

Robert Morris University Oral History Center
Iraq/Afghanistan Veterans Project



Transcript of an
Oral History Interview with
CHARLES MAZZARELLA
Mental Health Specialist, US Army, Operation Iraqi Freedom
September 27, 2016

Charles Mazzarella (1972-), Oral History Interview, September 27, 2016

Biographical Sketch: Charles Mazzarella enlisted to the United States Army (2003-2009) and served as a Mental Health Specialist with the First Cavalry. Mazzarella deployed twice to Forward Operating Base Falcon rising to the rank of Specialist Promotable.

Topics Covered in Interview:

US Army

Mental Health Specialist

Ft. Hood, Tx

1st Cavalry

Forward Operating Base (FOB) Falcon 2004-7 months

FOB Falcon & FOB Prosperity 2006-7 months

Interviewed by Josh Caskey

Transcribed by Nathaniel Mallery

Edited by Adam Salinas and John McCarthy

[00:00:01]

JC: This interview is part of the Iraq/Afghanistan Veterans Project undertaken by the Oral History Center at Robert Morris University. I am Joshua Caskey and today is September 27, 2016. I am joined by Chuck. Chuck, can you please state your full name?

CM: My name is Charles A. Mazzarella.

JC: You want me to call you Charles or Chuck?

CM: Chuck is good.

JC: Chuck's good? I do have your consent to interview you today?

CM: Yes.

JC: Excellent. So let's start off, where were you born at and when were you born?

CM: I was, well... I grew up in Wyoming, Pennsylvania. So I was born and raised in that area in Northeastern Pennsylvania.

JC: Ok.

CM: I was born April 3, 1972.

JC: Ok, and let's talk a little bit about what branch were you in?

CM: I had joined the Army active duty.

JC: What years were you in?

CM: 2003 to 2009

JC: So about 6 years?

CM: Yeah about 6 years.

JC: And then you got out as what rank?

CM: Specialist promotable.

JC: Specialist promotable which is an E4, correct?

CM: Yeah that's right.

JC: Did you enlist out of... Where was the local recruiting station for you?

CM: At the time I was living about an hour north of where I grew up. I had to travel another half an hour to the recruiting center at a place called Montrose I think, in PA. There's sort of a story behind it I guess. When I was 17 I was asked, because of my ASFAB test score, I was asked by the national guard. They came into my house and all this other stuff and I went to their armory. They wanted me to join but I was not ready at that time. The short version of it is, that I guess at the age of 30 or so I thought what I'm doing in my life I need to find more to do. So I had a

recruiter call me in November of 2002 and I said at the time, "I'm not for you." Then I thought about it for seven months and I went up there and I talked and by July 2003 I was ready to make the decision.

[00:02:03]

JC: So you were 30 years old you said at the time?

CM: Yeah at that time. I was 31 when I joined.

JC: Wow. So you were a little bit older. So what impact did 9/11 have on your decision? Or did it have any impact?

CM: I would say... I don't want to rule it out. I would say it had no impact really, it was more about a life situation because at that point I had already had an associate's degree, a bachelor's degree, and I had worked on a crisis line. I was working at a job that I felt was beneath me. So I wasn't doing anything with my life so I thought maybe I need to figure out what an Army of one does as a soldier.

JC: So you worked in the mental health field prior to your Army?

CM: That's right. I had an Associates in human services and then I have a Bachelors in something called College Studies which is with a concentration in social sciences. So yeah I was working at a crisis line before I graduated with my bachelor degree and then prior to that I had other experience. I worked with homeless men back in the county I grew up in, other smaller jobs prior to that is was retail. I was working at a darn group home when I joined, well prior to joining the military, when I decided I should do something better with my life.

JC: Sure. So did you have any history of family service or was it just something you felt you needed?

CM: A few people. My grandfather served in World War I.

JC: Oh goodness.

CM: I have an uncle who was in the Marine reserves and another uncle, I don't know if he went to Korea or he was in about that time. I had a cousin that was in World War II. I had younger cousins too that served but they didn't get deployed. So basically there is just 3 of us that were in war, in a combat zone; my cousin, my grandfather, and then myself.

JC: So other than your situation, what attracted you to military service? Was there any other intangibles or anything that you felt was attractive to you about the Army?

CM: I wanted some courage. I felt that if... self-confidence basically. I wanted, I felt that maybe by joining the military it would give me some direction that I needed. I am a more relaxed type of person and the structure of the Army wasn't something I craved. I guess I did to some degree, I didn't really like it, let me put it that way. SO I didn't really like the rigidity of it or initially being yelled at or anything and all those 900 bosses above you. That's maybe one of the reasons I didn't stay.

JC: You joined in 2003, obviously the Iraq war started in 2003. Did the war start before you came in or after you came in?

[00:05:13]

CM: It started before yeah. I went to MEPs and that was in July. The recruiters said you've been here several times, you know about it, you have to make a decision. We are gonna end up taking some other guys down there if you wanna come with us that is cool." So that specific day, I had four MOS's in mind, four job choices. I didn't know if I was going to go active duty or reserve at that point. I didn't make my decision until I was there. So I was going to go mortuary affairs specialist, two other ones I can remember at this time and mental health because that was the one I connected with. I thought well what am I gonna do as a reservist I still have to work, I went active duty. I was in the delayed entry program from late July until I... Well I went to Fort Sill, Oklahoma for my basic training in late October of 2003.

JC: What was your understanding of the Iraq war at that time? Did you know what was going on?

CM: It had been on the news in things. I saw the downfall of or the collapse of the Iraqi government. I felt and still feel that we were there to help them. They were under a dictator and we were under the premise I guess that there were weapons of mass destruction that we had to go there and eradicate that. So we... I felt it was fine. It was just a horrible regime I guess. I think we had to help them. And we did. Yeah we did because even my brigade and stuff when we were there, they were rebuilding buildings and rebuilding soccer fields in trying to make life better for the people that were oppressed.

JC: So you saw it as, "We were helping people and doing good things for these people?"

CM: Yeah I think so yeah. I mean yes.

JC: Leading up to, we'll get into your deployments to Iraq, let's talk a little bit about your training and all the way until your first unit. What was that like for somebody that is a mental health specialist in the army?

CM: I was going into basic training as a 31-year-old. The way it works is you have that first week in reception and you get all that stuff done you know, your paperwork and they shave your head and all this other stuff, the shots... Unless I'm remembering it wrong, I might be but they issued all the uniforms. And then when you get to basic training, the yelling begins basically. I found out later, we all found out that it's sort of a mind game two the drill sergeants. In fact, we heard of some drill sergeants that didn't want to be there, they had to be there, and you find out a little bit later as you become an E5 if you're really good, if your scores are great you have a really good chance of going, whether you want to or not. But the short of it is, training. So the one sergeant called me an old man or something as I was getting off the bus from reception to actual basic training. There was just a lot of rigidity. I knew there was gonna be yelling and everything. I knew they couldn't beat you up as they did maybe decades ago. It was stressful yeah. I did some running prior to going in but it was pretty tough physically I think. They got us in good shape, they ran us about 3 miles a day. I lost a lot of weight or whatever like everyone does. It was just a nerve wracking I guess because we didn't get enough to eat and things like that. It was just really... It was sort of tough. It was some, I don't know... They had us doing group activities I guess where we tried to work together and solve problems and we hiked.

Typical training, I guess with a rifle and various other equipment and things like that. It was interesting, but it was stressful.

[00:09:59]

JC: Then you went to AIT, what was that like for your job field?

CM: I would say better. The stress diminished. It was basically like going to college or going to a class, that's really what it was. Sure you still had to pay attention to what the drill sergeant said and everything. You were going to school but from nine to four or something like that. It was cool. There was a point, my training was 4 1/2 months long. Towards the first month and 1/2 or so after that let's say, we were lucky enough to go off base on the weekend. From what I understand about the medics, they were at a different building and they were treated more like infantry soldiers I guess from what I understand. They were allowed off base or if they were it wasn't as frequently as we were. If we goofed up or messed up somehow, they penalized us. "You're not allowed up off base this weekend." We bitched and moaned about that. There were a lot of times where it was nice. We were able to wear civilian regular clothing again and let your beard grow a little bit or whenever, not shave for a day and 1/2 or something, and go drink. It was nice. Have a meal instead of being on a base...

JC: So what unit did you end up with?

CM: I was stationed with the first cavalry division.

JC: So you were a mental health specialist with the first cavalry? Where was that based out of?

CM: Fort Hood Texas.

JC: So Fort Hood Texas

CM: I was the only one in my class, a mental health specialist that was stationed in Fort Hood Texas. There was another one of us on the station with a different unit that happened to be on our base I found out later on. I felt it was a privilege because the person that was the smartest in that class she ended up going to Fort Polk.

JC: Oh Louisiana yeah.

CM: I heard sort of horror stories about that place just that it was sort of messed up. I mean it was easy for me because I went from Oklahoma, training was in San Antonio for AIT and then we just busted up to Killeen which is in the middle Texas.

JC: So you kind of stayed in a tight region, a tight group.

CM: I didn't have to go to Alaska. So yes shore was it tough to be away from home like that? Yeah. It was fine I mean it having been to college I got through all that homesickness and whatever. I lived in Maine for a while prior to... Well that's where I graduated my bachelor's from and so I know what it's like to be away from home, to go home infrequently three or four times a year and stuff like that. I guess later on when I realized that I was the only one to go to a somewhat prestigious or respected unit I felt like I was lucky.

JC: Cool. So what did you end up... When you get to first cab what's the breakdown? What type of unit are you with under what subgroup?

[00:13:05]

CM: Okay. It was something called a brigade support battalion. Yeah that's it. I was with 515th Brigade Support Battalion. For anybody listening it is exactly what you hear. You have to learn about the units and I'll give a little quick lesson for people who don't know. You have a squad on and then there's several squads in a company. In a battalion there are several companies. A brigade, a bigger unit, there are several battalions. So then it goes up from there to the division and then beyond that regardless. So we were a battalion that supported the brigade, 15th brigade support battalion. So we... various battalions were like first response or... I don't know how to describe it. They had headquarters battalion, they would support the brigade paperwork or logistics or whatever it would be. Let's see... there was communications and other things like that. So I was part of a medical company. So it's just like on M*A*S*H* basically or whatever it was. We had what they called the aids station.

JC: So you were part of... you were an asset for the aids station, the mental health side?

CM: It was weird because there were... I was the only mental health specialist in the battalion. There were several other ones that were up north from where I was and I didn't get to meet them until we all met to go home about seven and a half months after I got to Iraq the first time. Later on they opened us a mental health center right across from a hospital at Fort Hood in Texas. We all met there so all worked and there was maybe seven of us that were in the brigade that was mental health specialists. I was by myself a second time and later on there were other people from a different unit that I worked with but mostly it was just myself and my psychologist the second time. The first time it was my NCO and his NCO and later on... the social worker and myself we arrived at the same time so the social worker was my officer.

JC: So let's talk about your first deployment to Iraq. When did you deploy to Iraq and where did you end up?

CM: I didn't know until lets July or so that I was...

JC: Which year was this?

CM: When I got to Fort Hood, it was July 03, 2003. I found out that I was going to go to Iraq. We left late August of 2003. We went to Kuwait I think it was Camp Buehring.

JC: yep that's right on the border.

CM: No, no, first time it was Doha I think. Yeah it was Camp Doha near Kuwait City or something, we couldn't see anything really. So we were there a couple of weeks and then I arrived in country, maybe it was about a week, I arrived in country late, the end of August or beginning of September, probably late August I guess. The second time we were there a lot longer.

JC: Where did you end up?

CM: I was at a place called... I was near Baghdad. I never knew exactly where FOB Falcon is.

[00:16:48]

JC: That's where you were at, FOB Falcon?

CM: Yeah. They used to call it FOB Ferin Huggins. I don't exactly know why or it had two names simultaneously but it may have been named after a soldier but the short of it was I always called it FOB Falcon. So yeah I got there.

JC: So somewhere near Baghdad but you didn't know exactly? East, North, South, West of Baghdad.

CM: Exactly. I mean I got to fly over at least once or twice and we were close to the Tyger or Euphrates River but several miles away. All I know is that we were close to a neighborhood, that there was a big 20 foot wall around the whole base and there was a road, I think it was route Irish or something, it was supposed to be pretty deadly. The opposite side of that was a neighborhood. I don't know the Iraqi term, I don't know. I knew it but right now I don't know the name.

JC: No, that's fine.

CM: We never referred to it. I never did in those terms like in the Iraqi name. We knew that there were people there and sometimes they would mortar us and shoot at us sometimes our guys, the paladins would go out there with the tanks and all this.

JC: So let's talk about what was your day to day situation there? What was your job and what was going on? That's kind of a lot of things but let's just start talking about your first tour.

CM: Okay. Ill describe the base a little bit. It was basically just one flat muddy place with no trees. Like I said, big building. There were... we slept in barracks that were 2 stories high I guess maybe three. They had a makeshift dining facility for us or what we referred to as a DFAC. They built another one later on. It was... comparing it to the second time, the first time was more violent. We got there... I got there... There was a group of us that got there like I said about the end of August, beginning of September. Once I got acclimated to my job and the oppressive heat because it's very very hot over there, about 120 degrees or so, but a dry heat. Then I felt comfortable doing my job. As a mental health specialist what I did was interview people. I did intake interviews initially, gathering information and then I was under the guidance of my social worker. I initially asked for any safety questions. I asked the person, the first time they came in, are you thinking about hurting yourself or others, killing yourself?

JC: So you did intakes? Suicidal intakes but mental health as a whole?

CM: Just a general... Yeah we had to rule out safety issues and I would report to my social worker if there was an issue she would come in and all this. If there was nothing, then I had the freedom to interview. If the soldier denied any safety issues I would report and then I would say, "So what do you want to talk about today?" So we talked about... a lot of the times what we talked about was anger issues and sleep problems.

JC: Were you essentially doing a counselor's job?

CM: Pretty much yeah.

[00:20:18]

JC: As an enlisted man wow/ I didn't know that's pretty interesting.

CM: Yeah they did train us for that at the same time. I found out later on, one of my, the guys in my unit... I should say one of the guys in my class was deployed to Germany and all he did was sort of clerical work. So I was given a responsibility of being allowed to do counseling. I want to say tertiary counseling, just real... whatever you can do. They said it's like your slapping a band aid on a bleeding wound, whatever. Whatever we were able to do to calm the guys and women that came in and help them with the issues that they had.

JC: I know you can't talk about specific people because of laws.

CM: I don't remember names anyway.

JC: Is there any situational type stuff that were either common themes or things that really stuck out during your time there that stuck in your mind? Maybe issues that you were dealing with as far as other peoples' issues.

CM: Oh yeah. Like I was lucky enough to have... I wasn't stressed out when I was there. I mean I can tell you how bad the conditions were, specifically when they would shoot at us or mortar us. I had no problem sleeping I was lucky. A lot of people that came in had problems getting to bed. Their mind was racing and things like that. They were angry because you're several thousand miles from home. You're in a foreign, obviously a foreign country, where there's not much similar to being in America so you have to acclimate to everything. There's no Walmart you can go to, there's not McDonald's so you're existing on a small world and your entertainment outlets are very small as well, very limited. You can be stressed. There's stress from being away from family and if you're married or whatever then the wife or husband will miss you, kids miss you, parents miss you, things like that. SO there's stress there and there's inter, what they call... oh God I can't think of the word right now but its where the interaction with other people, you can be stressed by that, in your unit or your leadership. Maybe you're being asked to go on too many missions or whatever it is. So you're getting stressed out. Unfortunately, there was a bad view of mental health, if I have to make a blanket statement, by the Army. The higher ups didn't want their soldiers to go and talk to mental health because it was a bad...

JC: Stigma.

CM: Exactly. When they went anyway, if they went via the chaplain or something and they came to us, then we tried our best to help them, to help anybody. I've always looked at since I started in the military that anybody can have a mental health problem just like anybody can have a physical health problem. We treated soldiers, fellow soldiers with respect and we listened and helped and we taught different techniques on how to reduce anger and stress and calm and get better sleep, medication if needed.

JC: Would it be fair to say that a lot of these people were in the early stages of Post-Traumatic Stress or was some of this stuff just outside home issues as well?

CM: I would say probably both. I mean because there were a lot of soldiers that did see some horrific things.

[00:24:07]

JC: How did you deal with that, hearing the things they had to say? Did that affect you?

CM: I don't know. I mean I think it made me said to use simplistic terms. I was there, I realized that I didn't leave the base so I didn't have the same experiences as the, mostly men, men and women that went on missions.

JC: But you wore the uniform nonetheless.

CM: I mean I have a different perspective on it because... Like that first time I wasn't able to get off the base at all. They were trying to set me up with something where I was going to take leave for several days but in the end of January 2005 that's then Iraq had their elections for the first time. So they closed all doors, doors, they closed all the roads and they closed the airport and no one was leaving. So I was unable to leave. So I was on base for seven and a half months.

JC: Is this the second deployment.

CM: First time.

JC: This is the first time. So how long was your first deployment?

CM: My first deployment was 7 and a half months long. We got there late august.

JC: Of 04?

CM: That's right.

JC: You said 03 earlier.

CM: 03 was when I did my training. I finished...

JC: When did you get to Iraq? You said August of 04

CM: That's Right.

JC: Is that what you meant? You said 03 earlier.

CM: I may have misspoken.

JC: That's fine.

CM: To clarify the timeline, I entered basic training October 2003. I left AIT which it your Advanced Individual Training, my mental health specialist training in June of 2004. I was assigned to Fort Hood of 2004 and we went to... I don't know what I'm trying to say... Oh, we went to FOB Falcon 2004, and then I left March of 2005.

JC: Ok, so like 2 months after the elections which is what you were talking.

[00:26:10]

CM: That's exactly right.

JC: So coming home from that deployment where you were counseling people and dealing with multiple issues themselves, how did cope in-between deployments? Was it an easy transition, was it a hard transition?

CM: Yeah I think it was fine. I mean we wanted to be home and that was it. I'm speaking just for myself. It was easy, it was great to be home. We were very excited to get on that plane and when we were told we were leaving Iraqi airspace, yeah there was a lot of cheering and yelling. We didn't want to be there.

JC: So what was it like between deployments and how long was it between deployments?

CM: It was about a year and half.

JC: Okay and what did you do during that time?

CM: For the most part I was able to be a mental health specialist on my base.

JC: Oh on your base at uhh...

CM: In Fort Hood Texas. There was some initial training when we came back, some time off and then we got back into the unit. We did some various details like we had to wait for the equipment to come in. Sometime I had to do that and they came up in shipping containers or what we called Connex. So we had to unload that sometimes and then we had to go to a train yard the one time and unload the vehicles. Most of the time since I was the only mental health specialist in the battalion, and there were guys that needed, mostly guys but women too also that needed to talk to somebody. I Was the one that they talked to for counseling and the stress of coming having been at war.

JC: That's quite a burden to bear.

CM: I guess so; I mean I just look at it as my job.

JC: Yeah or you can look at it the opposite way I guess too. Did you look at that as an honor or was It more of a burden?

CM: No, it was not a burden at all. The only way I looked at being, when I was deployed, I looked at... I had to stay... I don't wanna say sane. I had to stay calm I felt because if I was messed up, if I had issues that I Couldn't control then I wouldn't be able to help the soldiers that were there. So I looked at that the entire time I was in.

JC: So when did you end up... You said that you were back for a year and half so when did you end up going back for your second tour?

CM: Our second deployment was late October of 2006.

JC: Okay and where did you end up?

CM: Same place

[00:28:32]

JC: Same place?

CM: FOB Falcon yeah.

JC: Same place!

CM: We found out late August that...

JC: Was that coincidental or was that pretty much the rotation?

CM: I would say it's probably the rotation yeah.

JC: Okay, wow.

CM: Because I think the third, if I had stayed in another time we probably would have gone further north I think.

JC: So you're at FOB Falcon for a second time.

CM: Yeah, but well only for a short time.

JC: This October of 2006, right?

CM: That's right yeah. We got to Kuwait late October 2006. We got in Iraq, FOB Falcon again in November, beginning of November 2006. We stayed until February and then we were assigned, we went to a different base called Prosperity. Where FOB Falcon was, it was in the red zone I guess. It was sort of a volatile zone. Where we went to was called Prosper... FOB Prosperity and it was in the green zone, a lot closer to downtown Baghdad. It was supposed to be safer, I don't know. It was neutral zone or whatever, I don't know. The short of it was...

JC: Were you leaving the wire when you were at FOB Falcon or were you doing the same job that you were doing the previous deployment?

CM: That's a good question. No I don't believe I left the entire time I was on FOB Falcon.

JC: Were you doing the same things?

CM: Yes, I was continuing with my job yeah. I was a mental health specialist.

JC: Did you feel more seasoned the second time around?

CM: Yeah yeah definitely, I mean yeah because yeah. What was great for me is that I was there before.

JC: Yeah you were familiar with it.

CM: If I had to go back to combat, mentally it as good to make that transition because I knew exactly where we were going. We were in the same building so it was good.

JC: So you're obviously not out on the roads, out it firefights, but are you still getting mortared like your first deployment?

[00:30:33]

CM: The first time yes, well not as much. I would say the first time was really really bad. They were building the dining facility in late 2004 and it opened in I guess in early 2005 and they knew exactly where to mortar. They were lobbing mortars right where the dining facility was going to be built. It was more violent the first time; I don't know if I'll have time to go back to talk about that a little more.

JC: Yeah go, feel free.

CM: Maybe I'll just address that right now. So I mean like I don't know the reasoning why it was more violent the first time but it was. There was a time that it was either during Ramadan or after Ramadan that it was quiet between late 2004, early 2005. About a month or so, a good month, month and half when I was there on a Saturday, 2004 in October, there was an incident where some soldiers were just going to take a shower and whatever. An insurgent or whomever that didn't like Americans shot a rocket propelled grenade, or RPG at our base and 2 or 3 soldiers were killed.

JC: Were you near the incident or...?

CM: No no I was, I was probably in the medical, the first aid center.

JC: How big is this base? Just to give us an idea.

CM: I'd say about 2 square miles; it wasn't very big at all.

JC: Ok not big ok.

CM: Maybe 4 square miles, but it was a small base anyways.

JC: So how did that... How did that affect you? Did that make you nervous to do anything?

CM: Uhm, well we were all upset that it happened. We heard the explosion we didn't know exactly happened and then we found out who died, what and all this. Yeah, it was demoralizing that they would attack us on our own base. The following week we had the memorial on a Saturday and they attacked us again but we didn't... No one got hurt that time. SO I mean there was a heightened state of alertment... I mean alertness. There were times where we had to report by walkie talkie or whatever, where we were. We couldn't go wandering around so for a time there we had a battle buddy system I think or we had to make sure... I know as a mental health specialist I had a radio because if they needed me, if I went to the dining facility or if I went to MWR, Morale Welfare Relaxation Center whatever they call it, or the chaplain to talk to him, then I had to be contacted. So we had to have accountability and do a head count and all this sometimes during that volatile time when they were mortaring us. It came to the point where the brigade commander, a full bird colonel... There were little tiny shops on the base. It was very minimal compared to the second base that I went to. So he kicked everybody off the base, the Iraqis, except for the translators, just to be on the safe side because from what my sergeant saying there must have been someone on the base, at least one person or me, that was walking the coordinates and calling into their people and mortaring us. The full bird colonel decided to eliminate all that stuff. So it was a lot more volatile I should say. They gave us an acronym too,

VUCA, Volatile Uncertain Complex and Ambiguous and those are all vague words and that's the way they used to describe the combat zone over there. It was a lot worse. The second time we went back to FOB Falcon from late October of 2006 to February of 2007 and then we went to a different base. I don't remember there being as much action the second time but there was some.

[00:35:18]

JC: So you mentioned they moved you in February of 2007, did that have anything to do with the surge? The surge of forces, that was the same time frame.

CM: Right. The surge happened when we were there. Still at FOB Falcon we were talking about how it was gonna happen and they increased our troops by 25,000 people or whatever it was; basically the size of a division.

JC: Yeah I think it was about 30,000 or so.

CM: Yeah so we... What ended up happening was there was some unknown element as to when we were gonna leave. We were told in April that we might be there another year. So we had already...

JC: And you had already been there since October, okay.

CM: So we were looking at maybe a year and half of being there but I can talk to you more about that later.

JC: How was morale?

CM: When that was disclosed, yeah we were sort of upset about the fact that we would be missing yet another Christmas because I mean we had already celebrated a Christmas. We were looking at celebrating another one and it's tough to be away from home like that. I mean this is the way I look at it too as a soldier. It mustn't have... For us it wasn't as bad as World War 2 veterans but... Because as far as I know, I don't know if they got to go home at all. They're there for 3, 4 years, 2, 3 years whatever. In Vietnam I guess they were allowed to go home or have a little break and stuff but they were there for 13 months. The same thing here. You got used to being away from home and you missed things and all of that. You dealt the best way you can. I guess it got to the point where we were getting restless and all this.

JC: So let's talk more about your second deployment. Any memorable memories that stick out in your mind, whether they be positive memories or negative memories? Anything happen while you were there, any situations, people that you talked with that stick out in your mind?

[00:37:29]

CM: That's a lot to... Yeah what I was... The first thing that came to my mind was the fact that we tried to make it the best we could for Christmas and Thanksgiving. The holidays they fed us really really well, and what the higher rankings NCOs and the higher ranking officers would do, they served us food. Just so people understand, I guess there was... I can only speak about Iraq, there was a distrust of Iraqis in general. Even though we work with some people, we had to work with, obviously we wanted to help them but we just wanted to make sure we were safe on base. So we had contracted to other nationalities to serve us; on our base it was Bangladeshi. So normally they served us every day food. On holidays we had our first sergeant or commander or various majors and whatever serving us food. We thought that was sort of cool that they would take the time to serve us food. They treated us really well. The dining facility was really great. They decorated for the holidays, we had good food all the time. So we tried to make it the best. We tried to celebrate as best we can on Christmas and all that. We would decorate our hall a little bit, our offices, or whatever it was. The one thing that I remember... I mean my deployment was pretty much the same as the first time. The second time it was just, you were in and out every day, you did your job and I talked to a lot of soldiers. The one time I felt... Let me just back up a little bit. I was required to be a recorder when some people were brought into the aid station that were injured. Our medical center was the first response basically. You had people that would, if you got injured, you would attend to them in the field and then they brought them to us. If there was some really bad injuries, Iraqi soldier or American, we helped them. Well I should the docs and the nurses helped their wounds; gunshots, chest injuries, and if it was a busted leg or whatever it was then they would go elsewhere. There were times where I had to record just data that's all; blood pressure and things like that. So I got to... I was in the operating room at the time, and I got to see what was going on. There was time when a soldier, we would know ahead time, who was arriving. There would be three soldiers arriving maybe we would know the unit maybe we didn't. There was time where we were called ahead that a soldier DOA was coming to the medical center, Dead On Arrival. We prepared for that. His unit's members came and we had a mortuary affairs was right next door to us, the morgue. They prepped the body, cleaned up the soldier at the morgue and they brought him back to us. When were FOB Falcon the second time and they brought the Apache Helicopter landed and I felt it was important for me as a mental health specialist to be part of the, whatever you wanna say, the unit, the detachment that helped him. It was like a pallbearer and the body bag. We put him on the bird, the helicopter and he flew off. I was with his unit members and leadership.

JC: What was that like? Explain that feeling.

CM: I felt it was just important as a mental health specialist that I do something just beyond talking to people. It was just really really sad I guess. Let's see, an overwhelming sense of respect for what happened and for the soldier that died by everybody that was there. I just... Wherever he taken from our medical center after that I have no idea, but I felt it was important to help in that small way. I just felt that I had to and needed to.

JC: How were the guys that were with you? They served with him directly?

CM: I think so yeah.

[00:42:54]

JC: You don't know? Ok.

CM: Some of them were and some of them may have been...

JC: Were the consolable or inconsolable?

CM: Oh yeah a lot of them. Sure there were some that were somewhat inconsolable in the medical center. People were angry, yelling. There were some people that were crying I guess too. It was a very somber time that particular day. We never had anybody else that died there, the second base was a different story though. I don't know if you want me to get into that.

JC: Go for it, yeah.

CM: When we moved to the second base which was called FOB Prosperity, the same day we had 2 deaths. There was a soldier that killed himself before sunrise, really close to the medical center. We didn't, we found out later on, we didn't treat him. This was a soldier, we found out later on, that maybe he got a letter from home from his girlfriend or wife or something that they broke up or there was a divorce or somebody was cheating, she was cheating on him, or whatever it was. Some type of something set him off to the point where we woke up they found a soldier that killed himself near the medical center. Like I said, we found out he was not one of our soldiers, mental health wise that came to us and talked us because we didn't know who he was exactly. So we dealt with that, we talked to the unit members, and the chaplain also helped with that. I think it was the same day an NCO was out on a base, a smaller base nearby and was electrocuted accidentally. It was either the same week or the same day, but I think it was the day. So it was a pretty bad day. We weren't mortared as much on the second base, it was fine. We were at a ceremony the one time and there was car, well what they call a VBIED, Vehicular Born Improvised Explosive Device, V-B-I-E-D. That went off when we were having our medal ceremony of some sort at FOB Prosperity in late April of 2007. It was some type of, I don't know, it was a huge, very loud explosion. That rattled us and things but there were a lot times that that just happened in the first deployment and the second deployment. After that, I guess what I'm trying to say is that we never knew exactly what was going on. We just heard explosions.

JC: It would probably... Would it be safe to say that it was a good reminder that there was no such thing as safety?

CM: Yeah I would say so. I mean we had too... I don't know if it's, my opinion as a mental health specialist or just my opinion as Chuck Mazzarella or whatever but we had to understand that it was gonna be... It's a war zone and there was that possibility but for the most part it was fairly safe. We weren't getting shot at every day; we weren't getting mortared every day and we were luckily that way I guess. It was unpredictable. You never knew when it was gonna happen. A soldier I think on our, yeah on the second base, the local Iraqis were shooting in the air and one of their bullets hit our guy and through his Kevlar or maybe he didn't have his Kevlar on at the time and he got shot in the head by a stray bullet. So I mean he lived.

JC: It's a reminder of where you're at.

[00:46:54]

CM: Yeah exactly yeah. It was the worst place in the world at the time. I can't compare to Afghanistan, I wasn't there. Iraqi was in the news every day for years and it was the worst place in the world. We knew we were there. It was probably worse on the news than when we were there in real life because they would be reporting on the explosions downtown Baghdad etc. We heard them but we didn't know where it was, where it was going on. A lot of the time it didn't affect us.

JC: What did you do in your free time? Both your deployments.

CM: Well we worked 6 days a week. As a medical company we only worked 6 days a week, sometimes were need on a Sunday. We were able to go to church services if we wanted to. There was the morale welfare and relaxation center where there were games we could play on game systems, watch movies and things like that, basketball court, makeshift basically, well it wasn't a bad basketball court. We could go to the gym. The first base there wasn't much to do. The second base, there were shops, we had a PX we could shop at, you could buy coffee, there was a little restaurant. So there was a lot more to do at the second place. What I did on my day off basically was watch movies. I mean I bought a lot of DVDs over there and I just watched movies and I ate. I went to church once and awhile whichever. I took advantage of the amenities over there which were somewhat limited but the second base the actually did... The second base that I was at, FOB Prosperity, was Saddam Hussein's sports and leisure palace. It was located there. SO he had carious ponds built for fish or whatever it was. So we, our engineers, or whoever took over, I guess it was just regular people from the unit, took a pond and turned into a pool. They drained it, they cleaned, they painted it, they put water in it. It was about a 3-foot pool for us to swim in a little bit because it was ... hot.

JC: I'm just picturing that right now. It sounds like 3 foot of water, a bunch of guys and girls.

CM: The water was really hot ya know it was like 95 degrees, so it cooled you off a little bit. I was lucky enough to... There was a base nearby called Union Three I think. There was a lot of bases the closer you got to downtown Baghdad. I was asked to drive, a few times, officers and NCOs and some people, other enlisted, to go to this base where there was pool, a real pool, a nice pool. So we got to go to the pool a few times. We did various things through the deployment the second time. The Brigade Commander wanted to have boxing, so we had boxing. I mean I didn't participate.

JC: That's a morale builder.

CM: Yeah, I mean... Yeah it was something fun to do that was more like everyday life to try and remind us that we're still human and team building and this other stuff. Whoever wanted to box, we got to go to a boxing event once or twice to see the matches and it was cool. I mean I think we had a karaoke contest or we had a talent contest the one time in our dining facility. It might have been the first or second base, I forget which, maybe the second base. It was something to do. It probably was the second base. In my free time, the first time I was inspired to write a lot of short stories, not a lot but a few. So that's what I did in my free time because I

wasn't always busy interviewing soldiers. I wrote letters to older women that wrote to us or to kids, so I took it upon myself to respond to them in addition to writing...

[00:50:57]

JC: Are these like love letters or...?

CM: Oh no no no.

JC: Oh okay.

CM: These nice old ladies that...

JC: Oh, nice old... ok ok I wasn't sure what you meant.

CM: I wasn't some dating service or something.

JC: Older ladies, like church older ladies type.

CM: I guess through various organizations here.

JC: So, pen pals essentially?

CM: Yeah. They wrote to soldiers in a sense through various cards like dear soldier we miss you from this church, whatever.

JC: How'd that make you feel?

CM: We felt like people cared you know? I really think that they sent a lot of, a lot of care packages to us. That was nice. We didn't feel like we were alone over there. I took the time because I had the time and I'm a nice guy like that and I have writing skills I wrote to some people. Ya know, Hey Mrs. Smith how are you from California, whatever, this is what's going on, this is what it's like over here. I tried to make it as vanilla as possible: "how are you, what do you do" blah blah blah. So I wrote to them, it was something for me to do in my time. I got there, I waited their letter or their response. It was always nice to get mail. Just a small, little side note, whatever, my parents wrote every week and I got mail almost every week from them. So it only took about a week or so for a letter to come. Sometimes it took about 4 or 5 days for a box to get there. So if you think about how sometimes it takes mail a long time to get from one part of the state to the other, or one part of the country to the other, they got it pretty quick to us, to Iraq from the States. So it was pretty good. The second time I wrote a lot of stories too. I must have wrote 30 short stories when I was over there. My mind was clearer or something and I was able to write.

JC: What were these stories about?

CM: I wrote very short stories about different topics. They were not war related at all, some were family memories, some were just my attempt at being creative in different writing genres.

JC: So, it sounds like had a lot of ideas of what you wanted to do in your free time and you kept yourself busy.

CM: Yeah. I was able to keep busy and calm.

[00:53:32]

JC: That's important.

CM: When soldiers needed me in the fight, I would listen to the radio, the local radio sometimes, BBC or CBC, whoever it was, probably BBC. Wherever I was needed I helped out. Sometimes I had to do some small tasks. Command sergeant major, the smart sergeant major wanted some things done. I know there were 2 times I did guard duty. When my psychologist left in July of 2007, or June of 2007, whenever it was, for a month I had no officer above me to report to so the docs didn't want to take that responsibility or the felt that they were not trained in that capacity. So I was asked to guard duty for a month, so I did that from noon, I'm sorry, from midnight to noon. It was ok, I mean at that point I was already a clear soldier at that time.

JC: That's a long shift.

CM: Yeah a twelve-hour shift, on base, it was ok. There were various stations we had to cover, one was an X-ray, later on they had a body scanner that they brought in, one was meeting somebody initially, checking IDs, and then another station was checking a vehicle with a mirror. There was a tower that we had to be in and there was a gate. So we had to rotate and everything, it was ok. I was lucky hear again because I think all along I had NCOs that were sort of looking out for me. Or maybe it was just one or two that really cared because I think this specific NCO the first time tried to get me to go off base to go to Qatar for four days. I wasn't able to because of the elections in January but fine. The second time was the same NCO who hooked me up with midnight to noon because it was just cooler at night. I felt it was, if you had to do guard duty from noon through the hot part of the day to midnight it would be pretty damn hard and hot. I had to do that. Did I like it? I didn't really like the fact that I wasn't doing my job as a mental health specialist because there were, at that time, there was nobody.

JC: So do you feel like you were being used effectively throughout your 2 tours there?

CM: Do I feel like I was being used?

JC: Effectively.

CM: Oh effectively.

JC: Yeah.

CM: Yes, I would say yeah. Like I said I mean like I said, I think that they... I was lucky to be part of this particular medical company. I mean, I don't know, I think my opinion on it is that if you're gonna compare mechanics or whatever to mental health or to medical people, not to make some type of a smudge or whatever. Not to make a bad statement about it but I think we were just more educated as doctors and nurses and whatever else. I wasn't a doctor of course. I guess what I'm trying to say is that they respected me as an older soldier who had a bachelor's degree and work experience and they allowed to do my job and I was lucky in that way because they could have looked up at me like, "We don't need you." I was the only mental health specialist for the battalion and they utilized me in that way.

[00:57:08]

JC: In the training that you received between your schools and back in Fort Hood, did you feel like that helped prepare you for the situations you were put in as far as counseling veterans or during with mental health issues?

CM: Yeah. Well, I was on a crisis line before I joined the Army. So you deal with a lot of unpredictability there. You never knew who you were gonna talk to.

JC: So you were always dealing with people on the verge.

CM: Yeah pretty much. You were stressed, well I was stressed out but so were they of course. A lot of it was repeat callers which were ok and you got to handle them but some of them were very... I don't know what I'm trying to say... They were... You didn't know what they were going to do. The short of it was again, no, my training. Yeah I came to the Army prepared. I felt like the classes that I took were easy even though I... If you failed, you would have to be reclassified. I didn't want to do something else, so I took the classes seriously just like going to college or whatever. I felt like yeah, I was lucky that they respected me enough to use my skills and let me do my job.

JC: Yeah. So during your deployments, how did your family do and your relationships?

CM: I was dating a woman at the time. It was tough on her and it was tough on my parents. Yeah. I would talk to my mom and dad and then I found out through other family members that they were more concerned than they let on when I was talking to them on the phone. It was nice to talk to them. It was also sad at the same time because it was a connection to home and it was like a distraction for 20 minutes: "So how's the dog and how's the whatever it is people talk about, how's the cousin doing, how's this and that, what's going on, oh you had this and that." It was just, it was a distraction to talk to family members. It was a distraction from the reality of where you were. It was a connection to home and it was nice but it was like bitter sweet because you got to talk to them but it was also like you know you missed somebody's birthday or whatever.

JC: Looking at your time in Iraq, do you think the media was giving an accurate portrayal of what was going on over there at the time, 04, 05, 06, 07?

CM: I don't know. I would say... See we didn't get to watch the news every day or anything like that.

JC: Ok. What about from what you hear now about the war? I know you don't hear a whole lot but people are critical of the war, it tends to seem. So what would you say?

CM: They... I don't know about now but they reported on, at the time, they reported on what was happening I think. If there was an explosion in downtown Baghdad, if some car bomb that went off then, like I said we knew we heard something sometimes, sometimes we didn't know there was a car bomb. We would maybe see some news through... I don't know what they're called.

JC: Al-Jazeera?

CM: American Armed Forces...?

[01:00:33]

JC: Oh, AFN.

CM: AFN, Armed Forces Network, yeah. So I don't know. I think it was pro-American I guess, even though we were a coalition over there. I mean I think they... You know what, they just reported on what was going, about explosions...

JC: What about the American media though? You probably didn't have a whole lot of what was going on.

CM: I really can't speak on that, yeah. We caught some stars and stripes or whatever, but of course that's gonna be slightly

JC: But not mainstream media?

CM: No not really. I mean maybe a little bit. Online was so slow and things like that. So we didn't really get any. We got some news from home but it wasn't... You weren't privy to everything that was going on. Just major events like the Olympics, we were there. I was there in 04, we were in Athens at the time, that's where the Olympics were so we got to hear about that. This is more than a side. The only time we were able to drink beer there was the first base for the super bowl. The brigade commander allowed us to drink 2 beers, that were warm because otherwise we had to drink fake beer. It was mock. What do they call them? Non-alcoholic beer. We had that but no we didn't really. We got to hear some big events, I can't give my opinion on what the media's view was of us and all that.

JC: How do you feel your deployments to Iraq.... Have they changed you personally at all? Whether good or bad. Has it changed you as a person? Or do you feel the same old Chuck?

CM: Oh God no. Well it's tough you know it's... In a way what's sad for me is that all these years are going by that I've... since I've done this. I mean I know that maybe I'll be able to look back on this video and several years or 10 years or 20 years, God willing, whatever, and maybe I'll feel the same that... I don't know what I'm trying to say... It was significant to me. I wasn't inspired to join by 9/11 and that patriotism but I was raised to be respectful of our country and family and of the seven values that are in the military with the acronym LDRSHIP; loyalty, duty, respect, selfless service, honor, integrity, and personal courage. For me the most important was respect. So I took seriously the job that I did. I felt that... I feel now that my deployments were among the best things that I've done with my life. Did I want to be there every day? No. I mean I sort of use this little joke, where if somebody gave me a ticket to go home that day I would take it because I didn't want to be in the worst place in the world or what I consider the worst place in the world at the time. Who wants to be somewhere like that when you can be at whatever; you can be at the mall or you can go to the movies or be at home. But it was the job we signed on for voluntarily to do and so there's that sense of duty that people have. I have to say that I... there other soldiers that I respect more than what I did because I'll just give you this one example. There was a 19-year-old soldier that I talked to that was married. I'm a 31 or 34-year-old, whatever at time, soldier that was single. So I looked at him like wow, whether he had a kid at the time I have no idea. This is a young guy who at his age I was definitely not ready to go into the military. So he's serving, he's doing his job, he's going on missions, and he came to us, you

know to speak about his stress and that's cool. I had to admire him. There's a lot of soldiers that were there were younger than I was and they still are a lot younger. There's a lot of younger soldiers that volunteer. So I respected my time over. I was proud to be there. I look back on my service. Did it change me? Yeah I guess so. I just don't know exactly how. I think that I did accomplish my goal of getting self-confidence from the military, but I look back on my time in service as probably amongst the best time of my life and I think it always will be.

[01:05:19]

JC: So you got out in 2009.

CM: Yeah, December of 2009.

JC: What was it like adjusting to civilian life and adjusting to having been deployed to a combat zone for two deployments? What was that like for you?

CM: Let me preface that before I answer that question. We were at... those of us who were stop-lost over there, and there were many of us. We had our... My contract was up. It's very complex but the short of it is, I signed on for a four-year contract. I signed it in October, well July of 2003. So it started basically in October of 2003, whatever and then it ended in October of 2007. So I had the option to re-up or re-sign or to go in IRR, Inactive Ready Reserve, or to go the third route as a reservist. I chose that. So I got out of... We all got back from... It's a nice story I could tell you about that now or later.

JC: Go ahead.

CM: We got out of... We knew we were coming home late November; it was probably in December sometime of 2007. We were told, "Yeah we were probably gonna be home for Christmas." We landed in Fort Hood Texas at 2 o'clock in the morning on Christmas day.

JC: Oh wow.

CM: We had a little ceremony. My family was there and then I got to drive to San Antonio. So it was very cool. It was a Christmas present for our family members and for us as well. We got to be home for Christmas because there were times when we were looking at spending a second Christmas there. I left Fort Hood in March of 2008 and I joined a reserve unit, local, close to home. It was called the 865th Combat Support Hospital out of Utica, NY with a local detachment where I grew up in that area. So I was able to serve for another year and a half with them. Because I decided to go reservist I had my time of service cut by about a year and a half. As it turns out that you sign an eight-year contract whether you know it or not. So I only served 6 and a half years and in December of 2009 I was... My commitment to the Army was fulfilled entirely and I became civilian again with no ability for them to recall me. I have been that way since then. Was it difficult? What was difficult, that I didn't mention and I'll mention now, is from between the first... After we were deployed back to Texas the first time, one thing that we noticed that was remarkable, was that they had ceremonies on our base where they would use air cannons and people would jump at those things because we didn't know what the hell. Were we being mortared again? We had no... The sound initially startled us and then we had to realize, "Ok don't worry about that. They need to tell us about that stuff. They need to put out a

little memo or whatever; 'Hey there's gonna be a ceremony today,' so that soldiers on base who just got back from Iraq or Afghanistan know that there's gonna be a startling noise now and then." For me, I had no problems. I didn't have any problems were I was hyper vigilant or driving down the road looking for mortars or I should say snipers or whatever it was, or IEDs because the first time I didn't leave base at all. I was glad to be back and I took advantage of that time, went to the mall, and went here and there, and went to the little lake that was nearby in Texas. I was glad to go home. I got to go to Atlantic City once in a while when I was home. It was just nice, I appreciated them, and that's what I told. That was my advice to the people there; "We're gonna go back. Carpe Diem, you have to seize the day. Take advantage of the time that you have with your family now, here in Texas. Realize you're here in Texas. You have the freedom to go to those movies, go shopping, go to the restaurant, go to the bar, whatever because when we go back you're gonna be in the same situation again where you're gonna be away from home. So you have to make sure you have fun when you're here basically. So for that transition was fine. They told us we were going back, I dealt with that and all I can say is that was the worst plane ride; when you go from America to Kuwait or the middle-east. The best plane ride from when you're leaving a war zone and you go back home.

[01:10:07]

JC: So since you've been out, have you utilized any care at the VA? Whether it be care, medical care, or benefits... like GI Bill.

CM: Well I didn't use my GI Bill yet, no. I'm in the process of closing on a home but I did not use my VA Bill, the VA money, the loan because the place I'm gonna live at is a condo and it's not on the VA approved list. So you couldn't use the money. So, no I do use VA benefits, yeah. I was advised by someone who still works at the VA, who I served with in the military, to be assessed for problems. Whenever that was, let's say 2010, late 2010, early 2011 or so, I went to the VA and they did the thorough work up of everything and I submitted paperwork and I was approved for 100 percent disability for a respiratory issue. At the time, I had abnormally large tonsils and it obstructed my airway where I... Well when I went to sleep it really made it difficult. I had very bad sleep apnea. I still have some degree of sleep apnea but I've since had my tonsils removed. I also have the diagnoses of chronic bronchitis.

JC: Is that due to burn pit exposure or no?

CM: I didn't have to... I would say that there was just... They were burning a lot of garbage in Iraq the first time, whether it was us or the locals.

JC: At the incinerator.

CM: So there was a lot of haze on FOB Falcon. There was a lot times where there was a lot of smoke and things. I didn't have to personally burn any garbage or anything.

JC: Did they tie any of your problems to that or no, not yet?

CM: I would say... Well yeah, I would say that's exacerbated in any preexisting conditions, yeah. So the short of it is, yes, I've been to the VA and that's who my health provider is at this time.

JC: Have you had a good or bad experience or both?

[01:12:25]

CM: The VA's been fine with me I think. There are some aspects of it that need modernization, but do I wait now and then for an appointment? Sure. I don't have to wait too long, I don't believe. Overall I think their facilities are pretty good and I run into really professional workers there.

JC: So last question; How do you feel that your country has treated you in terms of your service? You feel like you've been treated well?

CM: I would say yes.

JC: Ok.

CM: I have to say that I was lucky to get the disability money. Some soldiers have difficulty getting that. I'm sort of finding out little things, these little perks that veterans get. You can go to an amusement park and get free tickets or you can go to Lowe's and get 10 percent off. So these little things are nice. I mean I don't know, it's a nice little respect that businesses do for people. You're an average person I guess you mention you were in the military then they have that obligatory...

JC: Thank you for your service.

CM: Thank you for your service. I mean I'm getting off topic a bit but I believe that yeah, sure, America... Anyone that has not served, I think has respect for somebody that has served. The country treats us well I believe but as Chuck Mazarella and also as a mental health specialist, former mental health specialist, I have to say more needs to be done to break down that wall between someone who served in the military, a veteran, or someone who has never served because I think we're looked at as... I don't know how to describe it. I don't want to talk to... Like the question would be or the statement would be; I don't want to ask a veteran about their service over there because I don't know what's gonna happen. I don't want to set them off, I don't know what. That's not me talking, that's just the general statement. I can't verbalize this very well but when guys came back from Vietnam, they didn't want to talk to... The general public didn't want to know what was going on. Of course they were ill-treated and etc. but I mean veterans were ill-treated. But the mind set of general people who never served in the military was, I don't want to talk about... to veterans about what happened over there because it's none of my business or maybe they saw some horrific things and they don't want to talk about it. But I'm in the mind, like in this project sort of a full circle here, that I do want to talk about it and I think there are soldiers that are former soldiers, marines, airmen, navy personnel, whatever, that do want to talk about what they did over there. The way I look at it too is that it's our story. If someone is concerned about "Well shit I don't want to tell them about how I was on a mission and I saw my buddy die in front of me because of an IED. My grandmother's not gonna want to hear that or someone like my cousin or whatever." You tailor the soldier's story to the person who's there. If you want to tell your spouse about everything, then that's ok. If you want to tell them about different things, or like generalizations that's ok too. I mean we, just alone, we have the experience of what it's like to be in a different country, away from home, in an environment where it's a lot hotter than it is where maybe you grew up. Anyone who's been in Afghanistan, they know what it's like to live in a high elevation level. We can at least talk about small

generalizations, general things, or we can talk about what happened on this particular day and this mission and whatever else if we want to talk about that stuff. But I think there's this barrier that exists and I think it needs to be broken down because soldiers are gonna die off and the story is not gonna be told. So this is a good medium or a good way to get a story across but at the same time people need to ask questions more. That's the way I look at it because these are people that I would assume that they respect anyway and I don't know why there's not a curiosity about why, what they did over. "What did you do the military?"

[01:17:26]

JC: That's a good point. That's a good point.

CM: Yeah. It's just really...

JC: You don't hear a whole lot about people asking.

CM: Sometimes, sometimes. That's one of the things that I think where the country lets us down. I don't... I mean it's... There's no disrespect for veterans. I think it was deplorable how Vietnam veterans were treated and it took all these years for respect to be gained. I think that respect exists but now there's still a little bit of a, like I said, this has to be more than that. There has to be somewhat of an understanding because maybe we can inspire someone to serve but there's a relatability. "I don't know what you did over there. I don't want to talk to them because..." I don't know what their reasoning is they just.... So there needs to be a better dialogue between someone who has served and someone who hasn't and specifically I think someone who hasn't served, asking people who served (excuse me) in a war zone, what it was like, what did you do, I want to know about it. Here again, it generates that respect I think. And then there's an understanding, "oh this is what it's like." It's not this alienization of soldiers or service members that we respect what we did, I admire what they did, I would never have the courage to do it, whatever, but you don't understand a little bit. Some people that's... I don't know what I'm trying to say. It just, there should be a willingness to want to talk. I mean someone is not going to thoroughly understand everything that you did. Josh and I could've been on the base and we have different opinions of what happened or different views on all this. The understanding is not gonna be exactly the same but there... I think like I said there's... Like I said there's this lack of a desire to want to know I think and that's just sort of what bothers me about where maybe the country lets us down. So I don't know what. There needs to be more projects like this I think where people come in and talk about what's going on and then this is played in classrooms, edited version of course and then maybe students at the college level or high school level or whatever, middle school level are encouraged to talk to... to interview someone in their family or a neighbor or maybe they're invited to a classroom to come in and talk briefly within... I don't know what I'm trying to say, an edited version of what they did over there. Not specific, horrific things that might stress kids out or whatever.

JC: I think that's everything I have for you. I appreciate it. Let's do the cliché, "Thank you for your service" but I mean it and thank you for the interview as well.

CM: I appreciate it too. I know I ramble and the story went back and forth.

JC: That's fine. Hey, it's your story.

CM: These things and sitting here, that's what's coming out. I want to tell about this, ooo I forgot to tell about this, so I think I covered most of everything. I mean I could probably talk for another 10 hours if I had to.

JC: Well thank you and we'll end the interview now.

[01:21:02]