

MiraCosta College Student Veteran Oral History Service Learning Project

Interview Date: November 1, 2017

Interview Location: MiraCosta Community College Library

Acronyms:

HC: Hector Cortes (interviewee)

CC: Chase Colin (primary interviewer)

NA: Nishant Narayanan (secondary interviewer)

BN: Bernice Narvaez (secondary interviewer)

Chase Colin: Hi my name is Chase Colin and I'm here with

Berenice Narvaez: Berenice Narvaez

Nishant Narayanan: Nishant Narayanan

CC: And were interviewing Hector Cortez for the MiraCosta College Student Veterans Oral History Service Learning Project. It's eleven am on November 1st, 2017.

CC: Hi, Hector. How's your morning going?

Hector Cortez: Hey it's going pretty good. It's starting, let's see what's going on.

CC: Right on. So Were you drafted or did you enlist in the military?

HC: I enlisted when I was seventeen in high school. I was super young I was seventeen and obviously underage my parents had to sign off, like he can join the army. I made the decision to join the army pretty early.

CC: So you said Army?

HC: Yup, Army.

CC: What made you choose the Army over the other branches of the military?

HC: I did during my freshman year all the way to my senior year. I knew it was going to be a big decision and it was going to be a big commitment. I did look into the Navy, the Coast Guard, the Air Force, the Marines. Army was not always my first choice. My first choice was the Navy for some reason. I guess, I always liked battleships and it stuck with me. After looking at it as far as the recruiters they either never showed up, or they would never call you back. They didn't seem all to interested in myself. You know if they aren't interested in someone new they're not going to be interested in someone outside. I didn't choose the Navy for that reason. The Air Force just talking to one recruiter, I only saw the recruiter once in high school and it just didn't have that calling. I did talk to the Marines and they were pushed more on pride and Semper Fi and everything. I mean it's great, it's awesome, but the pride thing wasn't my thing to go off of my military service. So I did I finally looked into the Army, and then the Army had this sense of brotherhood, professionalism they knew what our mission was. They knew exactly what they wanted to give me. They said we can offer you college, they pretty much put everything on the table. We don't get paid more than other branches it's just exactly the same. Right now you're pretty much picking what you want to do, what do you want to take with you? The army just showed so much opportunities and it showed right after basic I did get offered multiple things to do and it was great. I'm pretty sure those opportunities would never be there if I were to join any other branch.

BN: How would you define brotherhood?

HC: Brotherhood is a sense of I will always be there no matter what. Regardless of the situation the time, the place. As for me brotherhood I did see a lot in the Army, mostly when we were out on mission or on our downtime. There were a lot of times where I felt if I ever offered this certain situation to people back in high school they would say "Hell no!" I am not going to go and be in the middle of Georgia 100% humidity, doing pushups, having all this gear and marching twelve miles. Some people would nowhere near ever say let's do it. They might have to do something because they had to do it, but they were still there by my side.

CC: So you said you were seventeen when you decided to join the Army that's a really young age to be making such a life changing decision. What was one of the biggest factors in joining the military?

HC: I knew I always wanted to give something back to the country that has given me everything. Both my parents are from Mexico and the opportunities that were there are just nowhere near the same as here in the United States. I always felt me serving would be me serving myself, and giving back to the country that has given my parents and myself so much. In a way I felt like I was paying my dues for my parents and myself. I still continue to do that, I am still in the reserves and I love it. It's a little different from the active duty I changed my job, so it's more on the financial side instead of the infantry side which I used to do.

CC: Can you tell me kind of what your parents initial thoughts were on you joining the military?

HC: They were super skeptical about me joining, because I was so young. They asked me at least two times a day "Do you really want to do this? Do you really want to do this?" I think they were scared just like every other parent would, because you really don't know when and where they are going to send you. They were just scared. They were skeptical I was seventeen, they were like "You don't know what you want to do." I guess at first when they said "Yeah sure of course let's do it." I guess at first they might have thought I was joking, but then when I said "Hey I want to sign up tomorrow, I already did the paperwork. All you have to do is sign on the dotted line". Then and there, they thought wow he was actually serious. I have always stuck to what I wanted.

CC: Did you have any family or friends in the military before they influenced you to join?

HC: No. I am the first one in my family to be in the United States military.

CC: You said you had a son that's three months old?

HC: Yeah I have a newborn son he's three months. His name is Kylo, me and my wife both chose the name off of, we were watching Star Wars and then Kylo Ren. The name sounded super cool and then I said "Hey if it's a boy I get to choose Kylo". She was like "Ok if it's a boy you get to choose" and it's a good name so we stuck with it.

CC: That's awesome. Through your experience at the military would you if Kylo ended up wanting to join the military before or after college what would you say to him?

HC: I would say it's a great experience definitely think about it, because it is a commitment. The last thing you want to do in the military, the one thing the downside is just like anywhere else or like school or life if there are people who don't want to be there. They are going to bring the people who do want to be there down, and I wouldn't want my son to be that one guy who

quits halfway. If you want to do it give it your all give it your everything. I would let him know to think about it make sure that's what he wants I would be proud if he were able to join the military. If he would just take the college side, I would be more than proud as well.

Whatever he does in life I would tell him to make sure that's what he wants to do.

CC: Stepping on the bus to boot camp what was the feeling? What was going through your head at that time, and you know when you got on the bus it started to go from this is happening to this is actually going down on my way there?

HC: That's when it hit me, when I guess until then I did nothing but watch war movies. This is really cool, I'm ready to go. I'm not going to get homesick or anything like that. Once the recruiter picked me up got into the car, took me to MAPS to do my final swear in and stuff. I really did do this. You know I'm actually doing it. I went through the test I did everything, I started feeling homesick and that was the first thing. The next day we took a flight to Georgia. Landed in Atlanta got the bus to Basic, and once I got on Basic we went through reception. Which is getting your shots, they are giving you your uniform. It's not Basic, Basic it's not where your drill sergeants are there but it is where you're getting ready to go to Basic Your platoon get your company. That's where you are going to start off. That's where it hit me.

CC: Did you ever feel homesick? What is it kind of scary being away from home so far away?

HC: Yeah it definitely was before then I never left my parents side or my family's side really. I was super homesick especially going from California to Georgia literally on the other side of the country. I was super homesick just because everything was so different in California. We have Carl's Jr., out in Georgia they have Hardee's, and even the restaurants weren't matching up. Everything was so different. I definitely got homesick.

CC: Right. Everybody was all in the same boat. You all were new didn't know each other. Was there instantaneous brotherhood amongst you guys? You guys were all kind in the thick of it together without knowing anyone?

HC: Yeah. I felt the first sense of brotherhood not during our first week, but after it. Oh wow all of us went through it together. I noticed that everyone you know was upset or you know homesick, and that's when I felt the sense of brotherhood. Hey they are going through this tough time with me and that's when I felt it the most, because every time I felt homesick there was always someone else from California or from a similar place, saying "Hey don't worry man I am too" that's when we started bonding."

CC: What was your MOS? What was your job in the Army?

HC: In the Army I'm pretty sure it's only the Army when you sign up, you sign up for that one specific job because we are the biggest branch. You will hear a lot of Marines say they do open contracts which means they just get the job that the Marines say. I've heard tons of times or someone goes in for a certain job, and then they sign up like "Hey if this job opens this is what we will give you if not well." With the Army it's set out they promised me you are going to be an infantryman which is technically an eleven X-ray. You could go from a Bravo or Charlie. Bravo is an infantryman regular ground kicking in doors. The Charlie they carry a mortar they are just infantrymen just like Bravo's, but the Charlie's have that extra

responsibility. Regardless of the situation I knew I was going to be an infantryman I knew I was going to get the job done.

CC: That's awesome. Were you ever deployed?

HC: My only deployment was in 2013 to Afghanistan. I went to RC South which is a dessert very dry, lot of sand everywhere. I was there for half a year. I was originally supposed to be there for eighteen months helping all the Afghanistan soldiers, get ready for them to take over our base, but during that time President Barack Obama said that we are going to bring the troops back and he shortened it up to a year and then after that my deployment went from eighteen months to a year. My commanding officer said "Hey we are going to do it all the way down to sixth months." So I was able to make it back for Christmas, which was pretty good

CC: Do you remember arriving? Was it kind of scary going into Afghanistan?

HC: It was super super scary. The day we deployed, first we took a flight all the way to Germany and then from Germany we got another flight to Kyrgyzstan. From Kyrgyzstan, we got all our paperwork ready, and then took a flight to Afghanistan. The second I landed it was 130-degree weather. The second they opened the doors the whole room was super hot, and it was so bright I never felt anything like it. Then once we got there we were catching another flight to go to our actual base, and then once we took that flight there we landed. It was at night. The door opened from the helicopter it was a Chinook. Walked outside it was super dark, pitch black never seen it so dark in my life, and the people were holding on to the person in front of you. Just kept on going and then we went into the base, and that's when it got real. I'm literally outside of the where someone can shoot at us right now, and nothing from stopping them from shooting at us. That's when I felt, oh man I am actually in Afghanistan.

CC: That unbelievable. That must've been so scary. What was your living quarters like over there?

HC: It was actually pretty nice, because we had engineers attached to us so it was a big huge tent. Then they just put plywood in front of it, so we all had our own room. From there we actually added to it. We were able to get one refrigerator in there with one generator. So everything was plugged to one generator, and sometimes we had too many things on there it would turn off. It was pretty cool. I had my own room given it was like a jail cell, it was really small. I liked that it was my own room. I had somewhere to sleep in.

CC: You said it was a hundred and thirty degrees when you got there. Did you guys have air conditioning? Was it comfortable living?

HC: Yeah we ended up getting air conditioning in there so it wasn't all that bad. It could've been a lot worse. I think it definitely could've been a lot worse, but yeah it was really from my standard being in a hundred and thirty-degree weather with the AC it was maybe 90-95 but it was still better.

CC: Right. You said you were there to train Afghanistan soldiers, can you tell me about the interactions you had with them how did they treat you guys, how did they look at you guys and the civilian perspective on the army out there and what they thought about you as well?

HC: Right. For the soldiers, they're called the ANA which is the Afghanistan National Army and then well I worked with their army. Their AUP which is is Afghanistan Unified Police I

worked with them as well with the police and then the army. They were both really, (14:54 Nishant End) really excited we were there. The Afghanistan really looks up to us, because they do see what we've accomplished they do see the freedom that we have, and they were always very respectful. I never had, I never really felt any negativity. I've heard of incidents here and there, but for the most part the people I dealt with they were respectful. They were very open to suggestions we made. We were there to just train them, and then eventually we would just give them an over the job of being the Army, you know. We were supposed to teach them how to be a proper Army. How to take care of situations they might get in, and if anyone else you know Taliban or ISIS, whatever were to happen. As far as civilian side, I personally only dealt with male civilians just because in the culture over there males are not really supposed to talk to females at all. If so it has to be in the presence of the husband, and if that you still have to go through the husband before even thinking of saying one word to the female. We would have to get maybe a female soldier, and talk to the female to the wife or anything like that, but for the most part they were very nice, very kind people every time we went. We went to someone's house they always offered us what they probably didn't have, they offered us a little bit of food that they had. They still split it with all of us, they offered us chai, which is a tea. Which is really, really hot in 130-degree water but they still drink it boiling hot. I wore gloves all the time, and I still felt the heat from my gloves. I probably burned my tongue every mission, just me being courteous. But yeah, it was great.

CC: Did you ever see combat while you were over there?

HC: I did get to see combat, again my job as infantrymen was I did have to go into towns that we thought the Taliban or the Taliban was reported there. My first fire fight was on a mission. So we all landed on this one place we then saw this huge mountain, that we had to climb. We went up it. It was supposed to be a three-day mission so we were up in that mountains for 3 days. That was my first firefight. They said "Hey Cortes you're going to be right here." I had the saw which is the quad, which is an automatic weapon a machine gun. They said "Hey you watch this way." This was my staff sergeant; Staff Sergeant Gray he said "You're right here stay right there look this" Ok. They pretty much set us up in the perfect places, my squad leader staff sergeant Grand. He was like "Hey I don't like that spot move over here" I was like "Ok." I moved a couple more feet to the right and then the sun was going down and then we have this thing we call the chatterbox. Which pretty much you can hear transmission from radios around the area. We heard this one from a Taliban saying "Hey we see the soldiers; we see one were going to shoot at them." Then my platoon sergeant, or no my other squad leader sergeant Ford he said "Hey we just got word that they're going to shoot at us" and the second he said, that they're going to shoot at us we heard, I heard the first bullet for the first time. It was just like a cracking sound, and then a whistle sound, then there was more and then I heard a gunshot on the right. I was like "Wait what's going on" and then that was us shooting back. Then I was so confused. I was like "Wait you know what's going on? Are we shooting or they shooting at us? They said "Yeah they're shooting at us, get down!" I was like "Oh crap!" I sat down and then I remember seeing or thinking I saw a bullet go to my right. I started shooting in the general direction where I thought they were shooting and then you

know time flew by. They were shooting back and forth. Yelling, "Hey are you okay! Hey is this going on!" Yeah that was my first firefight. It probably lasted about it, was pretty short maybe like fifteen minutes.

CC: Were there any casualties?

HC: There was no casualties, thank God. Everyone in that mission was safe. We did take down the other people the Taliban who was trying to shoot at us, we used a helicopter to fly over them. You know, take them out.

CC: Wow. That's unreal, that's crazy to hear about. How long were you deployed in Afghanistan?

HC: So half a year.

CC: Half a year? In the six months you were there did you have any friends or anyone in your unit that were?

HC: Yeah. So from my first firefight I was already you know, we did all that. Ok I got that taken out of the way that's all good to go. Let's go back home. So we went back to our FOB after that mission, we landed and then they said "Hey go to your rooms put everything down, clean your weapons and then you can go get chow" Ok, cool. I finally got to my room, I remember taking my ruck off put it on there. Started cleaning, I opened up my fee tray to clean the inside of my VL of my weapon. We heard an alarm go off, then it was going off and it was going off I was like "What is that?" I've never heard that before and then they said "A code word" they said they the code word meaning there was someone in there shooting. People were like "Dude I just got back" this is FOB. This is supposed to be our safe place. They said "They there's a shooter inside he's shooting at soldiers, and people so take cover, put a wall right here make sure no one comes into our tents." I did, I sat there. I just saw people running back and forth, and I didn't know what was going on. I just got here! You know I just got back from my first firefight. Then come to hear that our mechanic was killed. We lost three soldiers from another Army, Romanian they got shot as well. It was a green and blue situation, which means someone that was working with us they ended up turning on us, so it was an inside job pretty much. We found out that it was security guards that we hired, contracted. They also get vacation time, when they went on vacation the Taliban got a heard that they were working with us. They had their family's hostage and they said "Hey if you don't kill soldiers we will kill your family." They were pretty much held hostage, they ended up turning on us. Yeah, unfortunately we did lose our mechanic. He was a great guy, I did talk to him a couple times, and we lost soldiers from the Romanian Army. That was just my unit.

CC: Whoa, that's crazy. How did you kind of cope with that? That must've been things got really real.

HC: Yeah, it actually got really real before then. Before that incident my first week there we had a brand new lieutenant come in he took over his platoon and everything. He was going out in his first mission and my friend was actually on the mission to, his names Brenal. He was on the mission and we heard a big loud boom! You know miles away, and we were like what happened? Then we were on QRF, which means quick response force. Then we were pretty much supposed to be going over there, seeing what was going on, seeing if they needed help.

Once we got there we saw the truck it was all blown up. Apparently the lieutenant who was there he was blown up, the driver was blown up we lost five people that day, because and then there was the gunner. Since he was a 9DD he got thrown up in the air dropped, and he was still alive apparently. But when it blew up the truck ended up falling, and it crushed him. But yeah five people died that day that's probably when it really got real, that's probably the one time I was like this is not a joke these things happen.

CC: Right. You know it sounds like it's rough over there, but did you have fun experiences over there is there good things that you know when you're on your leisure?

HC: When we had downtime, it's just a bunch of guys freaking hormones, throwing, and flying around. You know, we would just wrestle, workout together it was pretty much guys being you know, dudes. Playing jokes on each other, I remember grabbing a bunch of baby powder and I threw it on my friend and he threw shaving cream on me. It you know those were the fun times, those helped a lot.

CC: Yeah, Sure. Did you have a lot of down time like that or you guys busy busy all the time?

HC: There was always three phases. It was getting ready for mission, doing the mission, recovery and then during the recovery it's pretty much getting ready for the other mission again. The recovery was our down time. Sometimes it was a day, sometimes it was three days but for the most part there was always something going on, there was always another mission every single day. There's no days off on the weekends it's everyday there's a new mission. Do this, do that, do this, do that and if our unit didn't have anything to do they would send us to another unit to help them out on their missions.

CC: Did you always have access to food and what was the food like over there?

HC: We actually ended up contracting local people to make food for us, so it was pretty cool. There was always access to food, we weren't always stuck to MRA only on mission. Other than that when we were on the FOB, we had food on thanksgiving they brought turkey.

CC: What about supplies was there ever, did you ever find yourself having a shortage of things you needed?

HC: No, we didn't. luckily we didn't because we had a landing strip. So we had a helicopter always coming in bringing new things. We never had a shortage of anything, we always had water that tasted horrible it always tasted like bleach.

CC: Ugh. Was it from over there?

HC: Yeah it was from over there, Afghanistan.

CC: Did you stay in touch with your family while you were over there?

HC: I did. I got to skype them from time to time. No cellphones or anything so I really didn't get to call them but it was mostly skype when we had the chance.

CC: Did they let you stay in contact pretty often? How often were you allowed to skype?

HC: Our downtime. That was probably our only time.

CC: Was there anything you did before you went out on a mission for good luck or something? Carry something on you?

HC: Yeah, I took my bible.

CC: Your bible?

HC: Yeah, and then I would always before every mission I would clean my room. Just so God forbid something happens to me it's all ready to go, it's all packed and stuff but if I come back the rooms clean. I could just throw everything down and I got a clean room, so that's the way I saw it. That was my I guess my tradition.

CC: That's cool. That kind of proves the point you were saying earlier about the army kind of teaches this sense of leadership and that seems like a very you know leadership like role. Is there anything else that kind of happened? Did you ever anywhere else besides Afghanistan?

HC: No, not really we were always in Afghanistan. We always stuck to our sea south. The cool thing about there we were actually not too far from Alexander the Great's Castle, so that was pretty cool we drove by I saw it. It's insane how it's still up.

CC: Yeah that's crazy.

HC: Yeah I got to see the Himalayas when I was in Kurdistan, didn't really get to go far or anything but I saw them.

CC: What about non deployments? Were you anywhere else in the United States?

HC: In the United States? Yeah I've probably been to... So I was in Georgia, Kentucky, Louisiana, Maine, California of course. I've been in New Jersey places like that.

CC: All for training?

HC: Wisconsin. Yeah for training!

CC: I think we'll talk now about a little more about the transitions to school life and stuff like that. Yeah, do you recall the day your service ended? because now you said.

HC: Reserves, yeah...

CC: When did you stop being active duty do you remember kind of what it was?

HC: Yeah the transitions pretty cool actually because it's a month worth of transition. They were pretty much "Hey you we have to take you to classes, build a resume, we have to give you a plan what you're going to do." So they don't just throw us out into the world, they kind of set you up for success or try to. They say you have to make a resume; these are all things you have to do before you get out. So my transition was very easy getting out of the army. I do remember feeling that sense of relief but at the same time I was like "Aw man well I'm here getting my things, ready to leave." My friends are getting ready to go back to the field.

CC: Right.

HC: You know, so it's back and forth.

CC: Did you ever have like a sense of guilt or anything like that? That your kind of calling it and like you said your buddies are going back out to the field. What did that feel like?

HC: It sucks. Sometimes when I was still in I was like " Ha-ha I got lucky dude I got to stay back" but now it's more like it sucks I wish I was there with you guys helping you guys out.

CC: Right because you see that in movies a lot, like in American Sniper he just wants to keep going back because he feels bad for his guys out in the field. You know, your brothers are out there.

HC: Yeah, that's exactly what it is. A thing that a lot of people I've met suffer is from survivor's guilt. It feels like "Hey this person died, this person died and I'm still here." You know that's most of time nine time out of ten when I talk to veterans it's the sense of survivor's guilt. I should've I died also, or I should've died with them that's the hardest thing to cope with



sometimes is. Should I still be there you know doing that? Should I have done this done that?  
Should I still be in helping them out?

CC: That's tough to cope with I'm sure.

HC: Yeah... yeah.

CC: What about... Was it you who decided to get out or were your four years up and you were?

HC: Yeah, well I mean my time was up, but then I thought you know I could stay in and I think I was good at what I did. I know if I would've stayed in I would have definitely progressed, me getting out I think it was a decision me and my wife made. I wasn't always there because I was at work. So I did my time, I did what I wanted to do now it's time to focus on my family. So I did get out but I also wanted to focus on myself as far as school because I wanted to get an education. Not really for me but for my family to support my wife and my son. And because I knew if I had a son I was going to tell him "Hey! I went to college so you better go to college."

CC: Right, right, yeah. Seems like a very selfless person join the military because you owed it to your country for helping out your family and yourself. Getting out so you can support your family seems all very honorable stuff.

BN: Was college your first choice?

HC: Yeah, yeah I know I wasn't ready to jump into work. I mean the benefits are just there. The GI bill's great, you go to school they help you with a BH. So they're pretty much paying you to go to college, paying you to get an education.

BN: So paid to do your homework in a sense?

HC: Pretty much, you know. You can literally show up everyday and get an F and they'll still pay you. Given it's very frowned upon.

BN: What's your major?

HC: Right now I'm majoring in Website development, I like it a lot. It's just so much typing and so much computers and I don't know. Recently I've been into Communications majors.

BN: I'm a communications major.

HC: Are you?

BN: Yeah.

HC: Yeah! I love every time I go up and talk to people and giving speeches stuff like that. I love doing that, I love learning about people and about myself.

BN: Have you thought about switching to a communications major?

HC: I'm going to be honest with you, I think that's what I'm going to do next semester. That's why I I didn't focus more on my major classes I focused on classes I really needed to do, English stuff like that.

NN: So when you got out of the military did you take time off or did you just go right into school?

HC: So I got out in October of 2015 and I started that next semester, which is Spring?

NN: Yeah. So you gave yourself time off to regroup to civilian life?

HC: Yeah, I was fortunate enough the timing was perfect for me.

CC- Your friends that were in the service, do you continue does friendships with them? (15:54  
Bernice end)

HC- All of the time. I talked to people from basic because that's where it started.

HC- Yeah. I still keep in contact with a lot of them. Someone will call me to congratulate me on my son. People in Hawaii and Germany. People that are out, people that are in. I still care about them a lot. Yeah I think they got a lot closer now that they see the civilian side of them. If you get to see that person for who they are.

CC- This is a lifelong brotherhood it will last forever?

HC- Yeah definitely hurts when you hear about people who died. Recently another person I was with died a couple days ago. And you still care about it. It hurts because you care about them.

CC- When you got out did you join any veterans organizations?

HC- I have not just because I didn't want to give my hundred percent commitment. Just because I'm always working or at school or with my son. I just don't have the time I was thinking about it one-day.

CC- Yeah work and school is priorities.

HC- Yeah work school and a new kid. I feel like I have five jobs and I'm in the reserve.

CC- Could you tell me some of the challenges of going from military to school.

HC- For anyone in the military you always have someone breathing down your neck telling you you do today. When your a student everything is on you. You are the man that decides if you do this or not. I'm so used to having someone tell me what to do.

BN- How was it with your family when you returned home? They tried to convince you to stay.

HC- Yeah they were super happy. I stayed with them for a couple days to so they were happy.

BN- How did they feel about you staying in the reserves?

HC- They said that's good at least it's only part-time. I wasn't ready to fully go out of the military. I wanted to at least continue doing that for four more years.

BN- How do you feel knowing that it's going to be over completely pretty soon?

HC- I don't know it probably hasn't hit me yet because after that would probably be up to your reenlistment and it would be up to 10 years I think after my eight years I'm done.

CC- Did you feel out of place at all in school?

HC- No definitely not. At MiraCosta there's always so many different people from different backgrounds and cultures. I've never felt like that at Palomar. It was between Palomar MiraCosta and I didn't feel like I was supposed to be at Palomar. At MiraCosta everyone's super nice.

CC- At Palomar did you feel like you stood out a little more?

HC- Yeah I don't know what it was, maybe it was the people, the area I can't explain it. Here I always felt the sense of this is where I should be.

CC- Now being at MiraCosta do you still feel this brotherhood with all military veterans or does it stick Army with army Marines with Marines?

HC- No at this point we're all just veterans. We all bag on each other. In my class this guy Justin, he's super cool and next to me there's a guy named Chase and for some reason we'll all end up sitting in the front row and he's a Marine and he's an army guy so we were always bagging on him for being a marine. They call us Army stands for "Aren't Ready to be a

Marine Yet.” Marine we always say stands for “Muscles Are Required Intelligence and Not Expected” so we are always bagging on each other we still fully respect the service we did.

CC- What about amongst other students, do you feel like a regular student?

HC- I feel like a regular student. I never came up to someone and be like hey I’m a veteran do my homework. I’ve never had anyone say I’m a student and I deserve this.

CC- What’s your current career?

HC- Right now I work for Allstate, I’m an insurance agent, I just sell auto insurance and stuff like that but I think I’m just doing this for now. I’ve never actually thought of this field. There is a lot of potential, people need insurance.

CC- From the military you must’ve learned a lot what are some things that you learned that you can put into your future career.

HC- The one thing that we always focused on in the Army is being the leader. Lead from the, front lead as an example, be the example. They stressed that a lot when you become a sergeant, an NCO a noncommissioned, officer you have to learn this huge creed. It starts with it’s the end and it recites word for word what you have to do as the leader. I am a noncommissioned officer, I’m a professional, I’m a leader I lead from the front I would never make anyone do something that I wouldn’t do and I take that to heart. Right now I’m not a supervisor or anything. I would never make anyone do something wouldn’t do myself.

CC- Did your military experience influence your thinking about war and the military?

HC – I always had this thought that people don’t want us there because the United States has been in so many wars but from our perspective we’re obviously going in there to help and assist. I think it’s great. It really is but I also think that in their perspective, let’s say Canadian soldiers started coming into United States knocking on our doors. I would be pretty uncomfortable with that and there would obviously be retaliating. I got to see their perspective. When we were on the missions the Taliban wanted to kill us. When we went out we had a target on our heads. People around us were getting killed. People that would talk to us to and help us out, were targets too. They were just in the middle of it. The people there in Afghanistan are in a war that they don’t want to be in. Most of the time when I went into villages people are just farmers. They really didn’t have much other than the farm. Sometimes we had to go in there breaking doors, looking for people, using their house is a shelter as we fought Taliban. I realized that once we were on a mission there was a kid who got shot and part of his head got shot off. This kid was like 12 and they were wheeling him in a wheelbarrow while he was still alive. I looked at this kid and was like this kid never asked for this, he was on his way to school. It did change my perspective as far as the civilian point of view from a political point of you trying to help. If someone is caught in the middle of it, in my mind, it’s bad.

CC- I remember when you came into our class you were talking about stolen valor. I really appreciate your response. What do you think about stolen valor?

HC- So stolen valor is when someone wears a uniform and claims to be the military. Yeah, I fought for the country but I mostly fought for the rights that we received here and that’s freedom of speech and pretty much freedom of doing whatever you want to do within the law. Right

now the law doesn't say that you can't wear a uniform. If you want to wear uniform by all means go for it but obviously there's a law that you can't impersonate a police officer or Dr. Or something like that. I'm pretty sure military members, you can impersonate them all you want as long as you're not getting a discount. Sometimes it is hurt because it feels like there's this person feeling like they are entitled to all these things that they haven't even worked for. Just how anyone else and they didn't go to college and they say have a bachelor's degree. And here everyone else is graduating, staying up late, procrastinating and doing all this work for this piece of paper that you finally earn and someone just pretends that they have it. It takes that sense of value. It's like someone telling you it's just to giveaway.

CC- I asked that question because I thought it would be good to put "I fought for our freedom" I think that's really cool. What characteristics do you think stuck with you now in your daily life and school life?

HC- Definitely for me the one thing I took the most, like I said I was 17 when I joined, so super immature and in the army pretty much matured me. I think maturity would be a big thing for me. If you know you messed up and didn't do an assignment you're just like not trying to make excuses you just say I didn't do it. It's a maturity level. I get that a lot I'm only 23 the people say I act like I'm 28. I never knew how to take that because they're like you are so mature for being a 23-year-old.

CC- You have a very mature presence about you.

HC- I still do not know how to take that. You're mature as in your old are you mature is it like what? The maturity would be the one.

CC- What about the lack of structure in your daily life. You know like now you don't have anyone tell you do this do that. Everything is at your own discretion.

HC- My wife is very good at helping me feel that again. She's like hey this needs to go on this thing to happen. So I still see her as a person who keeps me on track. She does tell me hey do your homework so I still have the authority figure pretty much. I still have someone breathing down my neck.

CC- Did you receive any medals or citations in the army.

HC- Yeah I did get multiple citations. I did get a medal the Army accommodation medal, an army achievement medal. The medal that I take the pride in the most would be my EIB which isn't expert infantry badge. I had to do a whole week of training to get this medal, to get this badge. It's only for the infantry in the army in less than 5% of the infantry have this medal. So this is the one medal that I feel like I have earned. It was a whole week of nothing but multiple tests. You had to learn how to do navigation, so they pretty much throw you in the middle the desert and say hey find these points with a compass and a protractor and a map. Find your way around and when you're done we will see if you got it right. So that was the first day and then after that is just test after test do you know how to work this weapon this weapon this weapon. You have to show them in this exact order how they taught you to do it. In the last day you have to carry this to backpack 32 pounds for 13 miles. It's 12 miles but we took this route that I know was not 12 miles. I guarantee you it was at least 15 under

three hours. We had to walk with all of our gear for under three hours but I'm pretty sure it was 13 miles.

CC- Wow that's crazy! Do you ever wish you went to college first? Do you ever wish you went the officer route?

HC- I think if I was to stay in I would go officer or warrant officer. I never regretted going to military first because again I was 17 and I was not mature. I know I should've just gone to college and probably blown it off. So I do not not one-bit regret going into the military first. At least I got the side of the enlisted first which is you get to work directly with the soldier. I feel like I got the exact military experience I wanted to. The officer route it's more commanding you're more of a leader. You get the army sense but you oversee like a manager position but I wanted to work my way up from the bottom.

CC- You had said in 2020 your reservist position will be...?

HC- Yes so my whole Army can pretty much never call me back.

CC- They won't call you back anymore? But you will possibly have graduated from college by then and could you then go back into the army as an officer?

HC- Yeah I definitely could I'll definitely be young enough to do that still so I think if I do to get my bachelors degree I think I'll just take it day by day and see when an opportunity comes up I'll see you about it I don't know.

CC- Do you ever think it could happen? You said you want to be there for your son and at home and stuff.

HC- Yeah exactly. I don't know, the officer route pays a lot better too. So that's a big thing but yeah I don't know.

CC- Alright Hector. It was really good to do thanks we really appreciate it.

HC- Thanks Chase I really appreciated.

NN- Yeah. thanks for taking the time out of your day and sitting down with us talking about your army experience.

HC- Yeah I like to do this type of thing. Help you guys out. (Chase End)