescapable. One enemy defeated only for another to take its place. No amount of money, weaponry, or boots on the ground able to end a war with increasingly unclear goals. Narratives of patriotism and honor have given way to narratives of isolation and damage. Thus the War on Terror has established itself as a transitional war. Unlike WWII, forever pristine in its triumph; and unlike Vietnam, forever damned in its trauma.

The transition is mirrored by the media surrounding the war's narrative. News outlets dominated the early portions: Presidential press releases and videos of cheering Iraqis as the

statue of Sadam Hussein toppled. As the war dragged, general public support for and interest died out. In response, new outlets found new stories. Journalists who retained interest began to write long form works (notably Stephen Junger's *War* and David Finkel's *The Good Soldiers*) and thus the onus for representation shifted into the (non)fictional sphere.

In keeping with this cultural shift, I choose to make an explicit rhetorical move of following that larger cultural shift. Given the chronological distance between the early days and when I write, it would be impossible to discuss contemporary views of war stories without acknowledging that the fictional stories have overpowered the factual ones. Discussions of the fictional accounts can generally parsed into three kinds, outlined below.

First, the triumphant. American soldiers (explicitly identified as such) play the heroes in a number of modern films. Some, such as the Transformers film series, position the soldiers as combatants in a war in the Middle East without specifically stating their involvement in the War on Terror. It's worth noting that the Transformers series, like its ilk Battleship and Independence Day: Resurgence, rely on battling an alien menace and other fantastical foes. Attention is carefully drawn away from real life conflicts. Others, such as the Nicholas Sparks' novels *The Lucky Ones* and *Dear John*, situate the soldiers within the War on Terror. These narratives make explicit ideas of patriotism, service to a higher ideal, and honor. Soldier protagonists may be traumatized by their experiences, but upon their return home they are able to recover from that trauma and embody the romantic lead with relative ease. They codify the appropriate triumph narratives: palatable and complete with a happy ending for the audience.

Second, the traumatic. While trauma has made its way into theaters by way of movies such as *The Hurt Locker*, it is most often reflected in literature. Beginning in roughly 2009, there was a marked surge in war literature based on the War on Terror. Books such as *Redeployment*

by Phil Klay and *Billy Lynn's Long Halftime Walk* by Ben Fountain, and *The Yellow Birds* by Kevin Powers received broad critical acclaim. *Redeployment* won the National Book Award, while both *Billy Lynn* and *The Yellow Birds* were finalists for the same. These books, and their kin, were written primarily by military veterans and sold on "authenticity" that blurs lines between fiction and nonfiction.

Most deal with individualism in the midst of war—with the isolation and damage that has so come to define the War on Terror. Specifically, these works reinforce the idea of damaged individualism, wherein the lone anti-hero struggles to come to terms with the war. In most cases, they lack any kind of support system or else suffer within a broken system. Many end without resolution. If anything is salvaged, it only serves to underscore that the individual must overcome their trauma on their own. In effect, it advocates for bootstrap mental health, suggesting that the chasm between the damaged individual and the rest of the world can only be overcome by some innate strength of character. Notably, all the works listed above involve protagonists who fail to overcome that chasm and thus are left to uncertain fates.

While the reality for many modern veterans, it's also the only narrative rewarded and pushed forward by the explicitly civilian world. Awards are given for trauma, money is given for triumph, and recognition is given to those who best emulate the set model. Consistently holding up these narratives as the "most authentic" leaves no room for alternate (healthier) stories.

Third, more nuanced portrayals. It can be difficult to find these, as all too often hidden they fail to achieve mainstream commercial or critical success. Nonetheless, they usually do well among military and military adjacent populations. Novels such as *I'll Meet You There* by Heather Demetrios and short story collections like *You Know When the Men are Gone* by Siobhan Fallon break away from the duality of triumph/trauma. Their works emphasize

community and mutual vulnerability. They acknowledge the terrible along with the great. The success of their work among military populations suggest very real spaces of lived experience that has not yet been acknowledged or dealt with by the mainstream.

In many ways, the third category serves mostly to underscore the problems of the second. Current frames for war stories exploit the pain and separation experienced by the military for entertainment value. It functions off an unsustainable and unethical model that seeks the sensational at the expense of the compassionate.

**Current Frameworks**

Veterans' studies relates directly to military or military adjacent populations. In the majority of cases, perhaps due to access, this tends to be restricted to veteran populations. (Thus the name of the field.) As with many other 'studies', veterans' studies is less an independent discipline and more an interdisciplinary made up of other interdisciplinaries.

As discussed in Chapter One, medical and psychological texts make up the vast majority of the currently available body of work. Journalism, oral history, journalism, and other related fields make up the rest. It shares significant overlap with similar 'studies' including trauma studies and warfare studies.

Though the field has been around in one form or another since the 1950s, it's gained particular traction since 9/11. Recent developments to the field include minors in veterans' studies offered at Eastern Kentucky University and University of Missouri St. Louis, the National Center for Veterans' Studies at the University of Utah, and the inaugural issue of the Journal of Veterans' Studies.

Given the breadth of disciplines that contribute to the field, I'll address only two here, oral history and rhetoric/composition. Oral history's relevance to the topic at hand is obvious,

and it's worthwhile to elaborate upon the ways that oral history and veterans' studies have informed one another. Rhet/comp, meanwhile, represents the majority of rhetorics contribution to veterans' studies and thus requires some examination.

*Oral History*

Despite the relative historical importance of oral history to veterans' studies, it shows up far less frequently and less accessibly than other, more recent disciplines. Part of this is the intensely archival bent of oral history, which led Donald Ritchie in his seminal work *Doing Oral History* to note that in America, at least, oral history was deeply shaped by library archives associated with universities. These early archives were general collections, for posterity and for prominence, that were almost entirely inaccessible to anyone not associated with the university. Even as the field as a whole has experienced as shift, oral history has "remained closely associated with archives." (156) However, oral historians also initially chose to focus on people of political, economic, or societal importance. This only changed with the success of oral historians such as Studs Terkel (of *The Good War*) and Alex Haley (of *Roots*) who chose instead to "[write] history 'from the bottom up'" (23). Nowadays oral histories—and the archival work they often perform—focus on more general life histories and, meant for generalized historical research, rarely require importance from their participants.

Despite the shift in participants and the broadening of subject matter, the fact that oral histories were originally meant for archives and therefore for archival work remains evident in how the histories are presented. Or rather, not presented. There's a noted preference in scholars for reading transcripts rather than listening to recordings (Ritchie, 64). This is unsurprising in a landscape that continues to value alphabetic texts above other mediums. However, this can prove troubling when it comes to moving outside the archive.

Community projects, such as Ritchie references, often focus on piecing together an overarching narrative of the community in question. This may focus around a particular time period, event, or other cultural marker. Other tangentially related histories are often deprioritized, if included at all, in favor of creating a more holistic view. Collected histories are then further edited and curated for presentation. Doing so mediates the experience for an audience. It cuts through the many banalities that can result from oral history's approach, but it also tends to bring up questions of inclusion and motivation. Both historians and the communities they work with constantly (re)mediate the work (Ritchie, 157), seeking to tell the appropriate story.

In the case of working with military populations, this can often result in the kinds of war stories outlined earlier in this chapter. Digital archives of the Library of Congress such as *Experiencing War: The Global War on Terror* feature numerous oral histories, memoirs, and other digital memorabilia in a loosely defined and collected project. Among those featured prominently are stories of the combat zone and links to other archives on World War II and Vietnam. It is presented as a holistic look at the War on Terror, yet each interview has been cut for time and content, often without explicit reasons why. Listening through the archive, I found many war stories in isolation, left to stand testament in a way that seems purposeless. This is not to suggest that the archive does not accomplish important work. It records life, or at least some partiality thereof, for many veterans. Yet it also works as a testament to the kinds of available archives oral history currently works within. Places where stories are kept but not practiced.

Oral history brings valuable dynamics to the table. Focusing on the individual's story, or even the community's story, allows for a less predetermined approach. Questions may be designed to elicit particular ideas, but the (unedited) history itself allows for unique perspectives

that elude more mainstream research methods. Furthermore, valuing the story as it is—rather than as it could be—allows for a sense of mutual storying.

*Rhetoric/Composition*

Current work by rhet/comp in the field of veterans' studies remains decidedly lacking. It appears in special issues, such as the Special Issue on Veterans' Writing in *Reflections*; or as part of the ensemble in the Journal of Veterans' Studies. (Both of which, interestingly enough, were published in late 2016.) In both cases, its' impact remains restrained to composition classrooms and their ilk.

Work focusing on better transitioning veterans into first year writing classrooms, or making instructors more 'veteran friendly' (whatever that means), or starting writing programs that allow veterans to write through their experiences in a supportive environment. Rhet/comp focuses near exclusively on the veteran population of the War on Terror. I had imagined this would lead to the same confusing mish-mash of trauma/triumph that plagues the overall narrative of the War on Terror. It does not.

Rather, the rhet/comp approach focuses almost exclusively upon the idea of trauma. The featured article—which was actually a poem, unattached to any kind of rhetorical analysis or other essay component—in the *Reflections* special issue was "Heart of the Enemy" by Jenny Pacanowski. The poem discusses the line between viewing children in a combat situation as children or enemies. Though it was by far the most blatant example of trauma as narrative, it was not alone. Other articles included writing as a way of bearing witness (to trauma) in Karen Springsteen's "Veterans' Writing and the Rhetoric of Witnessing" and writing through (traumatic) spinal cord injuries in Mapes & Hartley's "Re-Authoring Narratives: Reflective

Writing with Veterans with Spinal Chord Injury". This pattern was also reflected by the work in the *Journal of Veterans' Studies*.

Again, it's important to note the impactful work being done in these texts. They relate a vital idea of attempting to bridge between civilian and veteran spheres of influence in one of the few places they can: a composition classroom. I see that vitality when I think of the Marine in my class, the trauma he inscribed on the page, and the ways in which that text worked within the classroom space. It's a war story and it's worth contemplating.

But it is not the only war story, and rhetoric(s) on the whole has much more to offer alongside composition classrooms. It is with this in mind that I move on to my own research and the ways rhetoric(s) were employed in the quest to find a new kind of war story.

## Chapter Three

## Working Through War Stories

Let me tell you a story.

I am fourteen. My dad and I are at the hospital on Elmendorf. (The Air Force base. This was back before it became a joint base with the nearby Army post to conserve resources.) We pick up my mother's thyroid medicine in the last errand of the day. It has been a very long day. (My dad drives around potholes with manic intensity.)

We walk out the doors at the back of the hospital by the ER. The back is where all but ten of the parking spots are handicapped. (Because this is still after the first deployment.) There's a man near the doors and he drags along a prosthetic leg that fits wrong.

I don't know him. My dad does. They talk. My dad asks where he's going. ("P.T., sir. Hoping they'll refit the leg while they're at it.") The man thanks my dad. We leave.

As we walk toward the truck, to drive home (around potholes) with my mother's medicine, my dad tells me a story. He tells me about sitting in the middle of a firefight, holding a man's leg together with sand streaked hands and sheer force of will, waiting for the helicopters. He tells me about the others in the squad who formed a ring around them to return fire. He tells me about how two of the men died on a later patrol. He tells me about how lucky he felt to save the man. He tells me about how he thought he'd never scrub the blood out from under his fingernails. My dad never tells this story again.

I never know how to tell this story.

### Methodology

In conceiving of my thesis research as an oral history project I also took on the methodological frame of oral history. This frame emphasizes a sense of duty toward both the

person being interviewed and the person who may one day access the history. It focuses on the mundanity and greatness of ordinary individuals. And, as my oral history mentor Jeffery Charnley said in reference to consent forms, "We call it a Deed of Gift because it's something they are *giving* the field."

It can be difficult to articulate any strong particulars of what makes up the methodology, likely because so much of it is invested not in theory but in practice. I find myself focusing on those moments of minutiae such as the Deed of Gift form in all its implications. Am I reading in too much if I say that it represents an explicit positioning of the participant's life experience as inherently valuable? That this, on some level, suggests that a story is worthwhile in and of itself? Or to say that oral history makes a deliberate rhetorical move in this moment to ask permission to tell that story over, to make something of it, to constellate it within other stories? On one level this is a necessary part of the paperwork that goes into oral history. No more notable than audio-recording equipment or notes taken prior to the interview. Yet the positionality behind its function implies a worldview that feels deliberately relational.

Articulating this methodology outside of these specific moments requires a set of language that seems unavailable within oral history itself. Thus I turned to cultural rhetorics and narrative theory in order to better express the methodological concerns in the research. In turn, using the language and concepts of cultural rhetorics and narrative theory led to a blending and blurring of the methodology itself.

Because of this complicating, I choose to approach the methodology by its themes rather than by parsing out each rhetoric in turn. In doing so I acknowledge the ways in which these rhetorics inform one another and constantly remap against and with each other. The below

represent the foremost concerns of this work and the ways in which the methodology shapes and answers those concerns.

*Narrative & Trauma*

Throughout this work I've been telling stories. Some of them are my stories, and some of them are someone else's stories, and some of them belong to both or either or all. These are stories I've told before. These are stories I've never told. I never had to buy in to the idea that stories are all we are, as Thomas King says, because I'd always already known that. More than that, I believed it. I still believe it. Storytelling is not simply an act of memory for me, contrary to Ritchie's assertions (19), but rather an act of community. Each time I tell these stories I give them out into the world in hopes that this time they will—

What? And there is the drop that comes with telling war stories. What purpose do they serve and why tell them? In Chapter Two I suggested that a war story happens at the intersection of triumph and trauma. Powell et al. suggest that intersections can result in a kind of butterfly on the pin board skewering. As with Thomas King, I know this implicitly and they give language with which to discuss it.

But first I must step back. Let us examine that intersection and the ways in which that pinning becomes horrifically explicit. Stephen Junger, a journalist considered one of the premiere voices regarding the War on Terror, writes in *Tribe: On Homecoming and Belonging* that the struggle faced by modern veterans is a lack of understanding among the civilian populace. More specifically, he suggests that this lack of understanding stems from the intensely tribal nature of the military and the intensely individualistic nature of modern American society. (I may step in here to say that I can agree with his assessment of the military, at least, which does focus on the in-group with a ferocious loyalty.) There's a fundamental disconnect, he implies,

between the intrinsic values of military populations and the extrinsic values of civilian populations (28). In order to illustrate this concept, he uses Native American tribes as examples of the violent but idealized (and singular) culture that best represents such a 'tribal' mindset. There's a story being told here—about war, about homecoming, about soldiers—that tries to step outside the Western mode while rigorously confirming the Western mode.

Let's go a step further. David Finkel's *Thank You For Your Service* spends the first chapter telling the story of a soldier who struggles with extreme Post Traumatic Stress Disorder. So does the second. And the third. It chronicles relationships breaking apart. People breaking apart. The impartial outside observer witnesses. No amount of impartiality stops the gut drop moment where a soldier, just returned home and seeing "a chance at absolution" in his wife, instead finding himself greeted by a bereaved widow desperate to know how her husband died (21). Triumph gives way to trauma.

If the examples provided by Finkel are the pain that comes from trying to pin down a war story, then Junger is the pain that comes from trying to justify that pinning. Cultural rhetorics provides a welcome alternative at this point. Instead of intersections they talk of constellations.

To constellate means allowing both practices and relationships to matter, and to allow "those relationships…to shift and change without holding a subject captive" (Powell et al.) It's a lovely image—star-stories thrown up into the firmament, mapping points drawn and redrawn, shifting understandings as constellations migrate. Though not made explicit by their text, it lends nicely into narrative theory's understandings of the ways in which storytelling leads to a kind of back and forth between storyteller and audience. After all, within a single story a person may hold many roles.

Furthermore, constellation allows on some level for compensating for trauma. Ringle & Brandell discuss the difficulty of telling traumatic stories in *Trauma: Contemporary Directions in Theory, Practice, and Research*. Beyond any number of reluctances to share their story, those who have experience trauma often have difficulty articulating that trauma due to issues of memory and of language. They cannot create a coherent, linear narrative of the traumatic event. (Or, indeed, anything surrounding the trauma.) This is obviously not uniformly true, but it is true often enough that constellating becomes a useful point of methodological reference. Rather than insisting on a singular truth that can be reiterated again and again, one can focus on the ways in which storying might change in response to trauma and to find rhetorical meaning in those changes. Doing so would allow for a more nuanced understanding of the ways in which narrative contributes to the sharing of war stories.

*Family & Relationality*

Given that the population I interviewed is made up of people I've already established relationships with, it didn't come as a surprise that many of them relied on me to supply certain intangibles about their experience. This went beyond the expected provisions of translating their terminology or helping to remind them of dates. Instead, there was a frequent expectation for a kind of call and response.

This pattern only became clear to me once I talked to veterans whom I did not interview but did discuss my research with. I was still familiar with many of these people. Yet not so close that it would be immediately expected that they would turn to reminiscing. Instead, the call and response took on a more generalized air. It was dependent on holistic experiences of the military. Remembering 9/11, remembering the first deployment, remembering all the gossip always winding its way around the base.

In essence, I often found that they expected me to help fill their stories with those of my own. This pattern can be found in the recordings. A rhythm of "you know" and "you remember" and "you were there." There, it's somewhat toned down, a function of performing differently while recording for posterity. Yet in both pre and post recording discussions, those interjections and calls for shared stories became more frequent. It was, in some senses, an exchange of scars as much as stories.

As I continued to collect the oral histories, this sensibility of mutual vulnerability became an intrinsic part of the methodology. Even as I say this, I acknowledge it would be extremely difficult (if not impossible) for a civilian researcher to emulate. Civilian researchers seeking to perform this kind of call and response would need the assistance of people "in the gap." By this, I mean family members (whether spouses or grown children) and other intermediaries (including veterans themselves) who can fill this space.

**Methods**

While the above methodology may lend itself to a number of potential methods in application, I have thus far employed only two. This is primarily due to time constraints and the shape of the project here analyzed.

The project itself is a collection of oral histories as related by current service members, veterans, and family members. Participants were drawn initially from my own family and friends with plans of expanding the participant pool in later incarnations of the project. As a starting point, my own relations proved an ideal starting point. The participants had shared histories and life experiences, not only with myself, but with one another. This emphasized something I had already known but which had been rarely acknowledged in the literature. Namely, that "war stories" are more often community stories, with a shared burden of remembrance. While this

could be replicated with more participants who share less direct connections, this would have required more time and resources than were available.

*Histories*

Oral histories were conducted—from initial contact to completed sign off—over the course of roughly a year (April 2015 to March 2016). Ten people were asked to participate. Nine were able to participate within the above timeframe, with the last being postponed for a later date in light of deployments. Unsurprisingly, given the length of time, this method underwent the most change from planning to execution.

Initially, I intended to perform two to three interviews with each person. The interviews would take place over the course of one to two weeks. I also intended for all of these interviews to happen in person. Much of this ended up being unfeasible or unnecessary.

While each oral history came with its own contextual nuances, a pattern developed. Participants were contacted in person. We would often have discussions later (usually in person) about the project and its' purposes. These discussions were informal, unrecorded, and meant to assess the general comfort levels of participants. Prior to conducting the oral history, participants were given an Informed Consent document and an opportunity to ask questions.

The oral histories themselves were scheduled to last thirty to forty minutes. The vast majority ended up falling slightly short of this—around twenty to twenty-five minutes. Seven of the interviews were conducted over the phone. The remaining two, which include the one analyzed for the purpose of this thesis, were done in person. Each history followed a similar format. Participants were asked to introduce themselves with their name, date of birth, and connection to the military. This was followed by six standard questions and follow up questions as needed.

This method reflects a particular sensibility cultivated mostly from Donald Ritchie's *Doing Oral History* and conforms with current best practices in oral history. However, it also makes use of Irving Seidman's *Interviewing as Qualitative Research*. In response to the issues of a straight oral history approach, as outlined in Chapter Two, I chose to combine techniques from both oral history and phased interviewing in order to reflect the complex nature of the stories collected. From Ritchie comes the assurance of treating a participant's story of a worth end in-and-of-itself, as well as an openness to tangential stories that don't necessarily reflect the exact goals of the researcher. From Seidman comes the concept of a whole life approach (as opposed to focusing on a particular, defined era and/or event). In ideal circumstances, the method would also reflect Seidman's conceit of conducting multiple interviews that each serve a different rhetorical purpose and allow the participant to become comfortable with recording.

*Transcripts*

After the oral histories had been collected via audio-recording they were transcribed for posterity. While it can be argued that transcription is merely another step in the collecting of histories, I view them as a distinct (if not entirely separate) method, given that transcription comes weighted with conscious (and unconscious) rhetorical choices on the part of the transcriber.

Ritchie says as much in *Doing Oral History*, pointing out that "[e]ven the most slavishly verbatim transcript is just an interpretation of the tape" (66) and that "transcribers might handle the same material in different ways, including punctuation, capitalization, false starts, broken sentences, and verbal obstacles to presenting spoken words in print" (67). Thus, there's something of an admitted art to transcribing interviews.

Thus far I have done my own transcription of the histories. In doing so, I chose to follow best practices for transcription as stated by the Oral History Association. This included formatting and ways of transcribing noises such as laughter. Even so, I made deliberate choices that went beyond best practices. Some were questions of research ethics. I have redacted certain information available in the original recording, such as identifying information of people who had not consented to be recorded. Others were stylistic. I made use of ellipses, generally considered unnecessary, to distinguish between sentences which trail off and those that are cut off. If the more general format denotes oral history, than the particulars reveal deliberate choices.

Perhaps the most important choice made in the piece was the inclusion of annotations. These were initially meant only to make visible and intelligible the linguistic quirks unique to military speech. However, the more I transcribed, the more I realized that it wasn't simply a case of acronyms or slang. Therefore, transcript annotations include historical events, clarifications on dates, descriptions of daily military life and work.

**Case Study**

The methodology and methods described above have been applied in the course of an ongoing oral history project. In order to discuss the results thus far, I chose an oral history that seems most indicative of overall patterns, and analyzed it. I chose to focus on context (the history itself), connections (how it related to other stories), and end with some conclusions about the implications of these patterns.

The chosen history is that of Edward Scott Martin, my father and an Army veteran who served fifteen months in Iraq during the 2007 Surge, whose story embodies the inherent contradictions I stumbled across repeatedly in my work. While I discuss portions of the history in

detail below, the history was over an hour long when recorded, making analysis of the complete work difficult. Readers may access the full transcript in the Appendix.

There are some logical reasons behind choosing my father, my *dad*, to be representative of the project as a whole. His oral history is the longest by a substantial margin (almost thirty minutes), and as part of this includes a level of detail and story throughout that marks it as a particularly rich site of analysis. Due to the circumstances of the interview the audio quality of his oral history is better and therefore the transcript reflects a more accurate reading of it. The stories he tells negotiate boundaries between what's already reflected within the literature of the field and what has yet to be explored, opening a space in which to discuss how those boundaries are navigated.

And yet I confess. I did not choose my dad's story as representative for those reasons. I chose it because in so many ways his story is my story. My war stories, the scars I carry and hoard and share, are a direct result of his war stories. It feels sometimes like I will never get the war out of my marrow and perhaps in some ways that's a bond we share. I began this project because I wanted to understand him and understand myself.

*Contexts*

We decide to do the oral history on March 10th, 2017. I'm on vacation with my parents for spring break. It's a sunny day in Hawai'i and we're meant to go to the beach later that day. I've written down what needs to be included into the introduction and nudge it across the glass-topped dining table. "Any questions?" I ask, for what feels like the twelfth time but is probably only the third.

I'd also interviewed my mom this morning. Normally that would've forced me to slip into the skin of researcher, historian, rhetorician instead of daughter. It did, but only for the

twenty minutes it took to collect my mother's history. Now I'm back to jitters. I wonder if I have a right to do this. I wonder if I can do this justice. I wonder if—

"No," he says. "We're good."

So it begins. The recording is one hour, twelve minutes, and four seconds long. In it, I ask the six standard questions.

1. What did you know about the military prior to joining?
2. What expectations did you have?
3. What surprised you?
4. What was the best part of military life?
5. What was the worst part?
6. What's one memory that's stuck with you?

The follow up questions come in the heat of the moment. They are clarifications, most of the time, but sometimes they pursue half-finished stories. My jitters smooth into professionalism.

I have interviewed three people so far and I think I know what to expect. I don't. There's a theatricality to his history that the others have lacked. It doesn't strip the authenticity, as some would assume, but rather emphasizes it. There are jokes, references, and callbacks; and I laugh. I am audience as much as researcher. I am witness more than I am audience or researcher.

I don't expect war stories. But that lack of expectation is manifold. The construction of my questions avoids those most often used to elicit either triumph or trauma. No one I've interviewed thus far has offered up the traditional narratives of battlefields. And this is my dad. We're on nebulous ground. My position as his daughter allows me access another researcher would lack. My position as his daughter disallows me access to things he may want to shield me from. We stand in this liminal space.

*Connections*

Around the fifty-minute mark of the recording, he begins to talk about coming home on mid-tour leave. Like most people recounting history, he's woven in and out of past tense, telling some stories as though they're immediate and others as though they've long past. (Memory is tricky that way.) But for the first time, the narrative slips entirely into present tense. Something clamps around my lower spine, nerves or just worry, even though we've already gone through IEDs and the loss of soldiers. How hard could an airport be?

(Very hard.)

This story takes place in the Dallas Fort Worth Airport, sometime in June. When returning on mid-tour leave, soldiers fly commercial airlines, and thus go through airports both friendly and unfriendly in uniform. Some airports, particularly when dealing with cohesive groups of soldiers going out on deployment, will block off entire terminals for the use of soldiers. This airport did not. As a result, he and the others on mid-tour had to go through a group of people who'd come to greet them.

Here, I take a step back. It's important to note that I'm what one might call an "engaged" interviewer. I frequently make nonverbal noises, encouraging or questioning or simply proof of continued active listening, that show up in the recording to various degrees. Most often these noises do not make it into the transcript—they're already half lost, more of an echo of the idea that in this moment I was nodding or tilting my head or widening my eyes. Engaging. But there are, of course, times where my varied tones of "mhm" came through loudly, clearly, in the pauses. They served actual function there, however difficult it is to define, and so I made them explicit within the transcript.

It's with both these concepts—that of moving into the present, and that of explicit engagement—in mind that one must work with the text. Preceding the below is a block of time (roughly two minutes), where he had spoken uninterrupted and with very little pause. At this point, however, he begins the transition from the more straightforward manner of earlier into the present tense, interaction heavy manner of storytelling.

SCOTT MARTIN: We had to go through a *gauntlet*. An absolute *gauntlet* of people. And it was *scary*. It was *frightening*. Remember, crowds in combat equals target equals death.

BETH MARTIN: Mhm.

SCOTT MARTIN: No crowd.

BETH MARITN: Mhm.

SCOTT MARTIN: No people.

BETH MARTIN: Mhm.

SCOTT MARTIN: Any time you see a crowd of Iraqis, one of them has an AK-47. And he wants to kill you. You hate crowds. You don't go into crowds. Crowds are where suicide bombers click their button and blow everybody up. Stay away from crowds.

BETH MARTIN: Mhm.

During this particular exchange, there's a roughly two second pause between each "call" (his speech) and "response" (my speech) that emphasizes the expectation of the pattern. The tension is clear, even within the transcript, particularly when compared to another exchange only a minute later. This exchange was notable less for call and response, and more because it took place entirely in a whisper.

SCOTT MARTIN: So I go into the USO and it's *filled* with soldiers. And you know what? It's quiet. It's so quiet you could hear a pin drop. People are talking in whispers. [five second pause] This is where I'm comfortable.

BETH MARTIN: Mhm.

SCOTT MARTIN: It's like a… [exhales] Weird. Yeah. This is where I need to be. Because it was too overwhelming. The sensory overload was *beyond*...

BETH MARTIN: Mhm.

SCOTT MARTIN: Beyond description. But to go in there and for it to be quiet. Just deathly quiet. Everyone talking in a whisper. But that's when we knew that we all got it. [laughs]

BETH MARTIN: Mhm.

In the moment, I file away a thought. The thought goes something like: is there not trauma in coming home and seeing threats on the faces of every civilian? Why don't we talk about that? What does it mean to talk about that? In the moment, I murmur another "mhm" and the story moves on.

Wait, I need to tell you another story. This story is my mom's. It takes place on the same day at nearly the same time. (Give or take a half hour.) But she's in Alaska. She knows he's coming home soon, a 48-hour window, and she's mowing the lawn in preparation. The cell rings. It's my dad. He's in the Dallas Fort Worth Airport. There's a good layover, he'll be home soon, things were hard at the airport. There, on the front lawn, she starts to cry. Because it's real. Finally, finally after so many months, he's stateside and that means something. It means safety. It means the hurry up and wait is over. It means she has only a few hours to finish mowing the lawn and get everything ready.

Wait, I need to tell you still another story. This story is my own. It takes place on the same day at nearly the same time and in the same place. I'm reading something so generic that I can no longer remember it while the dogs bark at the sound of the lawn mower. In the back of my mind I wonder why she's bothering with the grass. Dad won't care. I fidget with my

bedspread, yell at the dogs to please be quiet, and then realize the lawn mower has been shut off. I assume she's talking with a neighbor. Nothing feels entirely real, least of all that my dad's coming home, and I'm that same dizzying excitement of a kid about to go to Disney World for the very first time.

Wait, I need to tell you just one more story. This one belongs to all of us. Same day, different time. We're in the Anchorage airport. My dad's the last off the plane. Somehow he's at the gate and then he's right there. We hug, tangled up, and it's an echo of the night he left. No one knows who started crying first, or if they do they've never said, and sometimes I still ache for that moment before any of it felt real.

I began this project on the assumption that each story was a singular point that connected to other singular points. But now I think of this story told four times and how each is true and how each builds toward…something. Something I cannot quite articulate yet because I still haven't quite found the language for it.

Here are things I can say. Every woman I interviewed cried at least once. But it wasn't about the hardships, or the long nights spent praying, or the breaths held when the chaplain's car drove past. It was the homecomings. Every man I interviewed complained about the paperwork. They also talked about the people they'd met, the good they'd done, the demons they'd conquered. Every person I talked to gave me a narrative that would never play well on the big Hollywood screen because it was too mundane, too complex, too *something*. I began to think of what it means to come together, at the end of it all, and tell a new story.

*Conclusions*

The oral histories collected, including the above, provide ideas antithetical to "war stories." While trauma and triumph are included, other themes are both more common and more

focused upon. I heard very little of firefights, but I heard much of: connection, family, bureaucracy, humor, purpose, honor, waiting, endurance. These are things that don't quite fit within the mold currently presented by both mainstream culture and by research.

It remains a distinct problem if so much of what makes up military life—and thus experience of war—remains unspoken. Failure to access or appreciate these stories will lead to incomplete research that fails to have the desired impact on the relevant populations. That my research led me so far off the beaten path is both exhilarating and terrifying. I'm reminded of Chapter Two, in discovering that nuanced portrayals were perhaps the closest to 'real life' and yet received the least amount of attention.

I find myself thinking of the warnings. Of King, who says "you have to be careful with the stories you tell" (10). Of Powell et al., who reminds, "those stories belong to people" and "research is about people…it can save and destroy lives". Of all the ways in which I find myself responsible for the story I tell.

## Chapter Four

## At the End of a War Story

When people ask what it's like, being a military brat, I think of being in the paint section of a WalMart when I learn my dad's going to war. I think of how at Purple Heart ceremonies you go down a receiving line like a funeral for all the people who didn't make it. I think of Jane Austen, and battle buddies, and trying to fit one more bag of cookies into a Flat Rate box. I think of my mom swearing at a microwave that broke down the day after my dad shipped out for a warzone. I think fireworks going off and hands reaching to shield me from a blast that's not coming. I think of how strange it is that I ask for war stories when I already know too many.

And mostly, I think of how impossible it is to tell the story people want to hear.

### Reaching a Beginning

I began this thesis with definition of a "war story". The term is malleable and ever-evolving. It haunts the entire enterprise of veterans' studies. Despite writing a thesis on it, I still have yet to discover a truly succinct way to sum of a war story. Perhaps the best definition remains that a war story is the intersection between triumph and trauma.

But rather than work through again what a war story is, I would like to discuss what it might mean to be "at the end of a war story." That term originates from Tim O'Brien's *The Things They Carried*, and there he uses it to chastise the idea that any good may ever come out of war. It's implied, and then stated, that there can be no salvaging one's soul from the wreckage of a war. Here, I seek to redefine it.

It doesn't mean being at the end of a war. Redeployment is common and there's no definitive end in sight for the overall War on Terror. It also doesn't mean being at the end of war

stories. There's a reason that the Epic has remained a staple of Western literature since time immemorial. Rather, it means to come into a space that deals in homecoming and community.

At the end of a war story embraces the complexities and paradoxes that make up the modern American military. It examines what it means to come home. It acknowledges that these things are all too often unknowns. It is, in essence, what comes *after*.

Making the move from "war story" to "at the end of a war story" requires much. Over the course of this thesis, I've sought to clarify why current war stories fail and to suggest how we might approach being at the end of a war story. Doing so has required far too many attempts to define the ineffable. To this end, I must admit that this work on its own offers more in the way of questions than answers.

Further research, of all kinds, remains a necessity. Reaching out to not only veteran populations, but to current service members, to families, and to the community as a whole is vital in reconfiguring the framework. Most importantly, I would urge further research focused upon those who've come back from war and done well. Discovering what went right is vital and has the potential for far-reaching consequences.

To this end I would outline my own future work on this project. I plan to continue collecting oral histories and to place these histories into a digital archive. The archive's purpose would not be simply to contain, but to serve as a site for community building and outreach. Similar archives, such as the *It Gets Better* project, have successfully modeled the ways in which this can be accomplished.

Ideally, these kinds of community spaces would allow not only for further connection within the military, but for connection between military and civilian spheres. In making legible the lives of military and military adjacent populations, we may begin to emphasize the need for

civilians to reach out in ways more meaningful than “thankyouforyourservice” and give them the tools to do so. Phil Klay, award winning short storyist and essayist, writes in *The Citizen-Soldier* that, “No civilian can assume the moral burdens felt at a gut level by participants in war, but all can show an equal commitment.” Here might be a place to accomplish just that.

**And Reaching an End**

I have offered these stories up a hundred times. I scrawl them across the back of scrap paper and painstakingly copy them into digital documents. I give them to a half dozen creative writing classes. Each time I hand over printer-warm copies of these stories, I meet the eyes of my classmates, so I can silently beg: Please understand.

The first time I wrote the Exigency at the beginning of this work, it was for a mid-level class simply titled ‘Fiction Writing.’ The piece had four drafts. The last I sent to my family, for some confirmation that I’d written it true, that I’d made something they understood. My mother and my aunt both cried. It was true. It was true to aching. So I handed over twenty-three printer-warm copies and hoped.

But they didn’t understand. Couldn’t understand. Why would I pray for someone else’s father to have died? Why would I be afraid of knocks on the door? Why would anyone cry in public over fruit? Why was I breaking so far from the war story they had in their head?

Now I give you these pages, which I’ve written as true as I can, and I silently beg: Please understand. This story is yours now, too.

# APPENDIX

BETH MARTIN: This is Beth Martin, conducting an oral history with Edward "Scott" Martin on Friday, March 10th, 2017.

SCOTT MARTIN: Okay. Scott Martin. I was born 12/24/1964. Uh…I served in the military from 1983 until 2010, both in the National Guard and in the Army… Also some time in ROTC[1]. Twenty-eight years consecutive, and twenty-three active years of service. And, uh, that's good.

BETH MARTIN: Alright. So, first question, um… What experiences or knowledge did you have of the military prior to joining?

SCOTT MARTIN: When I was in high school, I saw that the, that Ronald Regan—the president at the time—was putting a lot of money into the military at the time. He wanted to build it up and to make it a stronger force in the world. It appealed to me, uh…

I always wanted to be a Ranger. For some reason. I don't know, maybe I saw a recruiting video, maybe I saw…something, but I thought if I could ever become a Ranger that would just – be awesome. Even as a high schooler, I thought that was the epitome of manhood. I don't know, maybe I was compensating for my short size, I don't know. But, uh, that's what I always wanted to do.

BETH MARTIN: Alright, and what expectations did you have going into the National Guard? I suppose we'll start there.

SCOTT MARTIN: Well, interesting, um… I went active duty, and uh, spent two years active, four years reserve[2]. But primarily it was about the education. They gave me, I believe at the time it was up to a *sixty thousand* dollar enlistment bonus for education, spread out over eight years, I think it was… It was something like that.

But I was gonna pay for my education. Which – which I actually *did*. Completely paid for the first two years of my college education, and then I went into the Simultaneous Membership Program[3]. I went into a

[1] Reserve Officers' Training Corps

[2] Service members are considered on active duty if they work for the military full time. They may live on a military post/base. Reserve members (similar to the National Guard) do not work work for the military full-time, but they can be pulled for active service and/or deployed as the need arises.

[3] A two-year program for members of the National Guard who have joined a university's Army ROTC unit. Provides tuition, a monthly stipend, and other benefits.

program where you're in the National Guard and you're in ROTC. And that actually paid for the rest of my education.

So I was able to save money every month, and then pay for all my education, so… Ultimately, uh, the Army—through my work—paid for all of my education.

BETH MARTIN: So while you were simultaneously enrolled, what were some differences you noticed between ROTC and the National Guard?

SCOTT MARTIN: Oh my goodness. Well…uh… ROTC was a bunch of college students. Some of them were very serious. Some of them were prior service like me. In other words, they were in the military and then they got out and…they found that they missed the military life.

And that's…once you've been in the military, you find that it's a—a brotherhood, a sisterhood—of friends, associates, people with common goals. Even though they're diverse, they have many different goals and purposes in life, but they all seek self-improvement and… I mean generally. And they also have a common goal, which is to support and defend the Constitution of the United States.

So, um, differences between National Guard and ROTC? People in ROTC…truly wanted to get an active duty commission. Not everybody gets active duty. Three of my roommates in college, all in ROTC, three of them didn't get active duty. I'm the one who got an active duty calling.

It is conceivable that I would've finished my college career and they'd have said, "You're going into the National Guard. We have no active duty slots for you." [gasps dramatically] I'd have had to get a job in a – in a business somewhere, and I feel I could've, but – but there is a core group of people in the ROTC that truly *want* to get active duty, they *want* to go out and serve, they want to travel the world and serve the Army…

Uh, but not all get that chance. The people who – who didn't care and weren't in National Guard like me, and just wanted a National Guard commission. They didn't wanna leave their state, they didn't wanna leave home…

BETH MARTIN: Mhm?

SCOTT MARTIN: David [Redacted] being one, that… He just wanted to get a commission, and then go back to his National Guard unit. And train, you know, one weekend a month. And so that was good enough for him.

BETH MARTIN: So did you feel lucky that you got a commission?

SCOTT MARTIN: Felt like I earned it. Um…because I, uh, I worked really hard for it. I don't feel lucky. I feel like I was one of the top two – or three – cadets there in the program. So…

BETH MARTIN: So how did they rank the cadets?

SCOTT MARTIN: Uh, um… Your grade point average…

BETH MARTIN: Mhm?

SCOTT MARTIN: Big part. Some people had active scholarships. So if you have a full time Army scholarship, you are obligated, you're stuck. You – you – the Army is paying for your scholarship, expecting that when you graduate you *will* fill an obligation. So they didn't have to worry. They were *gonna* go full time active duty because the Army was actually paying them a scholarship to get a degree.

BETH MARTIN: Mhm.

SCOTT MARTIN: Um…I was not one of those people. I certainly could've…because I had other means of paying for my education. Through previous Army bonuses and the work that I did. Cos you know, I also worked at a bar…

BETH MARTIN: Yes…

SCOTT MARTIN: Uh, earning money, saved up to pay for the next semester. You know, tuition, books, and all that. So that's the way I did it. Um… I forget what the question was. [laughs]

BETH MARTIN: [laughs] How they rank the cadets.

SCOTT MARTIN: Ah! So GPA is one. Some cadets had automatic active duty because of their scholarships. Then they also had things like leadership skills. I was the executive officer for, quote, the Ranger Club. Which was, uh, you know, we went to the field on weekends. To Fort Jackson. And we did things above and beyond what other cadets would do. And that participation level allowed us to show our leadership skills and abilities.

So they actually ranked people not only by – by their GPA but also by things like their extracurricular activities and leadership skills.

And then they had – they had something called the Distinguished Military Graduate, DMG[4]. I didn't know it was important. I had no idea. But later on, as people looked at my official Army transcript—it's called the Officer Record Brief—it actually said ROTC… Well, it says source of commission ROTC dash DMG. Distinguished Military Graduate. And I think they can only give that to like the top five percent of a graduating class of cadets. It was like, "Oh, I see how that works." Designating me as one of the top five percent, that kinda – got me the active duty, I think.

BETH MARTIN: Okay, so it was kind of like…

SCOTT MARTIN: Didn't know it at the time.

BETH MARTIN: Like the summa cum laude or the magna cum laude?

SCOTT MARTIN: Yeah! Yeah. Wasn't based on grades! [laughs]

BETH MARTIN: [laughs]

SCOTT MARTIN: I think I graduated with a 2.98 or something. You know, literally. I had, uh – a couple of rough semesters. So. Eh. I got better. [laughs]

BETH MARTIN: Yes, yes. [laughs] So… What were your expectations of the Rangers? Because I know you did go to Ranger School[5]…

SCOTT MARTIN: What were my – what were my expectations?

BETH MARTIN: Yes. Going in, what were you thinking it was going to be like?

SCOTT MARTIN: Uh…I thought it was going to be hard, but then again, thought that as long as I didn't get hurt that I could do it, that I could graduate. Obviously, I did. Uh… [five second pause] What I didn't realize, more than anything else, was that going to Ranger School was not really about survival…

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[4] Tradition begun in 1948 and originally given only to those who would receive an active duty commission with the US Army. The status of Distinguished Military Graduate is given to the top 20% of graduating ROTC seniors nationwide.

[5] A three phase, two-month school described as the "the most physically and mentally demanding leadership course the Army has to offer."

BETH MARTIN: Mhm.

SCOTT MARTIN: I mean, you have to survive. You have to survive the ordeal. You have to accomplish all the things that they set out for you to accomplish. But what I didn't know was what it would teach me about myself.

Because, I thought it was going to be about leadership dynamics and how you lead people under stressful situations. And yeah, I guess you do that. But what you learn is all about *you*. How *you* deal with adversity. How *you* deal with the challenges, the sacrifices, the pain.

So it was really – I thought it was about how to lead people, and how people react. But no, really, it – Ranger School, and any difficult school I'm sure. I mean, I'm sure you could lump some of the generalities in with SEAL School, uh…

BETH MARTIN: Mhm.

SCOTT MARTIN: Some of the other, tougher schools. Ultimately, you find out, once you graduate, you find out that you know much more about yourself than you do about other people. You learn that everybody's different. But you learn what motivates yourself first. And then what motivates other people.

So that was the big takeaway. I didn't see that one coming. I really thought it was going to be about "how you face the fire" and get through adversity. You do that, but you do that by learning about yourself. What you're capable of doing, and not doing.

Some people break down. And they find that they just mentally, or physically, cannot do it. That's all about them. It's not about everybody else. It's about them.

As a Ranger instructor, I saw many people who I thought were burly and large and they would succeed and they didn't have the, what we call "intestinal fortitude", they didn't have the *guts* inside. They may have been great leaders but they didn't believe in themselves, or didn't have the self-confidence, or didn't understand how to overcome the challenges they faced internally.

[four second pause] So, it's not always about… Uh… How big and bad and strong or anything you are. It's about how do you handle *very* difficult circumstances. It's all about – it's all about you.

BETH MARTIN: So do you feel that your Ranger training served you above and beyond what your other military training did?

SCOTT MARTIN: I do. I do. Because what happens is once you complete that training, then you wear a tiny little piece of cloth on your arm. That tiny little piece of cloth[6] tells everyone around you that you will never be cold, you will never be hot, you will never be hungry, you will never be sleepy. You are, in fact, a superhero.

…on a smaller human scale, of course.

BETH MARTIN: [laughs]

SCOTT MARTIN: What I'm saying is that it sets a framework in everyone else's mind that you can persevere through any threat, through any challenge. That *you* are the one, that when the bullets start flying, *you* are the one who will step up. Not them. You have been tested under the crucible and therefore, you have demonstrated that you will rise above everyone else when the poop hits the rotary oscillator.

And that's an *expectation*. It's very unrealistic. It is. It's very unrealistic. But, as you know, we have something called the "infantry butt sniff." Where you walk into a room, or it used to be that you'd walk into a room, with a whole bunch of guys. And if you did not have that tiny little piece of cloth on your arm…

*Oh*. We don't know if he's worthy. We don't know if that person can really face peril and – and do well. But if you have that little piece of cloth, it's automatically carte blanche given, that you will perform above expectations of all others. Even about others *with* the cloth. Because, well, any one of you with that cloth can rise to be that hero.

So it's a huge expectation. And it's about the expectation of failure. You don't want to be perceived as a failure in front of all those other people. Because now you know, and *they* know, that you've faced hardship and endured. So it's a huge disincentive to be seen as a failure. It's – it's like that A on your forehead. People have expectations because they see it.

BETH MARTIN: Mhm.

SCOTT MARTIN: They think, they think "oh *this,* specifically because you have *that*." Well, with a Ranger tab, everyone *expects* that you are the next superhero, just waiting for the chance. And those are some high expectations.

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[6] The Ranger tab, a small black and gold decoration placed on the left shoulder. It signifies completion of Ranger School and is worn for the rest of that service member's military career.

BETH MARTIN: And how many Rangers are there as compared to the rest of the infantry?

SCOTT MARTIN: In… Well, for infantry officers, it's… Extremely high percentage. Um. Not all. We have a person on our current staff who is an infantryman who is, uh, a major. He is actually getting up there, but we don't know if he'll make promotion to the next higher rank because he got hurt in Ranger School and never completed it. And somehow he managed to get promoted.

There have been unwritten guidelines way in the past that if you didn't complete Ranger School, as an infantry officer, that you weren't gonna get past captain. At the company level. But of course wartime changes all that. You need as many officers as possible, regardless of whether they've completed Ranger School or not.

But I have never, in my lifetime, ever seen or heard of an infantry officer having a battalion command who wasn't Ranger qualified. It's – it's unheard of. I don't think it's ever happened. So, again, high expectations. Yeah.

BETH MARTIN: So what surprised you about being in the military? Or what surprises were there?

SCOTT MARTIN: [four second pause] Um… Going into the military, I always thought that it was egalitarian. That everyone started off on a very equal footing. That through your hard work, dedication, perseverance… That you would – that you would rise to the top… [five second pause]

BETH MARTIN: Mhm?

SCOTT MARTIN: I honestly believed that. And even as a military officer, I thought, man we are all going to be judged *exactly* the same. Cos we're all doing the same job, we're all getting paid exactly the same, and that this equality thing's just working out *great*. Um… Then I found out that it doesn't work that way. And not in ways that you would've ever imagined.

For example. I showed up at my first duty assignment, and I'd worn a mustache—a military regulation, absolutely regulation, absolutely military, within regulation mustache. Well after I'd been to the unit a couple of weeks, somebody came aside and said, "Hey. You know, the battalion commander doesn't like mustaches." I said, "What?" Said, "Yeah, yeah, you need to lose the mustache." Like, "It's in regulation, it's

good, it's clean, it's good, looks great." He said, "Yeah, you might wanna get rid of it."

Okay. Well, I thought about it for another week or two. And then my company commander came to me and said, "Hey, battalion commander doesn't like mustaches. Get rid of it." [gasps] Okay. So I got rid of it.

Well, come to find out, my first report—I didn't know this at the time—but my first report that I got, my evaluation, it was actually lower than I thought it should've been. I didn't realize it at the time. I thought oh that sounds pretty good, okay, whoop whoop whoop.

Only as I got older and I looked back on that evaluation did I see that I think my mustache might've set me up for failure. That because, quote, the battalion commander didn't like mustaches… Literally. I mean, that *sounds* ridiculous now doesn't it?

BETH MARTIN: Little bit.

SCOTT MARTIN: But literally, I set a first impression with my rating officer. I set a first impression that he really didn't like mustaches. And the fact that it wasn't gone immediately told him that I was not a team player, or I was a rebel, or that I was trying to work outside of what *he* thought I should look like.

Sounds crazy and stupid, in a way. The regulation is there for a purpose. The regulation says, "You can have a mustache, go ahead!" But if that guy doesn't like mustaches…

Now what else didn't he like? Did he "not like" Black officers? Did he "not like" Hispanics? And that's when I suddenly realized—not then, but a few years after that when I'm looking at my different reports.

And I didn't have a mustache at all, period, throughout the rest of my career. Because, for some people, mustache was a mark against you. Doesn't make sense. But that just goes to show you, your appearance – whether you have a mustache, or you're Black, or you're Asian… It *all* counts. And it all depends on the view of that officer whether you succeed and get promoted or not.

So the one thing that was really shocking was that.

BETH MARTIN: Well since you were able to take a long view of the military since you were in so long, do you feel that – that that has evened out, or remained the same?

SCOTT MARTIN: Um… I don't know. I think that – that it comes and goes with personalities and that – that's one of the ugly things about… About the service. One thing that I have discovered over time is that there was a large period—before 9/11[7]—when officers who had tattoos…

Oh, if you had a tattoo and it could be seen. Oh that was, whoa. That would, that would be *negative* against you.

BETH MARTIN: Mhm?

SCOTT MARTIN: Cos officers, well yeah, you just don't have tattoos. And so some people would get out against those officers for "poor judgement" in getting a tattoo. [three second pause] Seriously. Even though it's fully within the regulations that officers—and enlisted! Male *and* female! Anyone!—can have a tattoo.

Now, there were restrictions. Like you couldn't have them on your face, couldn't have them on your neck. There were times when you couldn't have them below the elbow. And then 9/11 hit and they said, "Okay, you can have them below the elbow, but you have to wear a long sleeve shirt when you have 'em."

BETH MARTIN: Mhm?

SCOTT MARTIN: Okay. Again, that's all part of that wartime, okay, a great soldier—or a great recruit—just because he has a tattoo right here in the middle of his forearm…we're not gonna…prevent him from serving. In a wartime.

Um, so it comes and goes. It ebbs and flows. And some people have to carry around a piece of paper in their wallet that says, "I joined in 1990…" or "I joined in 2008 when the tattoo policy said that you could have a tattoo on your wrist." [four second pause]

BETH MARTIN: Mhm.

SCOTT MARTIN: But like from 2013 until 2016, it's – it couldn't be below mid-forearm. But – but that person, since they joined during that time when it was allowed, they actually have to have a piece of paper in their wallet, or on them, that says, "Hey, I joined when this was legal so you can't take

[7] A three-pronged terrorist attack on September 11th, 2001. Hijacked commercial planes were flown into the Word Trade Center Towers and the Pentagon. A fourth plane crashed in Pennsylvania after the passengers attempted to take back the plane, but it has been theorized that it was originally meant for the White House or Congress.

action against me." Like, come on, how ridiculous is that? [three second pause]

BETH MARTIN: Failures of bureaucracy.

SCOTT MARTIN: *Yes*. And so that – that actually gets…kind of frustrating. [laughs]

BETH MARTIN: [laughs] I can imagine.

SCOTT MARTIN: You know? Because there might be some officer out there today who says, "Oh! That non-commissioned officer[8]—that NCO—has a tattoo right there! I don't like tattoos. Now I remember that that's illegal." And so they say, "Well, since that NCO is doing something illegal, *in my eyes*…"

BETH MARTIN: Mhm?

SCOTT MARTIN: "I'm gonna give them a two instead of a number one[9]." Well, he may not be up to date with the regulation that changed…*twice.*

BETH MARTIN: Mhm.

SCOTT MARTIN: But still, in his mind, he's right. And so he is gonna punish that guy, because he *thinks* he's doing something wrong. Not that he doesn't check, not that he doesn't verify, he just *thinks* that guy is doing something wrong so he needs to punish him.

And that happens. That happens a lot. And I didn't expect that.

BETH MARTIN: Moving on to slightly happier things… What was the best part of your military experience?

SCOTT MARTIN: Oh my gosh… Working with people who have the same goals and objectives. And I think you could probably say that about *any* organization. [three second pause] Generally speaking, everybody's on the same page, if everybody wants to accomplish something *good*, then it's really good.

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[8] An enlisted service member who's attained (in the Army) the rank of corporal or any of the sergeant ranks.

[9] Refers to the Army rating system, wherein an assessment of "1" is the most desirable and shows the highest achievement.

Um, having the opportunity to command people in combat. Because that's where it is. If you… We in the Army, at least when I was in, would say things like, "Well, you know, you practice for war." Every day that you serve, you practice for war. And you hope you don't have to go. But if you do go, it's going from the practice squad to the NFL. You always get to practice, but you never actually put *in to* practice what you've learned and trained. So to go to combat… Uh, *huge* responsibility.

But at the same time, I feel really good about what I was able to do. The positive influence I was able to have. The lives I was able to save. The people I was able to bring home. While still accomplishing everything I was tasked to do…and more.

We accomplished a lot more than we were actually tasked to do. But – but it was about me having the vision of knowing what we needed to do, and then assigning those tasks to the people I knew could get 'em done, and then allowing them to do their jobs and do 'em well. So that's always nice.

And that could translate to any organization. As you give orders to people about your vision and where you want the organization to go… Seeing that actually happen. Seeing that take place. Seeing them take what you said and actually put it into practice. And whether it's increased sales… [laughs] Or, you know, whether it's capture more bad guys, or whether it's – it's rendering safe more improvised explosive devices[10]…

All of that, you look at the statistics, and you say, "Wow, because we implemented this new strategy – last month we cleared ten IEDs safely, and then this month we've done eighteen." Now, that has to correspond with, you know, fewer mishaps.

BETH MARTIN: Yes…

SCOTT MARTIN: It might just be that they're putting more out.

BETH MARTIN: [laughs]

SCOTT MARTIN: But if you safely had ten of them, but you *unsafely*—because people got hit, you know—had ten… Okay, we're at 50%. Now the next month, if you rendered safe eighteen and only *two* of them were hits… They're

[10] Bombs constructed or used outside of standard military operation. Commonly used as roadside bombs and in terroristic actions. May be made of conventional bomb materials, or with improvised household and/or scrap materials.

planting the same number, but at least you're catching more safely, and so fewer people are being injured and killed.

That's a measure of effectiveness that you can look at and say, "We're doing something right." See?

BETH MARTIN: Yeah.

SCOTT MARTIN: There is *joy* in that, believe it or not. There's joy in being able to say, "You know what, not only did we make the roads safe *for us*, but those civilians were hitting 'em too."

BETH MARTIN: Mhm.

SCOTT MARTIN: So the civilian population is not suffering the pain and the deaths as well. It's like, okay, we're actually doing something right here.

And then what happens is, as you hit that, then you start suddenly saying, "Okay, the next month there were only fifteen *total* events." And then the next month, there were only *ten* total events. That means that we're stopping the people from planting the IEDs. And in addition, hopefully you're finding more of those fifteen that didn't blow up. So I mean, you measure it every month, and you can actually see if your – if your plan is working, or if you need to change it.

And so, uh, that was actually very rewarding. Being able to see that we were making a *positive* difference. And – and of course, as I think *you* know personally, that by the time I came home after sixteen months, we had *significantly* reduced deaths and injuries of not only our folks but also all the civilians who lived and worked in the area.

So, I mean, *huge*. That – that's – I can't understate how important that was. That we came home *feeling* a sense of purpose and that we had accomplished something good.

BETH MARTIN: Very nice. And…is there a particular memory that stands out as maybe the best exemplar for all of that?

SCOTT MARTIN: [three second pause] Um… [three second pause] My goodness, there are… Oh… Well it's… [five second pause] Um, well, there's – overall, just…the feeling. The feeling of not having the hits, the deaths, the injuries.

When we first got there it was a very dark period. There was an uprising amongst the Sunnis and they were planting bombs left and right. It was crazy.

The unit that we had replaced stopped clearing IEDs. They stopped going outside the wire[11] because they felt like everytime they went out, somebody died. So they physically stopped doing it. And they thought, "Well, as long as we don't go outside the wire, nobody'll get hurt."

In fact, while they were transitioning over between us— We call it the "left seat/right seat ride." Where, if you're in the left seat, you're in the driver's seat, you're in charge.

BETH MARTIN: Mhm.

SCOTT MARTIN: If you're in the right seat, you're just kind of riding along. So what we did was we – we rode along in the right seat. They drove us around and showed us how they do stuff. They'd showed us the lay of the land and everything. So that was their left seat.

Then they did a right seat. Where now *we're* in charge, but they also have a guy in the vehicle who says, "Oh, now remember, don't do this because we learned not to do that." See, so it's a swap, in and out. Where – they said that in the left seat/right seat ride, they actually did more getting outside the wire than they had in months and months and *months*. Because we wanted to get out and learn as much as we could before they left.

You know that is – that is one thing that the Army was really, really good at. You don't just quit cold turkey and one unit picks up and flies away and the next unit's going, "Uh…what're we doing here?" No. The left seat/right seat allows you to integrate and blend and – and they *teach* you what works and what doesn't. And then when they go out with you, they make sure that you don't make the same mistake they did.

Cos, you know, the enemy has a memory too. He says, "Hey, this thing works, and I'm gonna keep doing it." Well, if we know – if they can pass on to us what the enemy does, then we don't have to learn from mistakes. We can learn from their experience.

So, going out there, to see… [four second pause] Not the fear but the concern in their eyes… [three second pause]

BETH MARTIN: Mhm.

[11] Military slang for going outside a support installation/forward operating base. Comes with implications of leaving relative safety for a combat zone.

SCOTT MARTIN: And know that they were uncomfortable going out and doing the things that we did… Looking back on it, like I said, I won't call it fear, I'll call it concern. They were genuinely concerned that we wanted to go outside the wire. That we wanted to go out into the countryside. We wanted to go out there and talk to the people. They were concerned. They *did not* want to do that with us.

Because they had suffered enough casualties and death that they didn't want to go through that again. And actually, uh… [three second pause] On a patrol that my guys were on, that none of my guys were injured on, but the outgoing unit lost a soldier the *day* before he was supposed to fly home.

It can happen any day of the time you're there. But that was especially terrible for them. Because remember, they had holed up, they had not gone out. So they had kept their casualties low. They hadn't accomplished anything. That's the problem. They hadn't accomplished anything. But because we *needed* to go out and learn the lay of the land… [three second pause] They lost a soldier.

BETH MARTIN: Mm.

SCOTT MARTIN: Who was one of their best. He was a good soldier. Like a – he was a sergeant. He was – but it can happen to anybody at any time.

But I would say the best memory, or feeling, was always remembering that unit and what they were as an organization. [three second pause] And then comparing and contrasting that with us when we left. Cos we were proud; we were downright *boastful* when we left. Because we knew – we knew that we took horrible casualties, I mean it was *horrible* in the beginning. But we knew that we made it a better place. And that feeling is irreplaceable.

Because like I said, we made it better not only for us, but for the civilian people. They had peace. For the most part. In our area, when we left, *huge* difference.

So to see this unit that was cowering when we – when they left, when they left… To see that unit and how they were kind of leaving with their tail between their legs, knowing that they had not succeeded, and…

BETH MARTIN: Mhm?

SCOTT MARTIN: Knowing that the enemy had won against them. And then seeing and feeling the difference when we left. [four second pause] If they had told me that I had to be extended—with my unit—for another few months, I would've said, "Okay. We're winning. We're winning, we'll stay."

BETH MARTIN: Mhm.

SCOTT MARTIN: If that unit we were replacing had been told that they had to stay two months, they would've broke down. Because they – they had mentally quit. So to see the difference between that unit and when they left, and then knowing the unit that *we* came home with…

BETH MARTIN: Mhm?

SCOTT MARTIN: *Huge*. That's the best memory I can have. Is we truly came back knowing that we made a difference. [three second pause] I think that's… I think that's part of the military structure.

And I look at—of course, I'm a student of military history—I look at World War II, everyone came back victorious. It was victory. We made the world a better place. We felt in our hearts, as a nation, we had done the right thing.

Korea? We didn't really win. There was no victorious parade. There was nothing that came back and said – and those soldiers, as a whole, as an army—certain units did great, others not so much—but generally speaking the DOD[12], the military, didn't come back from Korea and say, "Boy, we're heroes. We made a difference."

Vietnam? Of course, the exact opposite. They weren't, you know, hailed as heroes. So they didn't feel like they accomplished anything. And so for us to go, and come back feeling like we accomplished something?

BETH MARTIN: Mhm?

SCOTT MARTIN: Huge. Huge. Cannot be understated. Cos that's ultimately what you wanna do, you wanna accomplish your mission and then…bring as many people home as possible. So that's the best feeling. The best feeling is – not that we won… [three second pause]

BETH MARTIN: Mhm?

[12] The Department of Defense, under which all military branches fall.

SCOTT MARTIN: But that we did something for the greater good. [four second pause] Okay.

BETH MARTIN: Okay, so… [three second pause] Worst part of military life.

SCOTT MARTIN: Hm… Um… Well I can say this *afterwards*. Breaking down of the body. You know, getting back to that whole Ranger thing, when you – when you get injured, uh, Rangers are supposed to fight through pain. And they're supposed to keep going.

So, I kept running on an Achilles tendon that was torn. For years. And it would every once in a while retear, and I would take a break, and I'd keep going. [sighs] In the end, not the best thing for the body. But again, you have this mindset, you have this mentality, you have this little piece of cloth on your shoulder that says, "I will keep going. I will keep going. Though I be the lone survivor, I will keep going."

There's a Ranger creed. And it – it speaks to going above and beyond at times, because that's the expectation of you. And when you take that to heart, yeah, you – you get hurt on a jump but you keep going. You get knocked out on a jump but, once you wake up, you keep going. You know the concussion protocol? No. It's like can you walk? Can you breathe? Okay, let's get your rucksack on, and keep going. It's what happens. That catches up to you in the end.

Um… I think the Army, after so many battle injuries, is trying to overcome that. We did physical fitness training that, at times, was borderline abuse. I mean, abuse is in the eye of the beholder. Doing one hundred jumping jacks in a row…

BETH MARTIN: Mhm?

SCOTT MARTIN: Well. Jumping jacks are what you do. But, you know, there's a point where you're no longer building up the body, you're tearing it down? We did stuff like that. Doing, you know, two hundred sit ups. In a row. Non-stop. Eventually that *breaks* the body down.

Well the Army has since gone back and looked at all that and said, "You know what, you can only do a certain number and then you have to have a recovery period. And then you have to switch to a different exercise. And then you have to…" So, in other words, they're not tearing you apart.

BETH MARTIN: Mhm.

SCOTT MARTIN: Not every single day. So they – they've gotten better, they've gotten much better. But of course, when you're in infantry, and you're in a Ranger unit, well! Who's gonna fall first? [three second pause]

BETH MARTIN: [laughs] Yeah.

SCOTT MARTIN: Well, you can't fall! Uh… So you end up tearing your body up. I *hope* that the Army's gotten better over time. Combat injuries coming back had a *lot* to do with that, believe it or not. Because the Army did something that it's never done before.

They kept severely injured soldiers *in* the service. World War II? You got injured, you weren't still in service. Korea? Same. Vietnam? Same. There are US servicemen and women serving *in* Afghanistan *today* that have prosthesis legs.

Now, I'm going to guess that they're not actually running out on patrols. But they're serving on staff and they're doing things. The Army *never* did that before. They didn't have the technology with all the prosthesis and what they're capable of doing. But they're still in harm's way, they're still in a combat zone. We've never done that before.

The Army, and all DOD services, before 9/11… When you got injured – when you lost a leg, they kicked you out of the Army and said, "You go to the Veteran's Administration[13] and thank you for your service."

BETH MARTIN: Mhm.

SCOTT MARTIN: Now days, there is a colonel, who was a lieutenant colonel, so he – he has *been* promoted. He's wheelchair bound. He can stand up on his legs for a couple of minutes and then he has to sit back down. But he was so catastrophically hit in an IED attack that, you know, he lost some brain matter. He still – he *still* got promoted. He's missing part of his brain, and he still got promoted afterwards. But he's still serving. He's serving on staff. He does well. He does have some memory issues. But – but he's still serving.

And that's part of the new mentality that has taken over at least the Army. Is that, you know what, just because you're missing an arm…you can still *do* something to serve the Army. We've never done that before.

[13] Governmental department founded in 1930 to provide support (medical, skills training, etc.) for veterans of all US service branches.

Well, I think that has translated down to other people. People who are injured, with a blown out knee, well they may never be able to run a two mile to the best standard, but maybe they can still serve. Maybe we can rehab them. And then, they can continue to serve on.

Somebody – like my back injuries. Somebody in the Army today, it'd be, "Huh, if you need to use a wheelchair every once in a while, that's okay." What? What? You can do that now days? Um, yeah. Because we've suffered so many casualties from 9/11 to now in all our combat zones, if we kicked every single person out… [laughs] We wouldn't have enough people.

So they're using people wisely within the limits of their physical disabilities. And that's something positive. Cos it shows people – it shows them that they're still worth something. They have a sense of self-worth.

BETH MARTIN: So do you think that it's helpful that people can lose limbs and still stay in the Army? That they can stay in that familiar community?

SCOTT MARTIN: Mhm! I've talked to them, and absolutely. You know one.

BETH MARTIN: Mhm.

SCOTT MARTIN: I'll just use his first name. Mark. You know. He still has a sense of accomplishment, of self-worth. He is still progressing through the military chain even though he has limited use of his left arm. And some other health issues, I'm sure.

Cos, I mean, all the injuries that I've suffered over time… All coming back to haunt me. Whether it's the neck or the back or the arm or the leg. They all come back to haunt you. It's just a question of when. And something as catastrophic as what he suffered, I'm sure he is in constant pain. *But*.

He has a sense of self-worth. He has a sense of continuing to contribute to the nation's defense. Absolutely. If he had been shuffled out of the military… I mean, he'd – he'd still be the same person. He'd still wanna climb mountains, he'd still wanna bicycle and stuff, but I really don't think he'd still have the same sense of self-worth that he continues to have.

So yeah, I think it's been very helpful. It's also I think – I *hope* has also lead to a different view in the civilian world of how we view people with disabilities. I hope that it has led to a different view in the civilian world. That – all the advances we've made in prosthetics has been because

of the military. It's not because some guy got in a car wreck and lost a leg. No. It's because the military spent the money, and the research, and the robotic effort…

BETH MARTIN: Mhm.

SCOTT MARTIN: To actually get people functioning again after catastrophic injuries. So just like Tang with the – with NASA, and wanting to have food in space. Well, that contributed to civilian world. The combat injuries, as bad as they are, has led to a great leap forward in disabled people's abilities to contribute.

BETH MARTIN: So, talking about purpose, and people coming back and having that sense of purpose… What was homecoming like?

SCOTT MARTIN: Um, awkward. Awkward. Um, very interesting dichotomy here. [five second pause] I left for war the first time, and we went through a town in Maine. [four second pause] I can't even – I can't even remember the town. But it was a – it was a waystation, it was a stop, it was – it was a refueling stop. You had to stop in Maine, of all places. You know.

I can't even remember where it is, now. It escapes me. It was known. It was focused on on television, like, "Oh, this is where soldiers coming to and from, to *and* from, the combat zone would stop for refuel." So they had a whole concourse set up for soldiers. You know.

And as I recall, a lot of the stuff there was free. It was free. You walk in and it was like, "Oh, oh, you want some soda? You want some snacks?" The Army didn't pay for it. Soldiers weren't paying for it. This was USO[14]. And people were contributing money. You know, different projects. Wounded Warrior Project[15], as an example. They were paying money to—

So we walk in, and we walk down the gangway. Remember, I am now like…seven hours away from Alaska. I haven't gone anywhere. I haven't done anything. And we're walking down the gangway. And there are a lot of old people. Retirees, veterans. But they're cheering and clapping and everything. [three second pause] And we're just like, "What…this is awkward… I don't know how to feel. Why are these people cheering me? I haven't gone anywhere. I haven't done anything. I

[14] United Service Organization, a nonprofit organization that provides services and programs for service members, established in 1941.

[15] A nonprofit organization established in 2003 that provides services and programs for wounded veterans, particularly those resulting from military engagements post-9/11.

don't deserve this. Nobody here is a hero. We just sat on our ass for seven hours and got here from Alaska. Why are you treating me like a hero?"

Very awkward. Hard to – hard to describe, actually. Because you know in your heart you're not deserving of the adoration they're giving you. Okay, so that was really weird.

And oh, by the way, they had free cellphones. So you could grab a cellphone and call home. Which in 2005 is kind of a big deal, cos, you know.

BETH MARTIN: Yeah.

SCOTT MARTIN: [laughs] They didn't have payphones. But you could go into the USO, and they had literally… Like fifty phones charging. And all of these phones had been donated by people. And they had prepaid phone cards on 'em. You could grab a phone, any phone, didn't matter, and you could call home. So I called home to your mom. I was like, "Hi, I'm in Maine." And she's, "What? What? You just left!" Like, "Yup. I'm just – just letting you know I'm in Maine. We stopped for a refuel and a crew change before flying over to Ireland." Yeah, I've been to Ireland, once. The Dublin airport. So it was just, "Uh, hi, yeah, hi!"

So that was an awkward thing. We didn't feel we were deserving. We all – I could tell, looking my soldiers in the eye, we all felt kind of awkward. "No, people, don't clap. We don't deserve this."

And to this day, I still don't think – it's just awkward. Cos we were not worthy. We were not worthy of what those people wanted. To clap, and stuff. We weren't worthy.

Um…coming back. You go through one of two places. When you come back on leave, your mid-tour as they call it, you go through one of two places. You go through the Atlanta airport for all of the East coast stuff, or you go through Dallas Fort Worth[16]. [five second pause] *That* was weird and overwhelming.

Because I was jittery. I had the shakes. From being in combat. I didn't even know it. But I was so…overwhelmed by the homecoming. Because I thought they were just gonna get us off the plane, and we were gonna sneak through a side door, and we'd go somewhere, and we'd get out of the way, and…we'd just wait for the next plane. You know.

BETH MARTIN: Mhm.

[16] An airport outside of Dallas, Texas.

SCOTT MARTIN: Like – like a private concourse. *No*. Oh no. We had to go through a *gauntlet*. An absolute *gauntlet* of people. And it was *scary*. It was *frightening*. Remember, crowds in combat equals target equals death.

BETH MARTIN: Mhm.

SCOTT MARTIN: No crowd.

BETH MARITN: Mhm.

SCOTT MARTIN: No people.

BETH MARTIN: Mhm.

SCOTT MARTIN: Any time you see a crowd of Iraqis, one of them has an AK-47[17]. And he wants to kill you. You hate crowds. You don't go into crowds. Crowds are where suicide bombers click their button and blow everybody up. Stay away from crowds.

BETH MARTIN: Mhm.

SCOTT MARTIN: So they have a roped off gauntlet that – that's seventy-five, hundred yards long. Like a football field. And we have to walk this gauntlet. And there are people with *signs*. You know. "Welcome home, brave Americans!" Yellow ribbons. Someone handed me a king size Snickers bar. [three second pause] And I *took it*. First king size Snickers bar I'd seen in almost a year. I took it.

BETH MARTIN: [laughs] Mhm.

SCOTT MARTIN: I have no idea who gave it to me. But it was *so overwhelming*.

BETH MARTIN: Mhm.

SCOTT MARTIN: Because I'm still in combat mode. I'm in combat mode. I'm not supposed to be surrounded by people. And this is *loud*. I can't hear anything. I can't

[17] Semi-automatic assault rifle.

hear if someone steps on a pressure plate IED. I can't hear it. And that… That was *scary*. [five second pause] And you know what?

They told us, because we – they said – they stopped us in a big holding room. When we first got off the plane and walked down the tunnel. So there was nobody. We were alone. It was just all of us stinky people. Because we stink. We were stinky. We just flew in from Kuwait. And even though we had clean uniforms on, we still *stunk*, like desert. But they said, "Okay, for those going to Alaska, go to booth one… Oh, sir, you're a colonel, you go right over there." Oh, okay, I'm a colonel, go over there, got it. [laughs]

BETH MARTIN: [laughs]

SCOTT MARTIN: You know. [laughs] You know. "If you're going to Seattle, go there." You know, for connecting flights. Go there, go there, go there. You see, we had people from all over. It wasn't just our unit coming back for leave. It was like me and ten other people from the unit coming back on leave. Everybody else was from – now they might've been stationed with the 101st Airborne in Kentucky, but because they were single, their family is in Alaska. So they're literally flying home to their family in Alaska. So literally, we had – we had people from all different patches.

And they told us, "Okay, sir, you're going to get this. Here's your ticket for your next flight, into Anchorage, Alaska." I went – no, we went into Seattle. From Dallas Forth Worth to Seattle into Anchorage. But, they said, "Here's your ticket. It books you all the way through to Anchorage." They said, "Sir, we're going to sit you down over there. And then we're gonna do a call, and you'll come forward, and we'll move you as a group through the terminal, and then just to let you know, there is a USO…"

BETH MARTIN: Mhm?

SCOTT MARTIN: A United Services Organization. "There's a USO right around the corner from your…" From your, from your uh, from your…

BETH MARTIN: From your gate?

SCOTT MARTIN: From your gate. I said, "Okay." Okay, whatever. USO. Okay, I don't need USO. [three second pause] So, I do the gauntlet, with a bunch of people. Our group that went through.

Like I said, *totally overwhelming*. I mean, kids screaming. Teenage girls jumping up and down. I'm assuming, now that I'm thinking about it, that there were some families there who were actually gonna grab their – their returning – but the overwhelming support was overwhelming. So that was… Again, awkward.

So then, finally, I get to my gate. [four second pause] And there's just people *everywhere*. [three second pause] There's just people. And they're dressed in shorts. They're dressed in dresses. They're dressed in pants. [four second pause] I don't know who has the bomb. I don't know who has the IED. And for God's sake I can't spot any weapons. But I know they're out there. [five second pause] I'm going to the USO.

So I go into the USO and it's *filled* with soldiers. And you know what? It's quiet. It's so quiet you could hear a pin drop. People are talking in whispers. [five second pause] This is where I'm comfortable.

BETH MARTIN: Mhm.

SCOTT MARTIN: It's like a… [exhales] Weird. Yeah. This is where I need to be. Because it was too overwhelming. The sensory overload was *beyond*...

BETH MARTIN: Mhm.

SCOTT MARTIN: Beyond description. But to go in there and for it to be quiet. Just deathly quiet. Everyone talking in a whisper. But that's when we knew that we all got it. [laughs]

BETH MARTIN: Mhm.

SCOTT MARTIN: We were all like, "Man, that was way too much. There's *way* too much. This ain't happening. This ain't real." Too much. Come in here. Everyone's dressed the same. I know that these are uniforms.

BETH MARTIN: Mhm.

SCOTT MARTIN: Air Force, Marines, Army. Everybody. Like, "I can trust him. Yep. I can trust him. Yep. Yep, I can trust her. Yep. I'm good." [exhales] And that was it.

And five minutes before boarding time—cos they told us we would be first, they told us we would be first boarded on every plane—which

was helpful. It was helpful. Cos you have stand in the cattle call[18]. No. Oh God. [laughs] They had figured out. They had figured out. They were like, "You will be boarded on your plane first. Just take that for granted."

BETH MARTIN: Mhm.

SCOTT MARTIN: Okay. So, you go right before cattle call. And everybody gets on their plane. And you're like, "Okay, I'm on the plane." [four second pause] And then *every* person that walks by you… [laughs] "Hey thank you for your service." Uh, okay. "Heythankyouforyourservice." Finally you just close your eyes. You just close your eyes.

BETH MARTIN: Mhm.

SCOTT MARTIN: Cos it's too much. It's too much. Just close my eyes. Pretend like I'm sleeping. And they will leave me alone. It's hard to explain. Unless you've been there and lived that, it's hard to explain.

So that's part of the…getting back thing. You don't realize – it's like driving a car. I did not drive a car for over eighteen months. Not a Humvee. I had a driver. I did not drive while I was home on leave. Nope. Didn't want to. I was too nervous.

If you think about yourself, like "Oh, I'm just not going to drive the next eighteen months." Well, if you live in New York City that might works. [laughs]

BETH MARTIN: [laughs]

SCOTT MARTIN: Or with public transportation. But you – you can't *imagine* not driving for eighteen months. But I did. I wasn't driving. No way. I can't drive. I have people who do that. [laughs] So, yeah, the homecoming – the getting home, the reactions and stuff, is really weird. It's funny that, when I got adoration leaving…

BETH MARTIN: Mhm?

SCOTT MARTIN: I felt I didn't deserve it. I got adoration coming back. I didn't want it. [five second pause] In a way I was happy it was there. But it was too overwhelming. It was kinda weird. Kind of weird coming and going. Your

[18] Army slang for gathering/lining up a large group of people, particularly in situations such as boarding an aircraft, so named for its similarity to rounding up cattle into a chute.

perceptions. Never would've guessed that. [four second pause] I bet I answered a question in there somewhere.

BETH MARTIN: You did. You did. And that leads to a secondary question. So you talked about your civilian reception, what about your reception within the military community? Within the battalion as you all got back?

SCOTT MARTIN: Oh, when we all got back?

BETH MARTIN: Mhm.

SCOTT MARTIN: Oh that was painless. That was easy. There's – there's absolutely – because I was surrounded by all the people I had been with for, you know, up to sixteen months. The fact is that we had a process for getting back. And by the way, I've heard of it getting screwed up before. When we got back it was not messed up.

And maybe – I wasn't on the first flight. But when we flew into Elmendorf[19], the military base… They got us off the plane. No whooping, hollering, clapping. Nothing. Just like, "Follow the guy with the chem light[20]." And, "Follow *that* guy with the chem light." And, "For returns follow that guy with a chem light." Okay! Got my rucksack, got my bag, I'm – I'm walking, just like everybody else.

No pomp. No circumstance. Matter of fact. It was dark, it was night, and it was like, "Just go. Gotta go." Go that way, check in at that, give me your ID card, walk over there, give them your rifle, give them your night vision goggles, give them any other sensitive item stuff that you have. Like, "Boom, got it."

Saw Amy [Redacted] there. And you know, she said, "Welcome back, sir." And welcome back and welcome back and welcome back. I mean she was saying it to everybody.

But it was do this, do that, you got this little tag? Give it to them. Cos they made us write four tags with our name, social security number, weapon number, and whatever else. You know. All that stuff. And we're just, "Okay, give them this tag? You got it. There's my tag. Oh, you need a tag? Here's a tag." And literally it was like, "Okay, now get on the bus!"

[laughs] You know, but it was literally like stop here, do this, do this, do this, get on the bus.

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[19] An Air Force based near Anchorage, Alaska. Recently reconfigured into a joint base with Fort Richardson. Now known as JBER (Joint Base Elmendorf-Richardson).
[20] Known colloquially as glowsticks.

BETH MARTIN: Mhm.

SCOTT MARTIN: I mean it was – that reception was perfect. There wasn't a lot of lights. There was no cheering. There was no crowds… That was good. Because it – and I know they did this on purpose. I was part of the plan – I was part of the planning. So I knew what was gonna happen.

But you didn't want families there because they would just screw everything up. Suddenly people would forget that they had sensitive items and had to turn them in. And it's hugging and kissing and crying. And it's like, "No, we ain't doing that. Military operation. Boom, boom, boom, get on the bus."

BETH MARTIN: Mhm.

SCOTT MARTIN: So that was good. Um… Going into the gym, we thought, "Ehh, why do we have to go into the gym?" Okay, so we had to go into the gym so that we could get into a giant formation and somebody could speak—I don't even remember who it was, I don't care, I don't care, whatever. But somebody said, "Oh, great job, welcome home…" Blah blah blah. You know what we heard? "Wah wah, wah wah, wah wah wah."

BETH MARTIN: [laughs]

SCOTT MARTIN: [laughs] You know, "Oh we're so proud of you…" Wah wah, wah wah, wah wah wah. You know, there's my wife and my daughter right over there, I can see 'em. Oh, wait, what'd he say? Wah wah, wah wah…

BETH MARTIN: [laughs]

SCOTT MARTIN: Eeee! Wah wah, wah wah, wah wah wah. Shut the hell up and let me go home. You know, really, that's uh… But again, not being completely overwhelmed by people, at that point, was still good. And the fact that they limited the crowds to family.

BETH MARTIN: Mhm.

SCOTT MARTIN: So you didn't – they didn't park us in a stadium or something. Or they – they restricted the gymnasium there. The Buckner Center. They restricted it to family only. Cos, you know, what if they'd had, you know, a whole

bunch of other crap. We wouldn't have been interested. We wouldn't have cared. We don't want that. We just want to go home, at that point. Just wanna go home. Want to see my family. Want to go home. That's it.

So… They did it the right way, in that regard. I know that some people returning from Desert Storm, which I didn't go to, obviously. But people returning from Desert Storm, you know, they like formed them up and they paraded them across, you know, and then had them stand out there while people went "Wah wah, wah wah, wah wah wah." Oh, and here's Senator so and so! "Wah wah, wah wah, wah wah wah." Oh, and here's Congressman so and so! "Wah wah, wah wah." Oh no, here's Mayor so and so! "Wah wah wah." Oh and here's…Assemblyman so and so!

BETH MARTIN: [laughs]

SCOTT MARTIN: You're just like, "For the love of God, just shoot me." You know?

BETH MARTIN: Mhm.

SCOTT MARTIN: You don't want to hear that *crap*. All that is, is people trying to steal limelight and have their five minutes of fame that hopefully makes it onto TV so they can attract more voters. [snorts] Hell, I'd have shot him if I had my – if I'd had a rifle.

BETH MARTIN: [laughs]

SCOTT MARTIN: Just end the madness. Let me go home. So that's something that we definitely got right. Um… [four second pause] If there's one common theme about these homecoming things that I'm talking about, it's that you don't really want the admiration. You don't want all that. You do a little bit later. You want to be recognized *later*.

BETH MARTIN: Mhm.

SCOTT MARTIN: But you've just spent sixteen, eighteen months away from your family. The last thing you want is some blowhard talking to you ad nauseum. [three second pause]

BETH MARTIN: Mhm?

SCOTT MARTIN: Just…let me start returning to normal. [three second pause] Yeah. So, there you go.

BETH MARTIN: Alright. So last question. What is one memory from your military life that has had the biggest impact or stuck with you the most?

SCOTT MARTIN: [four second pause] Um… [five second pause] I was able to be there when you were born. And that's weird. Cos as a man I'm not like, you know. [four second pause] So many people in the military have children—or life events—that happen that they're not there for. It happens. I mean, literally, it happens.

It's quite possible that if your mother was pregnant while I was gone I probably wouldn't have gotten home for the birth. Even though we'd planned it out… These things rarely ever, you know…

BETH MARTIN: Pan out.

SCOTT MARTIN: Well, yeah. I mean, look at Tom [Redacted]! He was in Fairbanks, and he tried to get back, but he couldn't get back in time for the birth of his – his daughter. Jim [Redacted]. Couldn't get back in time for the birth of the daughter. You – it happens. I mean, Tom [Redacted] was only three hundred miles away and he couldn't get back in time.

The odds of me being there for it, and all the, um – "my daughter looked like a lizard"… It was still something that I was glad that I could be there for. And the funny thing about it is, I wouldn't have been there for it. And that's why I say.

Because I had a company commander who said, "We are *not* going to go to the field and leave you back here just because your wife's pregnant. And just because she's like eight and a half months or she's gonna deliver any day now."

And the battalion XO[21] said, "No, company commander, you don't understand. This guy's leaving Fort Lewis[22] in three weeks. And his wife is gonna do – is gonna deliver any minute. You don't need him for the next three weeks. So you know what? You're just gonna need to learn to adjust without him. And he's gonna stay here. And he's gonna be your

[21] The second-in-command at either a company or battalion level. Assists the commanding officer in daily tasks and often takes on administrative functions.

[22] Army installation near Tacoma, Washington. Recently merged with McChord Air Force Base, creating Joint Base Lewis-McChord.

rear detachment guy. But he's also gonna be able to…" [four second pause] "To be with his wife and see his – his baby born."

And that stuck with me. Here's why. As I grew to be a leader, and grew to be in charge of people, whether it was as a company commander or later as I was going through my 5th RTB or anything else. That was something that I *learned* the value of.

BETH MARTIN: Mhm.

SCOTT MARTIN: It's one of those things. You learned a lesson and you didn't really realize that you learned it. But the *value* of that in someone's moral, and their well-being is – is immeasurable.

So when I would have a soldier who – who would come up with certain circumstances—"sir, it's my first baby, and – and my wife's doing this and that and the other"—I'd say, "You know what?" [three second pause. "We're gonna let you go. We're gonna – we're gonna do this." I said, "Because I understand the value of it. And I don't want you to have to look at a *picture* ten years from now and say 'I wish I could've been there.'"

I said, "Because you will be retired—" I tell everyone – I used to tell this to everybody, "You will be retired one day. You will be – you will be gone from the military. You're gonna – you're gonna retire, or you're gonna ETS[23], you're gonna terminate service, you know. But your family will *always* be there. They'll – you can't get away from them. They will always be your family."

I said, "So this hiccup in the Army timeline is just that. It's – it will be a *blip* on the radar ten years from now. Twenty years from now. But that moment in time? Once it's lost you can't get it back. And that family, and that bond that you – that you start right then and there is – is more important than whether the Army has you for the next five days."

And so that's the thing that I learned from. And I don't think I would've learned it except that my company commander had ordered me to go to the field and then he was told that he was *wrong*. And that I could go. And – and that I – and see you born.

BETH MARTIN: Mhm.

SCOTT MARTIN: Mkay?

[23] Experation of Term of Service, essentially phasing out of the military upon reaching the end of their contract. Often requires continued reserve service.

BETH MARTIN: Mhm.

SCOTT MARTIN: So that's – that's important. It's not just you. But it's about – that event shaped me for the rest of my career. So that's why – it's not just self-serving.

BETH MARTIN: [laughs] Yeah.

SCOTT MARTIN: It's not just self-serving. But it shaped my perception of what was *right*.

BETH MARTIN: Mhm.

SCOTT MARTIN: And what was…fair. And I carried that with me and I applied that every single time. And it's unfortunate that if I had in fact gone to the field and missed it? That would've shaped me too. And I would've been that commander from then on that said, "Hey! I wasn't there for mine, and you don't have to be there for yours!"

But you see how that one little event shaped countless people that I influenced directly throughout my entire career. And that's kinda – that's kind of cool for me. [three second pause] Cos it could've gone either way.

BETH MARTIN: Yeah.

SCOTT MARTIN: It could've gone either way. I could've been the guy who says, "No way in hell!" But because that one major stood up and said, "No, that's not right. You're gonna be here for that birth." That shaped my response to that for the rest of my career. So that's kind of cool.

BETH MARTIN: Well thank you for your time.

SCOTT MARTIN: Okay. I hope you got something out of that.

BETH MARTIN: Yes.

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