

# Journal of Military and Government Counseling

## Special Issue: The Military to Veteran Career Transition

- ❖ A Life in Three Phases
- ❖ Female Service Member to Mental Health Counselor: A Transitional Reflection
- ❖ From Infantry Marine to Academic: Implications for Career Counselors
- ❖ My MIL-CIV Transition and Financial Hindsight
- ❖ Use of the Seven Touches of Outreach Model: Supporting Vocational and Employment Opportunities for National Guard and Reservists in Post-deployment Transition
- ❖ A Lifetime of Service: Teaching, Air National Guard, and U.S. Air Force (Active Duty) Experiences

Military and Government Counseling Association  
A Division of the American Counseling Association

To The Readers:

This special issue of the *Journal of Military and Government Counseling* is not in the format and style of our normal publication. It started as a special issue of a career development journal that ceased publication during the time the issue was taking shape. I felt an obligation to the contributors to see their work in print. The topic of the military to civilian career transition made it a natural fit for the JMGC.

Benjamin V. Noah, PhD  
Founding Editor and Current Editor-in-Residence

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**JOURNAL OF MILITARY AND GOVERNMENT COUNSELING**

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### **A Life in Three Phases**

By Benjamin V. Noah

I once worked for an academic dean who called me the man who has lived three lives; pre-Air Force; Air Force (25 years active duty); and post-Air Force. The same can be said of anyone who has served in the military. The transition from civilian to military is straight forward (whether through enlisted basic training or officer training); life is on a set schedule with few unknowns. However, the transition from military to civilian is marked by many “unknowns.” This requires the service member to be flexible. The U.S. Marine Corps teaches its officer candidates to “adapt, innovate, overcome” when faced with a challenge (Santamaria et al., 2004). Adapt, innovate, overcome applies, as well, to the transition from the military back to civilian life.

### **Some Thoughts on the Transition**

My last few years in the Air Force I volunteered as a counselor in the Transition Assistance Program (TAP). Many of the service members approaching separation (either term of service discharge or retirement) had no plan or clue for their future. Many of those retiring had no plan beyond moving to a former location where they still owned a home or staying in their current location where they may or may not have housing. Work considerations were minimal; either planning to find a job in their Air Force occupation or simply taking the first job they were offered. However, there were those who did have a plan but needed help with some “bumps” in their path.

The Combat Arms (special forces, infantry, armor, artillery, and related positions) account for about fourteen percent of military specialties. Thus, most military jobs have a direct civilian equivalent (Iliac-Godfrey & Lawhorn, 2018). For illustration, my three brothers moved from their military specialties to direct civilian equivalents (machinist, airframe and powerplant mechanic, and physician’s assistant). I was a meteorologist and airfield manager in the Air Force but took a different path by entering counseling and teaching in higher education. I did spend some time as an instructor in the Air Force, but it was in no way the same as teaching in a college.

Those Veterans who choose to remain in their military occupational specialty need little help from career counselors. However, those leaving the Combat Arms and those seeking a different career path may need some or significant help and support in guidance or career counseling. The transition back to school/into another field is not without challenge/bumps/or the need for additional support. If historical precedent is followed, the recent end of hostilities in the Middle East will result in a reduction in force for the American military.

### **A Few Words About Values and the Warrior Culture**

I formerly taught career development courses and was director of a college career center. Many of the students who used the career center wanted a career that matched their life values.

The importance of personal values is recognized by many of the career development theories such as social cognitive career theory (Lent et al., 1994), Brown et al.'s (2006) values-based career theory, and the personal values found in the personality types of Holland (1997).

When helping service members in career transition, counselors must be cognizant that the values instilled by the military will carry with the service member into the civilian world. The overarching value in the military is a sense of mission (task focus; Joint Publication 1-02, 2016, p. 161); followed closely by sacrifice, honor, and humility (Prosek, 2018). Upon entering the “warrior culture” the individual takes an oath to “...support and defend the Constitution of the United States against all enemies, foreign and domestic; that I will bear true faith and allegiance to the same...” (Title 10 U.S.C. § 502, 1956). I believe that most Veterans agree with me that the oath does not have an expiration date. The values embodied in “duty, honor, country” also may become lifelong prescriptions providing direction in decision-making (MacArthur, 1962). These values may direct the service member’s choices and actions for life and often impact transition planning and career choice.

To learn more about military culture, a free four module training sponsored by the Department of Defense and the Department of Veteran Affairs is available through the Uniformed Services University’s Center for Deployment Psychology (available at <https://deploymentpsych.org/military-culture-course-modules>). The training takes approximately eight hours to complete, and users are required to establish a TRAIN account. Continuing education units are available through the National Board for Certified Counselors.

### **Values in Career Choice After the Service**

This issue of *Journal of Military and Government Counseling* presents a series of articles that illustrate how military culture and values impact career choice in the military to Veteran status. My call for articles was answered by Veterans whose career choice was to continue a life of service by entering human services positions. This is not a typical choice for those leaving the Service but does show the strong desire to serve and give back to the community. Many Veterans may have a visible tattoo or wear a shirt with “IGY6” showing proudly. IGY6 is military shorthand for “I got your six” which means watching the back of the other person. This is a good sentiment for those of us in the human services arena.

Jasmine Gonzalez presents her journey from an immigrant family into an Army tour then transitioning into a mental health counselor and caregiver for her disabled Veteran husband. Aaron Smith and Shaun Sowell discuss how counselors can assist the Veteran in the transition using Aaron’s experiences moving from being a Marine to a counselor educator. The authors explain the connection between military values and career in simple terms for the benefit of counselors without much interaction with the military. Grady Hoaglund offers his insight into the financial ramifications of the military-to-Veteran transition through his own journey. He proposes an early and purposeful move to help bring financial stability to the move. Marianne Mathewson-Chapman’s struggle post-deployment and after separation from the National Guard was compounded by a lack of knowledge of the available resources. Marianne Mathewson-Chapman (while working at the VA) and Helena Chapman developed the seven touches of outreach model

VA outreach staff connected with returning service members, these “seven touches” provided a platform to recognize their transition needs and offer support with specific programs and resources to aid in their transition to civilian life. Judith Mathewson tells her story of service as a civilian teacher, National Guard member, a period active, and back. Her service is reflected in developing a program for at risk youth within the Alaska National Guard and assisting in development of the Tragedy Assistance Program for Survivors (TAPS) Good Grief Camp for military children who have lost a loved one in combat, training accidents, illness, or suicide while in military service. These programs have helped thousands in the years since their institution.

The desire to protect and to serve and for comradeship leads many Veterans to become first responders. I have counseled one Veteran who wanted to be a police officer; however, since he was a Security Policeman during his time in the Air Force, I did not include his story. Many Veterans leaving the Combat Arms choose careers as first responders because it continues a life of service to others. Mark Strebnicki highlights many qualities that make Veterans good candidates for these, and other, positions:

The military indeed does an excellent job in training service members for prime physical conditioning, leadership, organizational skills, problem solving, flexibility, and the ability to coordinate critical activities within the structure of a complex organizational system.

The military also is successful in training personnel to work well under stress in complex and demanding situations while using a good degree of physical and mental toughness. (Strebnicki, 2021, p. 224)

A U.S. Department Labor report 25% of police, 19% of firefighters, and 10% of emergency medical technicians were Veterans (Schafer et al., 2015).

Those qualities Strebnicki (2021) presented also can be applied to large number of Veterans who become successful entrepreneurs. When I was the director of a college career center (and taught career development), I became a fan of John Holland’s occupational themes. The enterprising theme describes individuals who are “persuaders” and tend to be good talkers and use this ability to persuade and lead others (Holland, 1997). One of General George S. Patton’s leadership principles states simply “never fear failure” (Williamson, 1979) – this is another needed quality for an entrepreneur. West Point graduate and former Army Captain Joe Quinn grew up hearing stories of the legendary Feltman’s of Coney Island restaurant (which closed in 1954). After transitioning out of the military, he set out with his brother to bring back a lost taste he had never enjoyed. After six years his Feltman’s of Coney Island franks are available in 3000 supermarkets (Ware, 2021). Randomly mentioned Veteran-owned business would include Black Rifle Coffee Company, Nine Line Apparel, The General’s Hot Sauce, HatnPatch, Medals of America, and hundreds of others. Another form of entrepreneurship is the non-profits established to help other Veterans such as Hope for Warriors, Wounded Warrior Project, and Tragedy Assistance Program for Survivors (TAPS). Approximately 70% of the Veteran-owned and -operated employees are Veterans (Ware, 2021). [The mention of these Veteran-owned businesses and non-profits does not imply endorsement.]

I tell my Veteran clients where they start on the civilian career path to keep their options open and be aware of new opportunities that may present themselves. I also mention that further education or a move may be necessary. Like their military career be ready to adapt, innovate, and

oeversome. “Veteran transition and career development is a life-long process” (Strebnicki, 2021, p. 233).

### **Final Thoughts**

First, I want to thank Cara Dougherty, PhD-Candidate, Tara Garland Matthews, PhD, and Chanpreet K. Singh, PhD for their assistance as editorial reviewers. Second, I want to apologize to those who submitted articles as it took me far too long to get this issue into print. Third, I thank you, the reader, for taking the time to read this issue. Finally, a big thank you to all who have served, are currently serving, and will serve in our nation’s Armed Forces.

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**Female Service Member to Mental Health Counselor: A Transitional Reflection**

By Jasmine Gonzalez

Growing up, I never had any intent on joining the military. I did not have a family lineage of military service. On the contrary, I came from a family of immigrants – two parents who worked immeasurably hard to achieve the American Dream and become respectable professionals in their own right. However, and seemingly so, a family whose values and ideas of structure, discipline, hard work, and leadership were at the very forefront of our homelife. Looking back, several years after my own honorable discharge from the military, I can see that correlation now.

It was not until about two years into studying in college that the military appeared like a good option for me. I was nineteen at the time and studying music performance as a vocalist and pianist in South Florida. I got wind that the Army Band was hiring musicians. To my very surprise, the US military is one of the largest employers of musicians in the country. The only catch: training as an infantry Soldier. I quickly enlisted and was granted a delayed entry. I spent the later part of that year training as a future prospective Soldier awaiting my shipment to basic training in Fort Jackson, South Carolina. It was from that day forward that my adulthood began.

The next year was spent completing all my basic and advanced training requirements. I met my husband, who is now a retired combat Veteran, while we were both in advanced individual training in Virginia Beach, Virginia. Next, I arrived at my first permanent duty station at Fort Stewart, Georgia. I was excited to begin my career as a hired military musician whose very historical purpose was at the forefront of upholding the morale of Soldiers and the military community alike. However, what I remember most prominent at the time was when I began to understand the rotations of deployments many Soldiers were undergoing over the last 15 years since the beginning of Operation Iraqi Freedom. I witnessed these Soldiers leave their homes and families every other year for over 15-month time spans. I also witnessed the families, wives, and children left behind struggling with loneliness, depression, and many other issues. My academic interests shifted and became geared towards the mental health profession as I began to understand the effects of combat exposure, military sexual assault, substance abuse, and suicide. With the support of my husband and mentors, I decided to complete my undergraduate degree in psychology using the Army's tuition assistance program while I was on active duty.

**The Challenges**

Fast forwarding another eight years, I was honorably discharged from the Army in 2017. When I think back on my own personal challenges entering the military, I experienced very quickly what it meant to be a female service member serving during wartime. I do believe many of those challenges were because of wartime and the integration of a culture shift (civilian to warrior to Veteran) that I am still undergoing to this day. Furthering those challenges were other aspects of my personal life pertaining to being a dual-military couple, a wife of a combat Veteran, and the years of both enduring many physical and mental injuries. As my Army career came to a close, my identity shifted towards becoming a dedicated Army spouse and Veteran. I then took on the responsibility to become a caregiver for my husband whose health began to

decline as a result of past injuries and the psychological toll he underwent in combat. I worked tirelessly advocating for his mental health treatment while pursuing my graduate studies full time. It was a challenge to say the least during those few years of treatment that ultimately led to a healing recovery and transition into my husband's honorable military retirement.

Looking back on my days in uniform, I remember feeling a sense of purpose, strength, and power. Once I removed that uniform, I felt a sense of loss. Also, switching from a male-dominated workforce to the female dominated mental health profession has also presented quite an adjustment and a challenge that I still have to this day. Hard charging and assertive characteristics and communication styles that were once idealized were no longer applicable. What did it mean for me to fit into this new civilian workforce? Was I to become softer and more feminine? I am sure, like many female Vets, I don't ever remember taking a course on masculine decompression anytime in the two years involvement in the Soldier for Life – Transition Assistance Program that Army service members are required to complete as a part of an effort to help transition from Soldiers to civilians.

Office small talk quickly changed from Army life to conversation topics such as fashion, makeup, lattes, celebrity gossip, pop culture, and a myriad of other topics I realized I was not well-versed in. I had worn combat boots every day to work. For the first time in my life, I had to actually pick out clothes to wear. I felt a disconnect walking into the job on my very first day as a civilian worker. I am slowly learning to adjust and embrace this awkwardness I still feel when such social engagements are warranted. One thing I have found is that kind people do not usually look down on awkwardness. Choosing to be surrounded by kind and supportive people has played a major role in overcoming these challenging aspects; knowing that I am accepted for who I am regardless of some of these strange Army girl quirks.

I will be clear and say that it is no secret that the population of women Veterans face immeasurable stressors and transitions from military service such as a loss in identity, homelessness, substance use, and higher rates of posttraumatic stress disorder, and so forth. As it was in my own experience, I do think that a female service member's effective transition is dependent on many factors including available resources both internally and externally during the time that the transition occurs. Those resources are key to springing forward successful career launches for female Veterans experiencing difficulty as a result of war and non-war military lifestyle causes.

### **A Role Shift**

After much anticipation, the transition from Soldier to civilian ironically brought up many unexpected role shifts. I knew very well that I would be hanging up my boots and trading in a life of discipline geared towards serving and protecting the American public to one of mere graduate studies and earning pay just for the sake of income. The stakes seemed much lower. Now suddenly the coping skills I had gained and applied as a military service member did not seem compatible with what my life would entail as a civilian.

I also went from engaging with my husband as a Soldier and as a dual-military couple to becoming the primary caregiver in our home. For an active duty woman, work was my role. You

are a Soldier 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, 365 days a year. There is an intense nature of servitude and the idea of selfless service that embodies work as the main role for any service member. For the first time since I had joined the Army, I was introduced to this idea of work-life balance. As I spent more time again with family, friends, and partaking in my own educational interests, work no longer took on the intense role it once played. This also took some getting used to.

In a universal paradox, I eventually came to the realization that my future prospective profession as a counselor could hold some solidarity to my previous identity as a service member. The key word there was “service.” The more my role shifted from a Soldier to civilian, the more I made peace knowing eventually I would continue to go on serving the public. Although in different situations and settings, my role as a mental health counselor is one of servitude to the public and the community in which I reside. Just as a painter may exchange mediums from oil on canvas to the pastels of watercolors, it would be a new role for me to change mediums of service.

### **Social Support**

As a female Veteran, knowing other female Veterans who successfully transitioned from Soldier to civilian helped to ascertain a more positive outlook during these huge changes in my life. Before entering the military, I remember being supported by friends and other loved ones who shared their military experiences with me. Knowing what to expect, particularly as a woman entering the military, ultimately helped me to understand the normality of military culture. During my service, it was just as important for me to seek relationships with established military career women. These social supports were empowering not only because they validated my own experience as a female service member, but because they highlighted the reality that success could be achieved by women. Upon my exit from the military, I can credit my endearing amount of gratitude to close friends and Veteran mentors, both male and female, who had successfully transitioned from the military. There was a sense of comfort knowing that there were other Veterans who came before me and who were able to successfully transition into a rewarding career and life after the Army.

The military always encouraged a direct and powerful communication style that many workplaces in the civilian sector may not always understand. Particularly for women, it seems there can be a high price to pay for not conforming to societal expectations for what is considered normal female behavior in the workplace. For these reasons, finding strong female leaders and mentors as a civilian was an important aspect of support for my transition. Interestingly enough, in the female dominated mental health profession, there is a plethora of them. Seek and you shall find, is the common saying. I have always been inspired by strong women. I was raised by them. I served among them, and now as a civilian, I have the pleasure of continuing to learn and grow surrounded by them.

### **Navigating a New Purpose**

I, like many others, chose to enlist on a volunteer basis during a period of time when the military was supporting operations to counter terrorism. Most recently those wars included

Operation Iraqi Freedom (OIF) and Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF). Most people who choose to serve understand the value of selfless service and putting the welfare of others before your own, even if it means you do not get anything in return. Having had the privilege of transitioning from the military to becoming a mental health counselor, it has been an honor to also walk alongside many counselor peers, mentors, and educators who also greatly resonate with this shared idea of servitude. There is this strong desire that many counselors have to want to help others work through the difficulties of life. Understanding my own values and seeing the shared commonality within my chosen careers was paramount to my own belief that I would have the capacity to be motivated and successfully achieve the goals necessary to transition to become a mental health counselor.

Fortunately, I was able to obtain the title of a Family Life Support Facilitator under a chaplain in the Army who was also a licensed mental health professional during my first duty station. This gave me a unique opportunity to gain insight into the Army's mission to provide counseling services to Soldiers and their family members. My motivation to complete my academic studies in the mental health profession had flourished as well as my decision to plan to exit the military upon completion of my second contract in order to facilitate my new career path as a mental health counselor. One empowering factor for me in leaving the military after years of planning and preparation to embark on a new career change, was that it was a decision I made. It was an aspect I had control over. I chose to utilize my GI Bill educational benefits to complete my graduate education and dedicate my time solely towards these educational goals with the prospect of one day becoming a licensed mental health professional. This perceived control over my decision to transition really helped me at the time to feel empowered to make my own decisions.

As I continued along my journey and meticulous plan to exit the military, there was no shortage of naysayers of those against leaving the military. I experienced periods of discouragement where I somehow figured the skills I had acquired would be undervalued in the civilian world. As I began acquiring new professional relationships with my graduate school professors, mentors, and counselor supervisors, they provided me with relentless encouragement that proved a different outlook. It dawned on me that I could actually go on to add value to the civilian mental health workforce. I remember the first-time a past mentor informed me that my area was in dire need of Spanish-speaking therapists and that those belonging to the Veteran population were largely underserved in our community by clinicians who had a thorough understanding of military culture. Another exclaimed that my attention to detail and ability to recognize signs and symptoms of depression and suicidal ideation was an important skill that I had gained being surrounded by the military culture. This empowered me with a sense of value and allowed me to better home in on the strategies that would be necessary for me to focus my efforts in participating in job-related tasks that would eventually help my skills as a clinician to grow.

### **The Takeaways**

I have heard it said that less than one percent of Americans serve in our Armed Forces. Of that one percent, female service members represent less than 10 percent of military personnel. There is a great honor to hold in those numbers knowing that as a female service member, I can

always be a part of something so sacred. Many of us have undergone experiences that very few understand. When you spot another female Veteran out in a crowd, there is an instant bond knowing that you are connected by these unique and shared experiences. Female service members are a select few. They have done what few will ever do against many odds and challenges. Transitioning from a military career to a rewarding civilian career is just another one of those challenges. Persevering forward meant tapping into my internal and external resources. It also meant finding support where it mattered most, healing wounds, reevaluating my identity, and deliberately planning and taking control of my newly found career with many of the characteristics I had been fortunate enough to gain in the military. Among those were the importance of strength, resiliency, discipline, structure, time management, and flexibility.

When I began graduate school, I spent a great deal of time devoting my interests into understanding this concept of posttraumatic growth that stems from a longstanding idea that humans have been capable to positively change because of their life encounters. From a healing and counseling perspective, I wholeheartedly believe we have the tools inside of us to facilitate this positive emotional growth experience that stems from the capacity of human resilience. It was my military service that first inspired me to join the field of counseling and it was those very experiences that have allowed me to gain a deep understanding and profound empathy for the human experience and great hopes for what the challenges of life can bring. You will often hear Veterans proclaim that their decision to join the military was one of the hardest, yet best decisions they ever made. My sentiments are no different. My service was an honor and when I look back at my transition, despite all the difficulties, I think about all I have gained throughout this entire process. Although the transition was hard, and one I am still learning to navigate, I can share the hopes of creating a new mission and purpose in life that can be attained after leaving the military. Going forward it is my hope to continue validating the unique shared experiences and challenges that female Veterans face. It is also my hope to continue understanding the pathways that can help others towards reaching their own personal growth.

### **About the Author**

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**From Infantry Marine to Academic: Implications for Career Counselors**

Aaron J. Smith and Shaun Sowell

The primary purpose of the following article is to clarify and enrich the conversation on how mental health and career professionals can support Veterans as they transition away from careers in the military and into civilian vocations. While many Veterans are likely to face a wide multitude of barriers such as mental health struggles, physical injuries, cultural re-assimilation, and a lack of reciprocation of military training in many states, they also possess a wealth of training and experience that make them highly adapted for work in a variety of civilian settings. After examining the extant literature regarding many of the challenges Veterans experience upon leaving the military, the authors will issue a series of actionable suggestions that might assist counselors in facilitating a successful transition out of the military and into a civilian work setting. These suggestions are grounded in both the contemporary career scholarship, as well as the first authors' experiences serving in and transitioning out of the military.

Among the authors' suggestions include operating from a strengths-based focus, thoroughly assessing military training and experiences related to character-building, leadership and operation-planning, and exploration of Veterans' experiences culturally re-assimilating to civilian life. Towards these ends, the authors will explicate some major areas of vocational strength possessed by a large proportion of Veterans leaving the military. The authors will also briefly examine some career assessments and interventions that might be used to facilitate the job development process with diverse Veteran populations in transition out of the military. Finally, after attending to some considerations for multiculturalism and social justice, the authors will issue a challenge to career professionals everywhere to advocate for greater reciprocation of job training by state governments to open up more opportunities for Veterans making the transition.

**Introduction**

**Some Common Struggles in Veterans Transitioning out of the Military**

Perhaps unsurprisingly, many Veterans transitioning out of the military and into civilian vocations face a wide range of challenging circumstances as they strive to adapt. Mental health-related barriers like trauma-exposure, substance use, anxiety, depression, and suicidal ideation, as well as physical injuries, among other factors, can complicate the process of seeking out and acquiring meaningful work opportunities. For example, the National Council for Behavioral Health (2020) found that as many as 30 percent of troops that deployed to Iraq (OIF) and Afghanistan (OEF) met the minimum benchmarks for a mental health diagnosis in need of treatment, ranging from post-traumatic stress (PTS) to major depression, though less than half of these Veterans had received treatment at the time of their assessment. Though a gross underestimate, this same study noted that there are as many as 22 suicides among U.S. Veterans each day. Additionally, according to the National Center for PTS (2020), about 23 percent of female identifying service members report having been sexually assaulted while serving and 55 percent report having experienced some type of sexual harassment. And, further complicating the transition from the military to civilian life is the reality that not all states are equal in terms of the

degrees to which they strive to reciprocate military training into equivalent civilian professions – an issue that will receive greater attention in the final section of this article entitled, ‘Maria’s story and a call to action.’ In spite of the multitude of obstacles Veterans face during their transitions, the military also imbues skills and wisdom that for many, help them to adapt and overcome their often-trying circumstances.

### **My Journey from Infantry Marine to Counselor Educator.**

I (Aaron) lived close by to Washington D.C. on September 11th, 2001 and so, perhaps unsurprisingly, I joined the United States Marine Corps as soon as I turned 17 years old. The date of my first day of Marine Corps bootcamp was ominously 06/06/06 and I graduated from School of Infantry – West at Camp Pendleton on the Marine Corps’ lauded birthday. I was soon whisked off to a variety of specialized training schools before being attached to a Special Forces unit – Delta Company, 4th Recon Battalion, 4th Marines near where I grew up in Albuquerque, New Mexico. For eight years, Delta Company would become my family, my compass, my primary source of anxiety, and my primary source of pride. While most service members get acculturated to the values of military service, special forces units take the process of acculturation to astonishingly new heights. It was in Delta Company working among special forces operators that I was further socialized into a subcategory of warrior known for their fanaticism, courage, and commitment to mastering their various trades. Maintenance of high standards and attention to detail were more than just socially auspicious; they were pre-requisites for survival.

While infantry battalions have some room for error in combat situations, given their vast numbers and overwhelming fire power, Recon teams embark on missions in small groups of four to eight Marines leaving zero room for error. The goal was not to be seen, nor was it to attack; rather, it was to gather reconnaissance information on enemy movements and equipment to be used for mission planning at the highest echelons of military commands. Our unit was in need of Recon operators and spots were limited at both the Advanced Reconnaissance School (ARS) and at the Basic Recon Course (BRC). Being an infantry Marine on the teams meant that I was asked to acquire a set of advanced skills via on the job (OTJ) training, and it was those skills and relationships that allowed me to succeed in my civilian endeavors. Serving as a ‘slackman’ as the ‘lowly’ infantry Marine, for example, I was asked to shoulder the burdens of carrying extra radio batteries, water and food, and the dreaded Squad Automatic Weapon (SAW) – a 23 pound ‘light’ machine gun – and as a result, with body armor, my pack often weighed upwards of 120 pounds. It was on lengthy, multi-day treks while on training missions in the highlands of the Sangre de Cristo mountains in New Mexico that I cultivated a grittiness and a commitment to professionalism that has founded my success across two Bachelors’ degrees, a Master’s degree, and a PhD.

**Learning to rely on social support during tragedies.** Perhaps, most importantly, it was the Marines of Delta Company – my family – that taught me to rely on one another for emotional support in the aftermaths of tragedies. I lost my first Marine to suicide – a Marine that was once under my charge – shortly before Christmas in 2014. Corporal (CPL) Cameron Weger’s passing, while deeply tragic, taught us that we could rely on one another for support. I drove my car full of Marines – one of seventy cars in the convoy that took CPL Weger’s ashes to the top of Sandia

peak to be spread – and among the Marines in my vehicle was Sergeant (SGT) Fred Hermann, our leader. As we drove up the mountain to say goodbye to Cameron, we filled the car with a combination of tears and raucous laughter recounting tales of our time with him. Fred always had a unique ability to wield humor to great effect, lightening the mood at strategic moments like a wise older brother comforting his younger siblings. Fred was our rock, often even putting himself in harm's way to keep us safe. Little did we know that only a few years later, on Memorial Day, Fred, too, would take his life, leaving behind two brothers which served alongside us in Delta Company and a young son. And just as Fred had done for us when Cameron was lost, senior and junior Marines alike put rank aside, in favor of commiserating in our shared humanity.

### **Implications for Counselors**

The following sections outline some actionable suggestions for career professionals and counselors working with Veterans making the transition from the military and into civilian occupations, including things like operating from a strengths-based focus (including value-based character building and training/experience serving in positions of leadership), and exploration of Veterans experiences during re-acclimation into civilian life. This section will also briefly explore some evidence-based career assessments and interventions tailored for work with Veterans.

#### **Operating from a Strengths-Based Focus**

Among the multitude of potential strengths embodied by the U.S. military Veteran, this article will examine: Values and character-building, leadership training and experiences, and acculturation to collectivism.

**Values and character-building.** Rare is the civilian vocation that provides as in-depth a training in ethics and character-building as the U.S. military, with jobs in the helping professions being among the few that do. Martial service deeply embraces the idea of character-building, adopting a values-based approach. Skillful career counselors can explore this part of military training with their Veteran clients and, perhaps, even advocate that they communicate this to potential employers, where appropriate. A brief look at each branch evidences a number of values that are easily translatable, not to mention auspicious, in the civilian workplace. The Navy and Marine Corps, for example, share the core values of honor (i.e., serving with respect and esteem), courage (i.e., serving in spite of fear), and commitment (i.e., dedication). The Air Force's core values slightly deviate from those of the Navy and Marine Corps, as they strive to actualize integrity first, service before self, and excellence in all things. The Army proffers loyalty (i.e., faithfulness), duty (i.e., a sense of being ethically or morally called to serve), respect, self-less service, honor, integrity, and personal courage. And finally, the Coast Guard strives to embody honor, respect, and devotion to duty.

**Leadership training and experiences.** Consider that service members, across the board, receive both world-class training and experience serving in positions of leadership; sometimes shouldering vast personal and economic burdens. The military, across all six branches, strives to build indestructible leaders, capable of developing and supervising responses to a wide variety of



circumstances – both combat and administrative. From a fire team leader being responsible for planning and carrying out combat patrols, to a Crew Chief responsible for a fleet of \$334 million dollar F-22 stealth combat jets, the military imbues responsibility based on rank and ability as opposed to age. Thus, some career counselors will work with Veterans that, while young, have shouldered immense responsibilities, often in positions of leadership. While it is easy to presume a linkage between age, experience, and “fitness” for certain jobs or opportunities (e.g., applying to graduate schools in mental health, for example), skillful career counselors must remain aware that age is not as predictive of responsibility or experience with regards to Veterans and service members.

In the Marine Corps, we were also required to learn several evidence-based acronyms for planning and carrying out missions. These included, among others, SMEAC (Situation, Mission, Execution, Administration and Logistics, Command and Communication), BAMCIS (Begin a plan, Arrange a review of the plan, Make the plan, Complete the plan, Issue the orders, and Supervise), SALUTE (Size, Activity, Location, Uniform, Time and Terrain, and Equipment) and others. These mnemonic tools, among a plethora of others, help Marines and service members to remember the steps in developing and coordinating missions. Further, as the military exemplifies significant diversity in factors like race/ethnicity, age, socio-economic status, ability status, and others, Veterans often leave the military having ample experience leading diverse groups of people in carrying out a wide range of missions.

**Military leadership principles.** Next, as we examine common strengths of US military Veterans that apply directly to vocations in the civilian sector, the military places a premium on building dexterous leaders capable of planning and carrying out a wide variety of missions. For example, the Marine Corps uses the acronym ‘JJIDITIEBUCKLE’ to train all Marines – regardless of their Military Occupational Specialty (MOS) – in the common characteristics of effective leaders, including: Justice, Judgement, Dependability, Integrity, Decisiveness, Tact, Initiative, Endurance, Bearing (i.e., maintaining a calm demeanor during chaos), Uniform (i.e., professionalism), Courage, Knowledgeability, Loyalty, and Enthusiasm. These values are not just a clever mnemonic; rather, they serve as a set of guiding principles that leaders in the military are frequently asked to contemplate on and enact.

### **Exploration of Veterans Experiences with Cultural Re-Assimilation**

It is a myth that the U.S. has an all-volunteer military force. While, indeed, folks “volunteer” for military service sans a draft, many people join because they do not perceive that they have any other options, escaping poverty, violence, and other difficult circumstances. Folks from a wide range of diverse backgrounds, regardless of their civilian circumstances, have their prior identities chipped away upon entering the military – mere shavings off of a marble slab that is being carefully sculpted into the image of a hardened, selfless servant. While the country they serve and protect is largely individualistic, Veterans are socialized into a collectivist, group-first way of life. As a result, when it comes to jobs that require teamwork, Veterans are often an incalculable asset. The U.S. Veteran is known for their work ethic, their commitment to service, and a willingness to prioritize the mission, even at the cost of their own personal welfare. As such, while a service-oriented, group-first mentality can strengthen their transition into civilian workplaces, it can also sometimes result in Veterans over-extending themselves at great personal

cost. Further, as will be discussed in the section on multiculturalism and social justice, possessing team-first values can also sometimes cause strain during the transition into a civilian workplace when Veterans begin their new vocations expecting others to embody similar cultural values. It is imperative that career development professionals deeply explore Veterans' experiences transitioning back into civilian culture.

### **Some Potential Career Assessments and Interventions for Consideration**

This section will briefly discuss potential career assessments and interventions for working with Veterans. First, consider that it may be important for career counselors to work from a holistic and strength-based approach and get to know the population before and during their work with Veterans. This is especially important for counselors who have limited experience with the military. Non-Veteran counselors have an obligation to learn general facts about military culture and become familiar with common experiences and terminology (e.g., ranks, branches, commonly used military acronyms/jargon, etc.). Also, career counselors must be aware of the distinct needs, concerns, and barriers Veterans may face upon discharge (e.g., differences in duty status and what that means for access to resources upon separation from the military, honorable discharges versus dishonorable discharges, etc.), and how these may intersect with other cultural variables the Veteran possesses (e.g., race/ethnicity, gender, etc.), discussed in greater detail in the section on implications for multiculturalism and social justice. And lastly, while not the case for all Veterans, career counselors should be sensitive to the difficulties a Veteran may have in asking for help. Before assessment begins, it may be critical for the counselor to describe career counseling as one step of the client's life-long career search process. Using the metaphor of helping them 'find their next mission,' for example, is one way that counselors might provide a vision for their Veterans that expresses what kind of work will be done in career counseling.

Once the initial rapport has been made (and which will continue to be cultivated), it is important that the counselor identifies why the client is seeking services. Using this information, the counselor may begin the process of assessment, working to reveal the client's interests, values, and personalities. Through this information gathering phase, counselors may use career focused interviews (e.g., a cultural career genogram, Savickas' [2011] Career Story Interview, etc.) and more standardized tests to structure the assessment process. Some commonly used career assessments with Veterans include things like the Career Thoughts Inventory (CTI) developed by Sampson and colleagues in 1996, the Career Planning Confidence Scale (CPCS) developed by McAuliffe and colleagues in 2006, the Self-Directed Search (SDS) produced by Holland, Fritzsche, and Powell in 1994, the Veterans and Military Occupational Finder (VMOF) created by Messer, Greene, and Holland in 2013, or card sorts like the University of Minnesota Skills Card Sort and the Personal Values Card Sort to gain insight into the Veteran's experiences and goals.

As with any form of counseling, career counselors should rely on client needs, theory, and research to help guide client development and implement additional interventions as needed. Prior research would suggest Savickas' (2005) Career Construction Theory, which focuses on how clients build their careers by placing meaning in their work and their choices, may be an ideal approach to use in counseling vets (Ghosh & Fouad, 2015). Another approach to career

work with Veterans that is supported by research is Cognitive Information-Processing (CIP) (Miles, 2014; Hayden & Buzzetta, 2014). CIP is a hope-centered approach which guides the client to envision a meaningful goal and to believe positive outcomes are likely to occur if specific action is taken. And lastly, Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT) and existential therapy, such as Frankl's (1959) Logotherapy, may be implemented concurrently to assist Veterans in reframing maladaptive beliefs and emphasize the capacity for growth (Hayden & Buzzetta, 2014).

Career counselors should be cognizant of not overwhelming Veterans in the beginning of treatment, so as to not overwhelm these clients. When resources, such as interest inventories or O\*Net are shared, counselors should spend ample time reviewing these with the client and highlight the most beneficial material.

### **Concluding Thoughts**

The following sections will conclude this article with a discussion on what the ideas presented herein might mean for multiculturalism and social justice, as well as, with a series of challenges issued to readers – a systemic-level call to arms. To illustrate the need for such drastic advocacy efforts, the authors present the case of Maria (a pseudonym to protect her identity) – a Marine who served in the Marine Corps during the same period of time as the first author and that experienced significant obstacles in finding meaningful civilian work.

### **Considerations for Multiculturalism and Social Justice**

There is an abundance of evidence that not everyone in the United States has equal access to important resources like money, education, health care, work opportunities, affordable housing, and other criticalities (Ratts et al., 2016). Folks with marginalized identities and especially those at the intersection of multiple marginalized identities all are likely to face a disproportionate number of challenges upon transitioning out of the military. Further, as previously discussed, a disproportionate number of female-identifying Veterans report having experienced sexual assault, sexual harassment, or both (National Center for PTS, 2020). As such, it is imperative that career professionals remain vigilant, thoroughly assessing potential barriers to resource-acquisition and mental health, making referrals to necessary Veteran and social services organizations where appropriate. Further, prior-service folks who receive dishonorable discharges lose access to critical privileges that would have otherwise carried on into civilian life upon transitioning out of active duty service, such as access to economic, medical, and mental health benefits through TRICARE (i.e., the government/military insurance company).

Further, whether Veterans came from collectivist or individualist cultures prior to joining the military, all Veterans will likely acquire and retain aspects of collectivism that have been deeply rooted in their identities while serving. Everything in the military revolves around service to others and it is an honor to be in a position to sacrifice for others. In the Marine Corps, among the worst things one can be labeled as is someone who looks out for themselves above others. Worse yet is someone that puts themselves ahead of the mission. Understandably, many Veterans report struggling to adapt to some civilian workplaces when their new colleagues fail to embody these kinds of values. While having a selfless, mission-first mentality that places the

group ahead of their own interests can be immeasurable assets, they can also result in frustration, heartbreak, and anxiety when their expectations are not met. Again, this speaks to the wisdom of thoroughly assessing Veterans' experiences re-assimilating and socializing into civilian culture during the career development process.

### **Maria's Story and a Call to Action**

Maria – an enlisted heavy equipment mechanic in the US Marines – served during Operation Dan, one of the longest and bloodiest battles of Operation Iraqi Freedom (OIF). Despite the unbearable heat and existential threats, Maria did her job exceptionally well and as a result, her Marines had the equipment they needed to accomplish a multitude of missions across the 90-day operation. Once the operation ended, Maria was recognized by her unit by receiving a Navy-Marine Corps Commendation Medal (NCM) – an award that is deeply coveted and rarely earned. After her deployment, she stayed in the Marines for another year and then decided to move back to her home state of New Mexico. Maria was told by the New Mexico state government; however, that in spite of her world-class training and experiences, she was not cleared to work as a heavy equipment mechanic, nor as a heavy equipment operator until she completed a costly multi-year civilian certification program (for training that she already possessed). Seeking work as a heavy equipment mechanic and operator became an impossibility and coupled with the loss of her military support system upon leaving the military, Maria quickly found herself overwhelmed. Fortunately, Maria had an aunt that was able to support her financially until she found work as a server at a local restaurant. Maria – once in charge of the proper maintenance of equipment worth in excess of \$100,000 – worked as a server to support herself as she worked her way through the lengthy civilian training program so that she could resume work in her chosen profession, but many Veterans are not as 'fortunate' as Maria. Consider that many Veterans, like Maria, leave the military having acquired a large number of skills while enrolled in rigorous, world-class training programs. Military Occupational Specialties (MOS) like heavy equipment mechanics and operators, explosive ordinance professionals, parachute riggers, survival instructors, military police, supply chain management, pilots and crew chiefs, motor transportation (i.e., Motor-T) folks, and construction personnel, among many others, not only received high quality training, but they also often have experience serving in these roles under the most trying of circumstances – when lives are dependent upon their abilities to successfully perform their jobs. Unfortunately, many of these same Veterans return to a State that fails to recognize, nor reciprocate their training into equivalent civilian professions. The authors challenge readers to explore the degree to which their states accommodate Veterans' military skills upon transitioning out of the military. If your state's accommodations in this area are found to be wanton, then consider carrying out systemic-level advocacy (i.e., to State and Federal legislatures) on behalf of Veterans that may be impacted, in accordance with the Toporek, Lewis, and Crethar's (2009) ACA Advocacy Competencies. This can look a lot of different ways, though it often includes actions like organizing a letter writing campaign or a signature petition aimed at pressuring folks in power (e.g., senators, congresspeople, etc.) to act on behalf of Veteran-constituents in their communities – service on behalf of those who serve.

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**My MIL-CIV Transition and Financial Hindsight**

by Grady C. Hoaglund

With the exception of a few unique highlights, my military career was not unlike thousands of others who enlisted out of high school, earned a commission, and retired after 20 honorable years of service. Having come from a poor logging and farming community and growing up with a rich history of Veteran family members, joining the military was a means of fulfilling several needs and wants. I was offered the standard opportunities to see the world, exposure to wildly complicated and foreign cultures, and create relationships with those who would become the most important people in my life. And, as many have also experienced, there comes a time when the glamor, security, camaraderie, belongingness, and routine must come to an end. Whether this time comes after a single enlisted obligation is fulfilled, or after 20 years of seemingly endless deployments, it will always come to an end.

During year number 17 of active duty service, time was rapidly chasing my career to its finality. Options to remain on active duty were available but for many reasons, my family and I chose to retire at the 20-year mark in order to pursue other opportunities. These opportunities were endless in our minds because at one point I had acceptance to a medical school, an education in engineering, personal interests that plotted all over the career spectrum, a current security clearance, and a newfound love for mental health counseling. As fate, opportunity, luck, hard work, and desire would have it, we chose to pursue a career in mental health counseling which proved to be the perfect fit for our future lifestyle and needs. The preparational transition to this career was riddled with long hours of study and very short days off. It was the goal that set our future on track and the work invested on a daily basis secured its reality.

My story is only special to me and my family. Every one of the transitioning military members approaching their own evolution in their careers by traversing the military-to-civilian experience can understand and explain what it means to them, and those experiences will be as special and meaningful to them as anyone else's. The details of their transition can be lost among the thousands of similar narratives of military members. For this reason, in retrospect, I am writing this article in an effort to help my current and future brothers and sisters in the Armed Forces make wise choices and prepare for their own journey and transition. The following is written off the back of my experiences, regrets, successes, and integrity.

The Department of Defense mandates a Transition Assistance Program (TAP) for those 200,000 service members leaving the military every year (United States Department of Veteran Affairs, 2020). This program is instructed during one and two years prior to separation, depending on duty status. My experience involved a few days of instruction on job hunting, resume building, benefits, interviewing techniques, and financial planning. Since this class, the John S. McCain National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2019 brought about several changes to the curriculum (Military OneSource, 2020). As an outsider-retiree, I see the added value and importance of those changes. However, it is not the content that needs adjustment, it is the timing and frequency of the financial education that would benefit our transitioning troops from a modification.

After much research on the financial wellness of military members, retirees, and those who separated, the overall findings were inconclusive and were dependent on finite statistical demographics and the methodological calculations used to determine if transitioning Veterans had financial wellness. Therefore, I reach back to my personal experiences and offer the following, simplified advice to those who are leaving the military in the future, the administrators in the Department of Defense that regulate and teach TAP, and those who currently have loved ones in the military.

Financial wellness is not being addressed early enough, often enough, or with enough emphasis. In order to ensure a financially stable transition into civilian life and a sustainable future as a civilian, a continual education program mandated for military members should be considered. Voluntary opportunities for financial planning, budgeting, and investing are rife in the military member support organizations; but after a long career of my own, it was not made clear to me how in depth and comprehensive the support system was until TAP highlighted its intricacies – one year prior to my separation. The wisdom and comprehensiveness of the information available was overwhelming and impressive. The dedication, knowledge, and expertise of those working in the support organizations were equally invited and unexpected. It felt like being on the Internet for the first time and seeing how much work had gone into creating such a rich environment of information.

This was information that was warranted years in advance and would have been welcomed on an annual or biennial basis. It was hard to imagine that the proud title of Military Retiree was going to come at the cost of two-thirds the pay each month, or that complete military separation was going to cost nearly all pay with a few dwindling benefits. Hearing those words and hypothesizing the consequences cannot always outweigh the romance of transitioning to the civilian workforce. In many respects, I took advantage of receiving my active duty paycheck each month and in knowing it would be deposited again, and again. Once retirement was complete and that check was slashed, reality finally set in. I was now truly reliant on what was left of my military pay as a retiree and my new profession as a private practice counselor with income that was seasonally dependent.

Through my transition and successes since retirement, I offer the insight of education to those who are not necessarily approaching separation, but those who foresee separation in a four-to-eight-year range. Do not inevitably plan for the future, purposefully plan into it! Imagine your spending habits in the next four years. Think about making your big purchases such as vehicles, appliances, and those large ticket items that will require payments earlier rather than waiting until the payments potentially last longer than your military obligation. There are few things that hurt a slashed military retirement check more than having another third of it taken out for a car payment. Have an honest conversation with yourself and try imagining a budget that is at least one third of what you currently make. Maintaining revolving debt account balances should have a large impact on this personal conversation about your financial future and steps to zero those balances, despite current wants, should be considered.

My conclusive message is to highlight the financial importance of planning for the military-to-civilian transition four-to-eight years prior to the event, which is in contrast to the required one-to-two-year TAP class currently prescribed by the Department of Defense.



Financial health resources and education are plentiful and available throughout the military support organizations; however, in my experience the richness and far-reaching depth of their expertise was not highlighted early enough in my career which would have made differences towards the end of my military career.

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**Use of the Seven Touches of Outreach Model: Supporting Vocational and Employment Opportunities for National Guard and Reservists in Post-deployment Transition**

by Marianne Mathewson-Chapman and Helena J. Chapman

**Personal Experience in Post-deployment Transition**

During Operation Desert Shield and Desert Storm (1990–1991), the primary author served as Chief Nurse of a Florida National Guard Medical Unit deployed to the Middle East. Her unit was tasked with establishing the US Army Reserve and National Guard combat hospitals in selected cities of Oman, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates, in anticipation of potential war casualties from Iraq. As her first military deployment for an extended period, she departed her civilian job, family, and community, and was well trained for her assigned tasks. Upon return home, she separated from active duty and experienced anxiety as she did not have employment or civilian health care for herself and her family. She was unaware of available Federal, state, and community resources, Veterans Health Administration (VHA) health care enrollment, Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) benefits and disability determination, and mental health services. As she pursued doctoral training in nursing, with pre- and post-doctoral VA fellowships, she focused her research efforts to improve cancer care and symptom management for male Veterans after prostatectomy. Throughout her doctoral training and experience in her own post-deployment transition, she realized that a new coordinated delivery system of services was needed to optimize the smooth transition from active duty military to civilian life. Hence, throughout her VA employment, she was empowered to design a model program to aid National Guard and Reservists in their post-deployment transition home.

Exploring and identifying specific Veterans' transition needs is imperative for career development practitioners to understand significant impediments that may impact their optimal career choices in the future. The primary author can attest that no service member undergoing combat will be left unchanged, experiencing both visible and invisible war wounds (Coll, 2011). Moving forward, career development practitioners, who understand these deployment and post-deployment transition needs, can contribute significantly to specific counseling approaches for Veterans to reach their post-deployment goals and provide strategies to attain critical vocational and employment opportunities.

**Introduction**

From September 2001 to November 2007, the total number of US Forces deployed to Iraq and Afghanistan included 254,894 National Guard (Air, Army), 202,113 Reserves (Air Force, Army, Coast Guard, Marines, Navy), and 1,193,234 Active Component service members (Waterhouse & O'Bryant, 2008). These service members may have experienced multiple overseas deployments and direct combat action, requiring their departure from civilian employment, community service activities, and family connections within familiar surroundings. One study reported that service members who held commissioned officer status, were college graduates, and understood the field mission had an easier adjustment back to civilian life (Morin, 2011). Although units aim to enhance troop readiness and resilience for the field deployment, the individual experiences of service members vary and cannot be compared. These collective

experiences must be understood by career counselors, leading to prompt and appropriate interventions that smooth this post-deployment reintegration to civilian life.

In 2008, the VA designed the VA Outreach Office to aid in the post-deployment transition period of the Reserve components, specifically when National Guard and Reservists leave deployment stations and return to civilian life at home. As one of the key staff members in this office, the primary author aimed to achieve two objectives that would lead Reservists to a successful transition. The first objective was to explore primary transition challenges that Veterans experienced when leaving active duty and returning to civilian status. The second objective was to develop an illustrative model that marked the key timing of outreach strategies to mitigate transition challenges related to achieving optimal physical and psychosocial health and well-being. In this paper, the authors will identify the post-deployment reintegration challenges and describe the innovative VA seven touches of outreach model. They will also present recommendations for career development practitioners to initiate critical services and resources to be offered at seven specific times to National Guard and Reservists as they transition home.

### **Key Demographic Statistics of Active Duty and Selected Reserve Components**

As of July 2023, the total number of U.S. Forces included 1,285,974 (235,990 officers, 1,036,944 enlisted) on active duty and 766,069 (136,338 officers, 1,036,944 enlisted) on Selected Reserves (U.S. Department of Defense & Defense Manpower Data Center, 2023). Table 1 shows the total number of officers and enlisted service members on active duty and Selected Reserves, as of July 2023. These service members may have experienced multiple overseas deployments and direct combat action, requiring their departure from civilian employment, community service activities, and family connections within familiar surroundings. Although units aim to enhance troop readiness and resilience for field deployment, individual experiences of service members vary and cannot be compared. These collective experiences must be understood by career counselors, leading to support timely interventions that are age- and education-specific for their transition to civilian life.

A recent report by the U.S. Department of Defense identified age differences in the Selected Reserve members, where 73.5% of enlisted members and 35.5% of officers were younger than 35 years (U.S. Department of Defense, 2021). Of the highest level of education among Selected Reserve members, 13.2% of enlisted members and 88.2% of officers had a bachelor's degree or higher (U.S. Department of Defense, 2021). Another study reported that service members who held commissioned officer status were college graduates and had an easier adjustment back to civilian life (Morin, 2011). Since many National Guard and Reservist continue to serve until their mandatory retirement at age 60, comprehensive age- and education-specific career planning should be an integral part of their homecoming goals.

**Table 1.** Total number of officers and enlisted service members on active duty and Selected Reserves, as of July 2023.

Components of U.S. Forces	Officers	Enlisted	Total
<b>Active Duty</b>			
Army	93,165	354,980	
Navy	56,011	273,466	
Marine Corps	21,505	149,173	
Air Force	60,914	255,046	
Space Force	4,395	4,279	
Total	235,990	1,036,944	1,285,974
<b>Selected Reserves</b>			
Army National Guard	46,604	277,415	
Army Reserve	39,308	137,660	
Navy Reserve	13,668	41,0	
Marine Corps Reserve	4,569	28,345	
Air National Guard	16,260	88,622	
Air Force Reserve	14,838	51,568	
Coast Guard Reserve	1,091	5,048	
Total	136,338	639,731	766,069

Source: U.S. Department of Defense and Defense Manpower Data Center, 2023

**Understanding Deployment and Post-deployment Reintegration Challenges**

During deployment, service members can experience visible and invisible war wounds, attributed to direct combat experiences, occupational hazards, and other environmental risks (U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, 2023). They may endure these war wounds long after they return home. Combat injuries may be related to proximity to improvised explosive devices, gunshots, landmines, and rocket-propelled grenades. Occupational hazards may include air pollution from combat smoke or burn pits, depleted uranium, diesel fuels from military vehicles, and exposure to aircraft and artillery noise (Mathewson-Chapman & Chapman, 2021). Environmental risks can vary by geographic location, such as vector-borne disease transmission (e.g., mosquito, tick, sand fly), extreme temperatures, and hazardous noise levels. These individual or combined exposures can affect the physical health and well-being of service members, leading to acute or chronic illnesses or injuries when returning home.

It is important for service members to receive health evaluations as they can experience physical and psychosocial health challenges when adjusting from deployment to civilian life. Far from the stress of combat duty, their abrupt changes in adrenalin levels and physical activities, coupled with stressors of unstable housing resources, unemployment or underemployment causing financial insecurity, and career or vocational counseling, can further exacerbate sleep disturbances, suicidal thoughts, and other mental health disorders (Institute of Medicine, 2013; Oster et al., 2017). Service members may be unable to connect with non-military civilian friends, seeking comradeship and understanding within the Veteran community. They may be uninformed of opportunities to advance their career or vocational aspirations after serving positions unique for service members. When they seek medical services, they may be reluctant to

disclose physical and mental health concerns to civilian health care providers, resulting in delays in evaluation and treatment. This distrust or lack of empathy stems from the perception that civilian health care providers may be unaware that military service represents a central part of their identity, and thus overlook stated concerns from their military service as they transition home (Manning, 2019).

The Veteran Wellness model, described by Berglass and Harrell (2012), highlights that physical and psychosocial health and well-being are linked to four elements – health, material needs, purpose, and relationships – which are affected by an array of factors (e.g., education, family, social networks). By understanding these deployment and post-deployment reintegration challenges, overall physical, mental, and emotional health and well-being can be integrated as a central component into clinical, community, and career development practice models.

**Seven Touches of Outreach Model**

In collaboration between the VA and the DoD, the seven touches of outreach model was designed as a personal approach with seven specific interventions during this reintegration period following deployment, and as service members transition to civilian life. This model was adapted from marketing principles, noting that experts emphasized the importance to reach out and connect with clients at least seven times in order to be successful in selling a product or service to target audiences (Munro, 2007). In the unique application of this central concept for returning National Guard and Reservists, VA outreach staff, medical social workers, and benefits experts identified and communicated with service members at least seven times during the first six months of the post-deployment reintegration period.

As VA outreach staff connected with returning service members, these “seven touches” provided a platform to recognize their transition needs and offer support with specific programs and resources to aid in their transition to civilian life. Table 2 presents the “seven touches” that offered service members a basic orientation on key VA/DoD services provided at the respective time intervals during the first six months after returning home.

**Table 2.** Seven touches of the VA seven touches of outreach model with key orientation activities for National Guard and Reservists during the first six months of the post-deployment reintegration period.

<b>Touch</b>	<b>Orientation</b>
#1	VA briefings on health care enrollment, benefits, and counseling services at the DoD Post-deployment Health Assessment (PDHA) at the demobilization station
#2	VA briefings at the DoD Yellow Ribbon Reintegration Program upon return home
#3	VA coordination with the National Guard’s Transition Assistance Advisor Program (TAA) upon return home
#4	VA Call Center staff called Veterans and informed them about the VA Combat Veteran Call Counseling Number (1-877-WAR-VETS) upon return home
#5	VA briefings at the DoD Post-deployment Health Reassessment (PDHRA) upon return home
#6	VA briefings at the DoD Individual Ready Reserve Muster Initiative upon return home
#7	VA shared informative website* upon return home

Abbreviations: DoD, Department of Defense; VA, Department of Veterans Affairs  
 \*Post 9/11 Transition and Care Management: <https://www.va.gov/post911veterans/>

Notably, this seven touches of outreach model was the first collaborative effort among the VA (VHA and Veterans Benefits Administration, VBA), DoD, and National Guard and Reservists. It was effective in reaching out and educating National Guard and Reservists about available Federal, state, and community resources during the post-deployment reintegration period. This framework offered service members an array of personal interactions with VA outreach staff, who aimed to direct their pathway through VA health care and benefits and other complex organizations and meet their post-deployment transition needs. As a result, VA outreach staff successfully developed a comprehensive resource manual to increase the Veterans’ familiarity with local Veteran Service Organizations, DoD Yellow Ribbon Reintegration activities, and additional support resources for health services in their community (e.g., VHA health care), disability (e.g., VBA), employment (e.g., Department of Labor’s “Career One Stop” employment centers), educational (e.g., GI Bill, Veterans benefits, vocational training), and community social services (e.g., United Way, food banks, family counseling, housing).

**Recommendations for Career Development Practitioners**

Veterans are a culturally unique population, representing less than 7% of the U.S. population who has ever served in the military (Vespa, 2020). Career development practitioners serve an essential role in supporting National Guard and Reservists in their transition to civilian life. By identifying common transition challenges (see Table 3) – apart from the desire to seek educational or vocational training for employment purposes – they can be aware of other impediments that impact the National Guard and Reservists’ optimal post-deployment reintegration needs and serve as a collaborator with VA social workers, career counselors, community outreach staff., and other civilian employers.

**Table 3.** Selected transition challenges and action steps that can enhance National Guard and Reservists’ experiences during the post-deployment reintegration period.

<b>Transition challenges</b>	<b>Actions</b>
Reluctance to seek first VA or civilian health care services	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Enrollment into VA health care, Tricare health program for Reservists or civilian health care program from their employment</li> </ul>
Poor diet and weight gain	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Enrollment into VA “Whole Health” program* (e.g., “Move” programs)</li> <li>• Consultation with dietician and fitness center exercise experts</li> </ul>
Sleep disturbances	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Consultation with primary care physician and sleep medicine specialist</li> <li>• Use of VA sleep app for insomnia or sleep apnea**</li> <li>• Enrollment in yoga, tai chi or mindfulness classes at VA or local fitness center</li> </ul>
Financial insecurity due to unemployment or underemployment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Review of Department of Labor resources (e.g., “Career One Stop” training and employment at Veteran transition centers)</li> <li>• Enrollment in VA benefits (e.g., GI bill, internship, trade school)</li> <li>• Application for state unemployment benefits</li> </ul>
Need for career or vocational counseling	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Enrollment in career development training programs that match military skills to civilian jobs (e.g., co-validation of military licenses to civilian licenses)</li> <li>• Search for trade schools or GI Bill college courses</li> </ul>

Transition challenges	Actions
Marital and family conflict	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Consultation with VA or community social worker</li> <li>• Search for appropriate marital or family counseling centers</li> </ul>
Poor housing solutions, homelessness or risk of homelessness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Use of food banks, low-cost housing or homeless shelter</li> <li>• Search for VA benefits or mortgage housing loans</li> </ul>
Alcohol or drug use	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Enrollment in VA or community drug or alcohol rehabilitation programs</li> </ul>

Abbreviations: VA, Department of Veterans Affairs  
 \*VA Whole Health: <https://www.va.gov/wholehealth/>  
 \*\*VA App Store: <https://mobile.va.gov/appstore>

Based on personal post-deployment reintegration experiences and the application of the seven touches of outreach model, the authors share three key recommendations to support career development practitioners as they interact and provide critical career advice in their community practice to transitioning service members (see Table 4).

**Table 4.** Recommendations for career development practitioners who provide career and vocational counseling for National Guard and Reservists during the post-deployment reintegration period.

Recommendation	Description	Key questions
Understand the deployment and post-deployment reintegration challenges of returning Veterans.	Career development practitioners should understand unique Veterans’ transition needs and provide support during the first contact at the VA or community setting.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What is your military experience? What was your job, rank, and deployment site?</li> <li>• When did you return from your combat deployment?</li> <li>• Do you have family? Where are you currently living?</li> </ul>
Be familiar with specific educational or vocational programs tailored for previous military careers.	Career development practitioners should be aware of military skills and match them to civilian job services. They should be familiar with educational or vocational counseling techniques and resources (e.g., Department of Labor “Career One Stop”) to mentor Veterans in their employment transition.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What is your military occupational specialty (MOS)?</li> <li>• Do you have civilian work experiences prior to your deployment?</li> <li>• Do you have any college courses or trade school experiences?</li> </ul>
Identify Federal, state, community agencies and resources that provide additional support while Veterans experience career transitions to civilian life.	Career development practitioners should be aware of Federal (e.g., Department of Labor “Career One Stop”), state (e.g., VA and non-VA services), and community (e.g., United Way, food banks, housing resources, church outreach programs) agencies that can address the immediate needs of Veterans and their families during their post-deployment transition.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What do you feel are your immediate physical, mental, and family needs prior to discussing your career development goals for the future?</li> <li>• Do you have a cell phone, computer, and internet access?</li> </ul>

Abbreviations: VA, Department of Veterans Affairs

### Conclusion

The deployment and post-deployment reintegration periods are complex and unique for each service member of the National Guard and Reservists. To address these challenges, career development practitioners should be aware of the “seven touches” or specific interactions that

Veterans experience during the first six months of the post-deployment reintegration period, as described in the seven touches of outreach model. They should also be knowledgeable about the personal and family sacrifices endured during their deployment and military service, which often mark their new dual role as combat Veterans and civilians as well as their career uncertainty for their future. Career development practitioners have the potential to change this trajectory and identify a new paradigm by linking Veterans with available resources within Federal, state, and community, state agencies during post-deployment transition. Their leadership can strengthen the health and well-being of Veterans and their families as well as encourage Veterans' future steps in pursuing long-lasting and satisfying careers with optimal vocational training after transitioning home from their military deployment.

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**A Lifetime of Service: Teaching, Air National Guard, and U.S. Air Force (Active Duty) Experiences**

by Judith J. Mathewson

After completing my bachelor's degree in secondary education, psychology, and journalism in Kansas many years ago, I taught near Fort Riley, Kansas, and was fascinated by the tanks, the wargames, and the mystique of the military due to the service of my grandfather, father, mother, uncles, cousin, brother, and sister in the Army, Marine Corps, and Navy. I intrinsically knew that I would be involved in serving in the U.S. military in some capacity. When I traveled to Kansas City to take the Armed Service Vocational Aptitude Battery (ASVAB) test, the recruiter told me, "Go back and teach. We have enough women in the military."

Undeterred, I completed my master's degree in special education, moved to Alaska, and taught many military dependents. In 1986, I took the leap into Basic Military Training at Lackland Air Force Base in San Antonio, Texas. However, I was 31 years old, "mom" to most of the 18-year-old women in the flight and instead of going to technical school, I returned to Alaska for on-the-job training as a "702" (admin). I earned the rank of Airman First Class due to my education, but there was no direct commission for teachers. Traveling from Alaska to Texas and training in 95°F humidity, I was in the best shape of my life, learned about teamwork, and determined that being in the Air National Guard was the best decision I had ever made. However, I observed at that time that the other military branches did not really see the National Guard as equal or even close to it. I have learned that within any challenge is a great opportunity for growth, and as I returned to Alaska in late summer (prior to the school year beginning), my circle of friends and learning curve increased dramatically. Being what was termed "Citizen Soldier" (now, "Citizen Airman"), one realizes quickly that the National Guard is never just a part-time job. In the late 1980s, 1990s and beyond, I spent summers on orders for extended periods of time, and weekends doing military training, assignments, and deployments to England, Japan, Germany, Florida, Washington, DC, Arkansas, and throughout the state of Alaska.

**Education and Military Collaboration**

One opportunity was helping create the Alaska National Guard Youth ChalleNGe Program (NG stands for National Guard) in 1994. It is a 22-week physically and mentally demanding program designed for 16- to 18-year-old at-risk youth who struggled with traditional high school and excelled within a structured military setting. Students (cadets) wore uniforms and learned about academic excellence (for GED or high school diploma), job skill development, personal finance, life coping skills, and community service, during a residential program located at Camp Carroll, Fort Richardson, Alaska. Mandatory parenting classes were part of the program for cadets' families. In collaboration with the Anchorage School District and community work sites, an innovative program curriculum was developed. As an educator, I am enormously proud of our team contributions as well as the 5,300 young men and women who graduated from this program over the past 25 years.

Another opportunity, borne out of grief, was assisting in the creation of the Tragedy Assistance Program for Survivors (TAPS) Good Grief Camp. This program was created by Army Brigadier General Tom Carroll's widow, Bonnie Carroll, in 1992, when the plane he was traveling in crashed into the mountains outside of Juneau, Alaska. Bonnie and I were Lieutenants in the Air Guard together, and there were no services at that time for the families of the fallen. Bonnie stated, "You're a teacher! Create a program for kids! I'll work on the adult side and getting services for them." As a result, the TAPS Good Grief Camp has served military children and adults whose loved one died in combat, training accidents, illness, or suicide while in military service. This program has supported over 90,000 families in all branches of the military. Other countries are now following this TAPS model of peer support for grief and loss.

When I retired and transitioned from teaching and vocational/work coordinator in June 2001, I had completed my Master's in School Counseling, thanks to the Montgomery GI Bill. After September 11, 2001, never did I imagine receiving active duty orders to Air War College in Montgomery, Alabama, followed by Patrick Air Force Base, Florida, to serve as the Department of Defense Equal Opportunity Management Reserve Component Program Manager for Air Force Reserve, Air National Guard, Army Guard, and Army Reserve Soldiers. This training prepared them to deploy and enforce a fair and equal opportunity environment in combat and at home. Following that opportunity, I was called to Washington, DC to serve as the Director of Equal Opportunity for all 54 states and territories.

What has been the most difficult part for National Guard and Reserve members? Switching from traditional Airmen to active duty was challenging because the rules change whether you are Title 10 (Active Duty) or Title 32 (National Guard). Two decades before, times were different, and Guard and Reserve members did not qualify for housing, counseling, use of the Commissary and other services. Many doors began to open that were previously closed to Guard members, beginning September 11, 2001, and the interoperability during the Global War on Terrorism, to include Operation Inherent Resolve, Operation Freedom's Sentinel, and Operation Enduring Freedom. I have been able to navigate the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) system for my military service disability and encouraged others to seek available resources. I learned about receiving help from VA Vocational Rehabilitation upon leaving the military to determine what my next steps could be for civilian employment.

Looking back – I believe the Air National Guard and Air Force gave me the opportunity for continuing my education, pursuing leadership development, and conducting briefings and public speaking to small and large groups. My service also provided career encouragement and guidance as I aimed to achieve an array of milestones along my professional path. I value the circle of military friends who continue to inspire, mentor, and assist with career decisions, letters of recommendation, and words of advice. This circle includes my sister, Major General (retired) Marianne Mathewson-Chapman, US Army; Major (retired) Bonnie Carroll, Air Force Reserve; and Colonel (retired) John Fleming, US Air Force.

**Mental Health and the National Guard**

Guard members have deployed numerous times and share a double commitment to their civilian and military careers, their families, and community. Finding the balance for family responsibilities, physical, educational, psychological, spiritual, and vocational requirements is a challenge, but can serve as an opportunity. As a Guardsman and licensed professional therapist, I have seen marriages end in bitter divorce, escalating substance use, domestic violence survivors, symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder and traumatic brain injury, and suicides of overwhelmed service members. I have also looked into the eyes of family members and battle buddies who experience survivor’s guilt, anger, sadness, and excruciating pain and helplessness. As a hospice volunteer working with terminally ill Veterans and their families, I am privileged to advocate for World War II, Korean War, and Vietnam Veterans and their families. The opportunity to be fully present with those Veterans and their families has been my honor as part of the Space Coast Honor Flight to Washington, DC. My personal mission in earning my PhD in Marriage and Family Therapy has been to give back to Veterans of all eras. I would not trade my service to America because those who have come before me are the humble patriots who have protected our freedoms.

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