

Robert Morris University Oral History Center

Iraq/Afghanistan Veterans Project



Transcript of an

Oral History Interview with

Suann Davison

Family Nurse Practitioner- Officer, US Air Force

September 16, 2016

**Davison, Suann (1969 –), Oral History Interview, September 16, 2016.**

Biographical Sketch: Suann Davison joined the U.S. Air Force and served from August 2003 until September 2013. Attending Officer Training School and was selected to attend the Uniformed Service University of Health Services, graduating as a Family Nurse Practitioner. Suann was stationed at Wright Patt Air Force Base from 2003- 06, then at The Air Force Academy in Colorado from 2008- 13. During her time at The US Air Force Academy Suann was tasked to deploy, eventually arriving in Kandahar Afghanistan. Working in an Operational Mentoring Liaison Team Suann would serve as a mentor for the Afghan hospital as well as training programs that helped pilots become qualified in medical transportation. Suann would earn the rank of a Field Grade Officer- Major, before leaving the U.S. Air Force.

Topics Covered in Interview:

9/11

Officer Training School, Montgomery Alabama

Wright Patt Air Force Base, Dayton Ohio

Labor Delivery Nurse

Uniform Service University of Health Services, Bethesda Maryland

Family Nurse Practitioner

Air Force Academy, Colorado

Nurse Practitioner

Joint Expeditionary Team, Fort Riley, Kansas

Kandahar, Afghanistan

Operational Mentoring Liaison Team

Forward Operating Base Lindsey, Camp Hero

Afghan National Army Doctors

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Transcribed by John Cummings & Adam Salinas

Edited by Adam Salinas Dr. McCarthy

[00:00:02]

JC: This interview is part of the Iraq and Afghanistan Veterans project, undertaken by the Oral History Center at Robert Morris University. I am Joshua Caskey and today is September 16<sup>th</sup>, 2016. I am joined by Suann. Did I say that correctly?

SD: Correct.

JC: And just, a, can you state your full name.

SD: Suann Davison.

JC: And do I have your consent to interview you today.

SD: Yes you do.

JC: Excellent, now let's start. Just a little bit of background. So, where were you born and when were you born.

SD: Pittsburgh Pennsylvania, September 27<sup>th</sup>, 1969.

JC: And so obviously your local and did you end up joining out of Pittsburgh?

SD: I did.

JC: You did, okay. So you were, you were in what branch?

SD: Air Force.

JC: And, umh, what years did you serve?

SD: Umh, August 2003 to September 2013.

JC: Okay, wow. So quite a long time, ten years and umh, what rank were you when you served in Afghanistan.

SD: Afghanistan I was still a Captain.

JC: You're a Captain. Then when, when you got out, what rank, were you a Captain or?

SD: Major.

JC: Major. Okay. So you got out as a Major. So, field grade officer. Impressive. Umh, so let's just talk a little bit about, a little bit of background. What would interest you in the service?

SD: Originally I wanted to join out of high school but my parents wouldn't let me because umh, my brother had been in the Marines and had died, so.

JC: Mmmm.

SD: They didn't wanna lose another

JC: I'm so sorry.

SD: child.

JC: I'm so sorry.

SD: So, then September 11<sup>th</sup> hit and then I knew we'd go to war and my husband at the time said that why don't you join so, I had to go back to get my BSN first. So that's why there's a two year gap from 2001 to 2003 and then I joined.

JC: Wow. So your brother was a Marine and when did he serve if you don't mind me asking?

SD: In the 80's.

JC: He served in the 80's.

SD: Yeah.

JC: Okay. But was he killed in combat.

SD: No.

JC: Okay.

SD: He was not killed in combat.

JC: I'm sorry for your loss.

SD: Thank you.

JC: Umh, so, so you had always had a little bit of history of family service. Anybody else dating back to maybe grandparents who served?

SD: My dad, World War II.

JC: Oh, your dad, okay. So, another Marine in World War II and what did he do in the Marine Corps.

SD: Umh, Mechanic.

JC: Okay.

SD: So, he was a Purple Heart reciprocate.

JC: Wow.

SD: Cause he served in the Pacific.

JC: The Pacific. Okay. What, so you have, so.

SD: Lots of ...

JC: Yeah, yeah lots of.

SD: Service. My parents were

JC: So that definitely. Did that help you in your decision to come in? Was that a big, was it a major factor, or no?

SD: A factor in the sense that my parents have always stressed the importance of doing your duty and your share of helping others.

JC: Sure.

SD: So.

JC: Excellent.

SD: As far as joining the service. I actually chose which one deployed the shortest amount of time

JC: Laughing.

SD: because I had kids and then.

JC: Oh that makes sense.

SD: So it wasn't

JC: Yeah.

SD: and they had always told me not to join the Marines as a female.

JC: Yeah.

SD: Very.

JC: That's probably good information.

SD: Laughing.

JC: Laughing. Let's talk a little bit about impact of 9/11. Did it have any bearing on your decision to join?

SD: Yes, I knew, umh, I lost a cousin in 9/11.

JC: Oh my gosh, I'm so sorry.

SD: So, and I knew we'd go to war and I knew as a nurse I could at least care for people. Umh, well they were deployed and stuff so.

JC: Okay.

SD: Talked to my husband about it and that's when I joined.

JC: Oh my goodness. You have, so, quite a bit of grief and loss early on before you even joined. That's unh,

SD: Yeah

JC: wow. Umh, what else, what other type of things attracted you to the, to the Air Force, or the military for that matter and being a nurse for that matter?

SD: Umh, I just always had respect for the military. It's like a calling, you know? Some people are just drawn to it, to serve and others don't understand it.

JC: Sure.

SD: So.

JC: Well yeah, that makes total sense. So you served in Afghanistan, umh what, umh, as far as your understanding of what the war in Afghanistan. What kind of understanding did you have upon entering the military and umh, did that change in any way?

SD: Umh.

JC: Basically how you look at the war. I mean, not from political or media but just how you looked at it. What was your understanding?

[00:04:19]

SD: I didn't actually, I tried not to look at it too deeply because

JC: Mhmm.

SD: you know, you'll get angry with certain things

JC: Yeah.

SD: Umh, but my position was to try and help the oppressed Afghans. Umh, make a better country for themselves and get under, out of the role of the Taliban

JC: Yeah.

SD: versus being a strategic land piece. Laughing.

JC: Yeah.

SD: Fighting for that.

JC: So you actually thought of, so that's interesting because a lot of times we don't hear that side of it from some service members and some do say that as well but you were, you actually thought of the Afghan people.

SD: Correct.

JC: Wow. That's very cool. Umh, so you came into 2003. Can you talk a little bit about like, what it, what it was like, umh, you obviously came in as an officer. Did you have to go to any officer training and then what kind of training did you do after that?

SD: Sure. I, you join as an officer, you go to officer training school in Montgomery, Alabama.

JC: Okay.

SD: It's a four week, a, emergence training on protocols. Umh, basic background history of the Air Force. Learning your uniforms and

JC: Yeah.

SD: all that fun stuff, how to march here is cool training. Not as much, I was medical so I was expecting more medical training at some point.

JC: Okay.

SD: Umh, which I didn't receive until later. I thought there would be more weapons training.

JC: Okay.

SD: And there's not, until,

JC: Really?

SD: until you're tasked

JC: Interesting.

SD: to deploy. As an officer they don't, umh.

JC: They don't that way though.

SD: Right. They don't train you until your

JC: Okay.

SD: tasked to.

JC: A little bit different in the Marine core. The Marine corps kind of, every Marine are riflemen but not so much. That wasn't your experience.

SD: Yes.

JC: Umh, so, umh, let's talk from 2003 until the time you deployed. What, where were you at? What unit were you with and what were you doing?

SD: Umh, in 2003 to 2006 I was stationed at Wright Patt Air Force Base, in Ohio.

JC: Okay. Th-that's Western Ohio.

SD: A, Dayton Ohio.

JC: Dayton, okay. Yeah.

SD: And I actually worked as a labor delivery nurse. Laughing.

JC: How cool.

SD: Umh, which was fun. I liked it and then I put in for a packet for schools' selection.

JC: Okay.

SD: And got selected to go to school for family nurse practitioner at the Uniformed Service University of Health Sciences,

JC: Okay

SD: in Bethesda, Maryland.

JC: Oh wow.

SD: So that was my assignment from 2006 to 2008

JC: Okay.

SD: and then once I graduated, umh from the university I went to. The Air Force Academy in Colorado

JC: Okay

SD: and worked there as a nurse practitioner in several different units.

JC: Okay.

SD: Private care, emergency room, cadet medicine.

JC: So, were you dealing with cadets on a regular basis?

SD: Umh, yeah.

JC: Oh cool. How'd you like Colorado?



SD: I loved Colorado.

JC: Yeah.

SD: Laughing.

JC: Most people do. That's why I asked.

SD: Laughing. I'll retire there someday.

JC: Laughing. And then, and then leading up to 2009, what unit did you end up going to?

[00:07:35]

SD: So, I got tasked for deployment in 2009.

JC: Okay.

SD: Umh, they call them jet tasking, Joint Expeditionary Teams.

JC: Okay

SD: Umh, so you don't know anybody else.

JC: Oh my.

SD: You don't go with your unit, you go single.

JC: Wow.

SD: Umh, so you go there ten week training in Fort Riley Kansas cause its and Army deployment.

JC: Okay, okay.

SD: So you train there first.

JC: What was the training like?

SD: First we have to qualify Air Force training, so you finally start shooting and stuff. So, that's why I said it's weird that they wait so long.

JC: How'd you take to that?

SD: It was fine with, for me because where I grew up hunting with my family.

JC: Okay.

SD: Laughing.

JC: So you had a little bit of background.

SD: Yeah, but a lot of people fail because

JC: Really.

SD: they don't have much weapon experience

JC: Okay.

SD: and you gotta qualify in both your 9 millimeter

JC: Yeah.

SD: and your M-14.

JC: Okay.

SD: Umh, including shooting with your and Kevlar on

JC: Yeah.

SD: all that. And then when you go to Kansas umh, they train you as if you're boots on the ground and no matter what position you are.

JC: Okay.

SD: I mean we learned how to drive the Humvee's with night vision

JC: Oh cool.

SD: goggles. You had to, learn how to clear barracks, houses.

JC: Okay.

SD: Umh, it was a counter insurgent kind of programs,

JC: Okay.

SD: so we had to learn also how to work with the Afghans, interview the Afghans, accept their culture.

JC: So you got cultural training? Any language training?

SD: ugh, fortunately, yes, but they taught us Dari (Afghan language)

JC: Oh, Dari okay.

SD: and I was in southern Afghanistan.

JC: So that didn't help you.

SD: and they speak Pashto (Afghan Language).

JC: Pashto, yeah.

SD: So we kind of had a, pull our interpreters to the side and, and get a little extra training in umh, Pashto.

JC: Okay.

SD: At least for the medical stuff.

JC: Oh wow. So let's talk about transition from your, your done with training and you're on your way over. What's, what was the route and what umh, what was that like getting over there. I know it's a process.

SD: It was, we went from Kansas, umh, to Jersey for Fort Dix.

JC: Okay.

SD: To pick up some more team members.

JC: Okay.

SD: Umh.

JC: And you had, you didn't know any of these people?

SD: Mmm mmm.

JC: Okay.

SD: But in Kansas I knew the two medics that would be assigned to me as, umh, who I met up with. So what we trained together at least there.

JC: Oh, cause that's good. You, were you able to build up a little bit of camaraderie

SD: Yes.

JC: and.

SD: Yes. So that was, that was

JC: Okay.

SD: good. A, but prior to getting to Kansas we didn't know each other.

JC: Okay.

SD: Umh, we go to Fort Dix and then we take a commercial plane to Germany.

JC: Okay.

[00:10:23]

SD: And then a military plane from Germany to ah, Kazakhstan.

JC: Kazakhstan, okay.

SD: And then, from Kazakhstan and to Afghanistan.

JC: And then where did you fly into Afghanistan.

SD: We flew into ah, Kabul first.

JC: Okay, the capital.

SD: Yeah and then took another plane down to Kandahar.

JC: And that's where you ended up, was Kandahar?

SD: Yes.

JC: So, what was the living situation like when you got there and did that change? Did they move you around at all?

SD: Yeah, when we first got there. Cause you're transitioning, you're in the tents.

JC: Okay.

SD: Until you get your, umh, if you're lucky a b-hut (wooden hut used as living quarters) to live in. Laughing.

JC: Okay what is that?

SD: Which is a live in shack.

JC: Oh is that, okay.

SD: A, and sometimes you share your b-hut with other people. Sometimes you get time alone because their transitioning out and

JC: Okay.

SD: you got the room to yourself, but

JC: Okay.

SD: it's, I guess 6 foot by 6 foot. Laughing.

JC: It's small.

SD: They're small.

JC: Oh yeah.

SD: But it's, you know a roof over your head

JC: Yeah.

SD: versus

JC: Absolutely.

SD: being in a tent.

JC: Yeah. Laughing. So, when you got there, were you with some of the same people that you met along the way?

SD: Yeah, several different mentoring teams were there so, still not my direct team but other people we trained with in Kansas were on the same FOB as us.

JC: Okay, and when you got there what did they, they kind of tell you this is what you're going to be doing. Did you know what you were going to be doing?

SD: No, it was very disorganized. Laughing.

JC: Really.

SD: You get there, I guess when they request the manpower, they, they request out a year ahead

JC: Okay

SD: and what they think they're going to need. So when we first got there, umh, the Air Force teams said uh, I don't think they're with us. We don't need any more and it was the Army colonel who was saying I think they're with us. So it took them, probably two weeks figuring out which team we were actually supposed to be on.

JC: So you fell under Army command.

SD: Correct.

JC: And what was this command? What was the, what command was it or unit?

SD: Umh, it was an, they call it an omelet team.

JC: Okay.

SD: Operational Mentoring Liaison Team

JC: Okay

SD: and my team was from the Tennessee National Guard

JC: Oh goodness.

SD: and the Bulgarian Army.

JC: Wow.

SD: So.

JC: What were your thoughts on that?

SD: It was interesting. I didn't know, I guess certain National Guard units have a sister country that they work with.

JC: Yeah.

SD: So that's what the, a Bulgarian Army was to the Tennessee guard.

JC: Okay.

SD: So they had actually trained together in Poland.

JC: Wow.

SD: The guard and the Bulgarians and then they trained a little bit in the U.S.

JC: Okay.

SD: before they deployed and then we.

JC: That was interesting.

SD: became part of their team over there.

JC: Okay. So you became part of their team. What did you guys start doing? Were you leaving the wire regularly or how did that work?

SD: In the first two weeks, no, cause they were finding our placement. Umh, so we just worked at, our FOB was FOB Lindsey.

JC: FOB Linsey, okay.

SD: It's our Camp Hero. Like it was, it was a U.S. FOB inside a Afghan base.

JC: Okay.

SD: Umh, and they had, it was a big Afghan base for training. A hospital and basic training.

JC: Okay.

SD: So, the first two weeks we worked the hospital, at the Air Force. Umh, until they found our place in it.

JC: What was it like working in the hospital, what were you doing?

[00:13:55]

SD: We were to mentor the Afghans and this was not, they've had several teams before us so that Air Force Colonel told us that we had to respect their way of doing medicine. Which puts women and children last on the list.

JC: Okay.

SD: So that was hard and, umh, cause two or three days in we had a mass casualty come in and there the Afghans that come in, including civilians.

JC: Want to talk a little bit about that? What happened?

SD: Umh, just they hit a roadside IED, themselves.

JC: And these were the civilians?

SD: Correct.

JC: Okay.

SD: Umh, so, the Americans will respond also because I'm sure there was Americans around the accident

JC: Mhmm.

SD: to.

JC: Mhmm.

SD: So the PJ's bring them to our FOB. The Afghans.

JC: That's the Air Force para rescue, Special Ops?

SD: Correct.

JC: Okay.

SD: Umh, and so they come into the hospital with blast injuries, amputation, things like that and the women and children were the last to be cared for and that's hard to watch. So.

JC: I bet. So, did you have any prior experience to this type of trauma level in the states prior to this or was this kind of your first experience?

SD: It was my first experience but the air force tries to send you to a trauma center prior to deployment

JC: Okay.

SD: and but my deployment was a short notice deployment.

JC: Okay.

SD: So I didn't have time to, to do a C-STARS they call it.

JC: Okay.

SD: Trauma training.

JC: So you're thrown into the fire literally.

SD: Correct.

JC: That your, so how did you deal with that? Mentally, physically, emotionally?

SD: I think I felt prepared for it because my nurse practitioner program was a military university.

JC: Sure.

SD: So we had a summer course and combat medicine.

JC: Okay.

SD: And I was blind fold after that. At first I didn't want to be at that school. Laughing.

JC: Laughing.

SD: and do military college. A, but it came in handy when, when you deploy.

JC: So you, your training prepared you, you felt.

SD: Correct.

JC: Like it was

SD: I felt.

JC: good training.

SD: Yes.

JC: Wow. So, you said you were there for two weeks and then what happened after that?

SD: So then the, we went under the Army Colonels Command for the Omelet Team.



JC: Okay.

SD: Umh, so then we started working the Afghan clinic.

JC: Okay.

SD: It was in the hospital, so they would do sit call for their soldiers in the morning.

JC: Okay.

SD: Umh, and that was kind of frust..., my Colonel told me they don't listen to him very well. They're not going to listen to me. A, as a woman, so just do what I could, instead of local, so our local was hand washing.

JC: Okay.

SD: We did not achieve our goal.

JC: You didn't, you didn't achieve your goal.

SD: Laughing.

JC: Oh goodness.

SD: Because we would go days without the faucets working.

JC: So it's kind of hard to do hand washing if you don't have water.

SD: And my medics taught them how to fix their faucet several times but if the general wasn't there, who wanted his CHI tea.

JC: Yeah.

SD: Umh, they had no reason to fix the faucet

JC: Okay.

SD: for them.

JC: So his priorities were a little screwed up.

SD: Yeah.

JC: Is that safe to say.

SD: Yes.

JC: So, what were some of the differences you noticed from your experience with umh, U.S. service members compared to Afghan service members?

SD: They're, I would say doctor wise, I would say they are at the level of an Air Force medic.

JC: Okay.

SD: Umh.

JC: So kind of like a paramedic trained.

SD: Mhmm. Lower.

JC: Lower than that EMT?

SD: EMT level.

JC: Okay.

SD: Umh, some of the doctors were better but the ones that worked in the clinic, umh, were not very knowledgeable. Didn't care to know things.

JC: Okay.

SD: A lot of times they, when they examined patients they would just interview them.

JC: Okay.

SD: And then hand them a prescription.

JC: Oh goodness.

SD: Umh, if something came in that was complicated, they, they conveniently disappear. Laughing.

JC: So that puts it on you.

SD: Yeah. So we have to take care of them and stuff.

JC: Now these doctors, these Afghan doctors, are they civilian doctors or are they military doctors?

SD: Military.

JC: So they're military Afghan National Army ah, doctors. Okay.

SD: Yes and they, they get specialty pay. Umh.

JC: Okay.

SD: The Afghans are very corrupt in there pays so they had to set up bank accounts and direct deposit pay.

JC: Okay.

SD: But unfortunately the doctors got extra pay, so the specialty pay was hand delivered which meant three people took their share before it got to the doctors. For delivering it, they would say. This is.

JC: Wow. This is totally different than what were used to and getting paid in the U.S. military.

SD: Yeah.

JC: Laughing. So, let's talk a little bit more about your experiences. So you worked, you worked in trauma hospital and you worked with doctors. So, let's talk a little bit more about as the deployment progressed.

[00:19:09]

SD: It, it actually got interesting and I checked with my medics to make sure they'd want to do it but since the doctors didn't want to learn, umh, we started to work directly with the medics and the young guys coming in. Umh and Kandahar Airfield was about ten miles away from us.

JC: Okay.

SD: And the Canadians needed to start training, umh, medics for helicopter, umh, medical transports and stuff like that. So, three times a week we started to go over to the airfield with our medics and take them on transports with the helicopters.

JC: Okay, so we fly on Afghan helicopters, which are MI-17's.

SD: Did you feel safe on them?

JC: Ah, yeah because there would be an Afghan pilot and an American pilot

SD: Okay.

JC: in it and then we were always.

SD: Was there maintenance similar to ours, our standards?

JC: No. Laughing.

SD: Laughing.

JC: Sounds a little sketchy.

SD: And then ah, the way the escorted by Blackhawks.

JC: Okay.

SD: Was definitely when we go outside the wire. Which every time going over to the airfield was going outside the wire cause we have to

JC: Yeah.

SD: go through the town and go over there. Umh, but if we flew like to Terracotta (Iraqi city) or umh, Jalalabad (Iraqi city), whatever. Wherever we fly we would get escorted by the Blackhawks and that made me

JC: Yeah.

SD: feel safer but I didn't realize that the air force and it was U.S. Air Force on it. I don't know how the Canadians got involved but. Laughing.

JC: Okay, yeah.

SD: It's definitely a

JC: You got quite, quite a mixture

SD: cultural, cultural immersion of.

JC: Wow.

SD: I think there was like fifteen different countries over on the airfield?

JC: Yeah.

SD: Umh, but the medic for the helicopter, the air force medic was the gunner.

JC: Okay.

SD: I didn't know that that was their role.

JC: Huh.

SD: But.

JC: Interesting.

SD: Yeah.

JC: So what was it like, your first time getting outside the wire, getting on a helicopter and flying in hostile air space? How did you feel?

SD: At first you're nervous.

JC: Yeah.

SD: Your, you're hyper vigilant, looking at everything. You know, watching for you know, something just to look out of the ordinary.

JC: Mhmm.

SD: Umh, trying to teach the Afghans what to look for.

JC: Mhmm.

SD: Umh, but there's always that delay because you have to tell them through the interpreter and then by the time the interpreter says it, we've passed what we wanted to point out to them.

JC: Okay.

SD: So they weren't really seeing those kind of, kind of surrounding area that we want them to pay attention to.

JC: Mhmm.

SD: Umh, the medical stuff we would have to teach every day, like Groundhog Day. Over and over.

JC: Yeah.

SD: Like, putting a patient in the ambulance, if you're bagging them with an ambu-bag (ambulatory bag).

JC: Okay.

SD: You both cannot jump up front and drive away and not still bag that person. Laughing.

JC: Okay.

SD: As you drive to the hospital.

JC: Laughing.

SD: And so, numerous patients, Afghans.

JC: Was this frustrating to you.

SD: Oh my gosh it's so frustrating.

JC: Yeah.

SD: So frustrating.

JC: So during your time over there you were obviously leaving the wire and flying here and flying there. Did you guys take contact or any situations that stood out. Cause this is a very volatile time.

SD: Correct, umh, luckily no.

JC: Okay.

SD: We are lucky we never in umh, direct combat at all.

JC: But, but it was the possibility was always there. How,

SD: Always.

JC: how did you deal with that? Did the, was there a complacency ever or was it always that mindset of today could be the day?

SD: It became, I guess complacency. Like you're so bored, sometimes

JC: Okay.

SD: you're like who cares.

JC: Was that frustrating?

SD: Yeah. Sometimes.

JC: Did you want to see action or were you glad that you weren't, that you weren't taking fire?

SD: I'm glad we weren't taking fire. I loved

JC: Especially an aircraft.

SD: right, I loved our experience. I loved that we got to see the other side. That we got to see the Afghans.

JC: Helping people.

SD: Yeah. Directly and seeing why you're there, because the other people on the FOB. I mean that some of them were just the army guys that doing convoys and

JC: Yeah.

SD: they just had nothing but hatred because

JC: So you're.

SD: they kept getting, you know.

JC: Hit by IED's.

SD: Hit, hit by IED's and stuff and not realizing the oppression that these people have or the conditions that

JC: Mhmm.

SD: they live in and, and trying to help that side of it.

JC: So you, so you didn't see the direct combat side of it but you saw the after effects. The casualties of war. Let's talk a little bit more about that, if you're comfortable with that? Some of your experiences of umh, maybe patients you dealt with, things that stick out.

[00:23:55]

SD: Umh, it's, you become, I guess, immune to, not immune to it but, after seeing the five or six people come in with legs blown off or, you know, body parts missing, gunshot wounds.

JC: Mhmm.

SD: You, it's not a shock factor anymore, you just go straight to what you're trying to do as far as applying the tourniquets, or doing whatever and for us a lot of times it wasn't us directly applying it was teaching the Afghans.

JC: Okay.

SD: You know, how to put them on, what to do, and a lot of times I felt bad because Afghans don't have good follow up care.

JC: Yeah.

SD: So a lot of times you are saving them but they're just going to die.

JC: From infection.

SD: From infection and umh, no one changing dressings, things like that afterwards.

JC: Okay. That's frustrating and that's sad.

SD: And I think it would have been a lot harder if I was seeing American's

JC: Okay.

SD: injured versus Afghans.

JC: Really? Okay. So there was a difference.

SD: Correct and cause, I mean we train, we're taught casualty's a casualty. Worst case person gets treated first whether it's Afghan, American.

JC: Okay.

SD: And that if it came down to that decision, for me I don't know if I could have made that decision

JC: Okay.

SD: and chose Afghan versed over American.

JC: Okay.

SD: But luckily I didn't have to.

JC: You didn't have to do that. Did you guys ever work on any injured American's?

SD: No.

JC: So all Afghan. Umh, was this, pretty much all age ranges, male-female, kids?

SD: Granted, if it was a mass casualty they would come in and then on Tuesdays we had a women in child clinic. So they'd come in for, a, just routine treatments.

JC: Okay.

SD: Umh. We have a bunch of female providers available.

JC: What is that range from? Like what kind of things were you, is this like umh, sick call or what is this?

SD: Yeah, umh, whether they were pregnant and wanted to be checked or the kids were sick or injured. A lot of burns, the kids always burned

JC: Burns, yeah.

SD: because they have open fires and in their living areas.

JC: Okay.

SD: Umh, infection blossomed,

JC: Any

SD: infections

JC: deliveries? Did you do any baby deliveries over there?

SD: No, I did not. I did a

JC: Okay.

SD: post-partum emergency where the guy, the father, the woman wanted to wait another week till I was in the clinic and I was

JC: Yeah.



SD: so please bring her up now. Umh, he got my interpreter's phone number and they called me at the FOB and then I had to go meet them at the hospital because she was hemorrhaging but

JC: Okay.

SD: he was going to wait for a female, for another week again,

JC: Oh geeze.

SD: like that priority.

JC: They didn't want males working on their, on the females,

SD: Correct.

JC: okay.

SD: So.

JC: So that's a cultural thing.

SD: Very much.

JC: That frustrate you?

SD: Very much. Laughing. I, I mean I understand that to a point but if they want their population to grow and be healthy,

JC: Yeah.

SD: you're going to have to learn to take care of your females

JC: Sure.

SD: and your children you know.

JC: Absolutely.

SD: So, there should be some respect there.

JC: Yeah, definitely. So as you're there, are you working with some of the same people on the America side? The whole time you're in Afghanistan?

SD: Yes.

JC: And building camaraderie and friendships?

SD: You are, it becomes frustrating because, like I said we have a lot of convoy units on our FOB, so. One week we lost three people in a week.

JC: Americans?

SD: Americans from hitting IED's

JC: Yeah.

SD: and stuff and then you have your ceremonies and.

JC: Mhmm. Did it have that effect you, did, cause these are people I'm guessing you probably didn't know but doesn't make a difference because

SD: Right, you, you learn.

JC: they are American service members.

SD: Right. Well you start living together because the FOB's only a hundred

JC: So you do know some of these people?

SD: Right.

JC: Loosely know them.

SD: Yes.

JC: Okay.

SD: So, and this is where the other soldiers were getting frustrated and, you know, next time I'm out on mission I'm going to light everybody up and you know, having to talk them down that, you're taking innocent lives. You can't

JC: Okay.

SD: take it out on everybody else.

JC: Could you sympathize or empathize with them

SD: Oh absolutely.

JC: from where they are coming from.

SD: Yeah, because I mean, it's a, why are we there if, we're just losing soldiers and you're not seeing any positive

JC: Yeah.

SD: the outcome of it.

JC: Okay.

SD: And

JC: Yeah.

SD: you do. By the time you leave you're like, was this ever worth it, was it worth

JC: Okay.

SD: all the lives? That you just saw leave, you knew.

JC: So, did you ever have a problem with feeling you were being used ineffectively  
or did you feel like at least you were being used effectively yourself?

[00:28:42]

SD: I felt I was, we made our self be effective.

JC: Okay.

SD: It's up to you to make that choice. You could sit there and do nothing for six months.

JC: Yeah.

SD: You know, and, and we didn't want to do that. We

JC: Okay.

SD: wanted to at least make an impact on a few people.

JC: Yeah.

SD: You know, so we started with young medics. You know and they, they said the same thing, you know. Nothing's going to change until the older people get out and so our focus was on training the young ones who had the motivation to be different and

JC: Mhmm.

SD: educated and sympathetic.

JC: Yeah.

SD: The older people are all, you know, they've lived through people trying to take over their country for years. Laughing. Decades

JC: Decades.

SD: Yeah.

JC: Maybe a millennia. Yeah

SD: So, and to them it's just another war of people trying to tell them how to run their country.

JC: Mhmm. Wow. What about the morale, with the people you work with directly? We'll keep it more to the American's. Umh, how was the morale?

SD: It starts up high, like anything. You come in all gun-ho. You're going to make a difference and, like I said you get frustrated and it starts coming down. Lives are being lost and home issues start rising for people and just, by the time the six months and for us it's six months, but the army people are there 18 months and so it's now. You have to have a, again self-motivator to, to stay happy and healthy.

JC: What was that for you?

SD: We would play board games as a team

JC: Okay.

SD: or watch movies

JC: Okay

SD: Umh,

JC: So that's what you did in your free time

SD: work out together. Yeah.

JC: Cool.

SD: We had to or, or you could just fall into a hole and not do anything

JC: Yeah. What about as far as like, keeping up with family members. Who did, what did, what, who was your family at that time, from your direct family? Were you married?

SD: I was married.

JC: Any children?

SD: Four children.

JC: Oh wow.

SD: Umh.

JC: What were there ages when you were over there approximately? I know it's hard to think back.

SD: Yeah so, ten, twelve, fourteen and sixteen.

JC: Oh goodness. So teenagers and oh wow and.

SD: So.

JC: Late elementary students, wow. How did they deal with it?

SD: Umh, they did okay cause they weren't big news watchers I think. We did skype.

JC: Okay.

SD: Umh, the internet would be spotty. So, if we were able to talk three of four times a week we would.

JC: Okay. Did that make it, things harder for you or did that keep things?

SD: It, it

JC: Keep you motivated?

SD: It kept me motivated that they, you know I could see how they're doing, how they looked. You know

JC: That's good.

SD: hear the sound of their voice and hear about their day and what's going on.

JC: Okay. SO you were able to keep up with them.

SD: Yeah.

JC: And your husband was holding down the fort, so to speak or?

SD: Correct.

JC: And was he a civilian, or a military

SD: Yes, civilian. He's

JC: Okay.

SD: in the military.

JC: So was it, it still got to be a lot for, to raise four children while you're, while you're gone?

SD: Yeah. He had a difficult time with them. Laughing.

JC: Did he, I would imagine, but he was able to do it so. Wow. That's tough. So you were a captain over there. Did you find yourself, obviously at some leadership role? Training people constantly and how did that effect you as a, as a leader?

[00:32:19]

SD: Cause you're not just thinking of yourself, you have to know that the situation you're going to put the people under you in is safe also. So, with my two medics that were with me all the time, even before we did the mission or anything, you know, I would make sure they were okay with it.

JC: Mhmm.

SD: You know, I would make sure we had the latest security intel before we went outside

JC: Okay.

SD: the wire. Umh, which, you know, I had to fight for, to get, I can't think of it, what was it called? The SITREP or the certain computer you logged on to get

JC: SIPR (Secret Internet Protocol Router Network).

SD: SIPR.

JC: Yeah.

SD: I had to, I had to fight to get a SIPR account.

JC: Oh, my goodness, as a Maj,

SD: Laughing.

JC: as a captain that's

SD: Just.

JC: unheard of.

SD: You know, but because we were a different entity. I mean, it was just totally different than anyone else but they finally gave it to me so I could check things.

JC: Okay. See what's going on.

SD: See what's going on.

JC: Yeah. It's important.

SD: And then, yeah and then halfway through the deployment the Tennessee guard left and then it became all Bulgarian Army, so I had to make sure that we could stay under their command.

JC: Yeah.

SD: And so, the Air Forces signs off on me, said yes as long as they were willing, but then I became more like a liaison for the Bulgarian Army.

JC: Okay. How'd that work with communication?

SD: Their communication was good.

JC: They speak English or?

SD: Yeah they did, they have to pass

JC: Okay.

SD: a test to come on a NATO mission themselves.

JC: Really?

SD: It was funny because most of the older Bulgarians speak Russian because of where they are

JC: Okay.

SD: and stuff. So.

JC: Did they do that around the Afghans?

SD: Yeah so they.

JC: And they had to of been.

SD: The older Afghans would speak Russian.

JC: They knew how to speak Russian because of the occupation?

SD: Yeah. So, it was actually faster for them to communicate, speaking Russian than trying to go through the interpreters.

JC: Wonder what that was like, what was it like for the Afghans. You think that brought back negative memories because of the history of the Russian occupation and Afghanistan?

SD: It didn't seem like it.

JC: It didn't? Okay.

SD: They liked speaker.

JC: It was just a way to communicate.

SD: Correct.

JC: Okay so.

SD: But I started having to go to the, the Afghan general meetings in the morning. You know, and.

JC: And they were done in, what language?

SD: Pashtu.

JC: In Pashtu, which you said you weren't trained on but did you learn some while you were over there?

SD: Minimal.

JC: Minimal

SD: Laughing.

JC: Yeah, that's pretty common.

SD: All medical stuff, yeah.

JC: Yeah.

SD: How to say hi, how are you, how are you.

JC: But you had interpreters.

SD: Yeah all the time.

JC: Okay and were they effective?

SD: Yeah, in fact several of the interpreters, especially in the hospital were Afghan civilian doctors

JC: Okay.

SD: and they got more money by being an interpreter

JC: Oh wow.

SD: than they did being a doctor.

JC: Okay.

SD: And if you interpret for the U.N., you, if you did so many years, you could get a visa to come to America.

JC: Yeah, that's true.

SD: So.

JC: So, so

SD: They had very,



JC: Okay.

SD: a lot of motivation to interpret properly.

JC: Yeah. So, if you were to think of one experience during your time in Afghanistan and it could be a patient, or a situation or even a positive memory, or a negative memory for that matter. What comes to mind?

[00:35:40]

SD: I guess I have two.

JC: Okay.

SD: The first is that first week we got there, and we had the mass Cal and there was a little girl injured and they could tell me not to treat her because it wasn't my culture and I ended up treating her anyways. Laughing.

JC: How'd that go over?

SD: Umh, the Air Force Colonel gave me a dress down for not, you know, following their orders but.

JC: But how did you feel inside?

SD: I felt like I, mean

JC: You did.

SD: the right choice of helping her.

JC: So it was humanity decision

SD: Yeah.

JC: over a military decision.

SD: Correct and I don't think one child was going to make a difference of me helping, you know, so.

JC: Yeah.

SD: So there's that one, there's umh, the one that we did have one of our teammates from Kansas die when the IED, umh, explosions.

JC: I'm sorry

SD: So we went over to the airfield to see all the other guys that were injured and we got everybody to get up and or at least the wheel chairs to go out for the ramps ceremony

JC: Yeah.

SD: and be a part of that. So that was.

JC: That was emotional

SD: Mhmm.

JC: Yeah. I'm sure emotional for them but emotional for you as well to see people out there that, that are fighting. Not only for, it's okay. For, for, not just for America but there also fighting for, like you said, ah, a better way of life for the Afghans. Did you feel that way?

SD: Yeah, for the most part.

JC: Yeah. It's okay. If you need to take a break, we can take a break as well.

SD: I'm good.

JC: Yeah. It's just very painful, I'm sure. So how did you bounce back from that?

SD: It's hard when you first come back because you're so hyper alert...

JC: Yeah. So you, okay.

SD: So you have to, like when you drive over there, you drive in the middle.

JC: Yeah. You own the road

SD: And I'm on the sides.

JC: Yeah.

SD: It is so you're always, when you come home you're driving towards the middle of the road and everybody's like get over, your, your over the line and stuff.

JC: Laughing.

SD: Laughing. We're like what's that pile of something up there?

JC: Yeah.

SD: Yeah.

JC: And what we'll get into that transition as well, because there's a transition period coming from a totally different

SD: Yeah.

JC: world. Literally, combat, combat zone and.

SD: That was hard to come back to, just caring for primary care patients. You know your,

JC: Okay.

SD: you're seeing, you know major injuries over there and then you come home and people are just, whining cause

JC: Laughing.

SD: there's a cold for a day and they want medicine and you're like really and like,

JC: Okay.

SD: so that was frustrating, coming back.

JC: Frustrating coming back to reality but this is the new reality?

SD: Yeah.

JC: Yeah.

SD: So.

JC: Umh, but before we get into the adjustment period of you coming back and all that, I just have, I was curious did you ever come across any civilian contractors? American civilian contractors that you worked with?

SD: Oh yeah, our FOB was, we had more civilian contractors on our base than we had military.

JC: Really? What was that experience like and what were they doing? I mean I'm sure there as a lot of them but?

SD: Umh, we had a big contingency of Special Forces. Laughing.

JC: Okay.

SD: Umh, for training the Afghans Special Forces and we had ah, combat engineers and what else did we have, what else, just the engineers building stuff.

JC: You mean like Blackwater, Triple Canopy, any of those type of operators?

SD: You know what, I don't even know.

JC: Yeah, you probably wouldn't know.

SD: What company they were with.

JC: Yeah.

SD: I do know most of them were prior military

JC: Okay.

SD: who were already deployed

JC: Okay.

SD: and came back as a civilian contractor

JC: Yeah.

SD: instead of making thirty grand a year or now making two hundred grand.

JC: That's a big difference.

SD: And they get to decide what day was a bad day to go outside the wire

JC: Yeah.

SD: and the, if they found it wasn't safe, they didn't have to go

JC: Okay.

SD: versus having an order to go on your mission.

JC: Okay.

SD: So, um

JC: What about

SD: but they were friendly and umh, they, they got things done faster than we could. Like if we needed ammunition and stuff they could give us stuff faster than we could get our,

JC: Okay.

SD: our own.

JC: What about as far as like eating, chow hall, mess hall, was that, who was that run by? Was that civilian American's or was it Afghan or?

SD: Umh, our dining hall was civilian American's. Umh, actually we had good food.

JC: Probably KBR maybe? Like a.

SD: Yeah it was KBR.

JC: Okay.

SD: Laughing.

JC: So that those were contractors as well?

SD: They were contractors. Umh, in fact that was a

JC: Was it good food?

SD: It was good food, for a change.

JC: Yeah.

SD: Like people would come from the airfield

JC: Laughing.

SD: and do a mission over to our, our Afghan FOB so they could get some food. Umh, but we had to eat with the Afghans probably three days a week at least. So we, have a lot of.

JC: Did you eat their food?

SD: Yes. Laughing. It wasn't bad.

JC: What were some of the foods that you enjoy, I mean even if you don't remember the names and what were some of the cultural things that happen when you at? Was different as me and you would sit down to dinner?

[00:41:10]

SD: Yeah. Umh, you eat on the floor on the

JC: Okay.

SD: carpet that they roll out. Umh, a lot of lamb, rice,

JC: Yeah. Did you like that?

SD: non, nan or

JC: Yeah.

SD: the bread.

JC: Yeah.

SD: Umh, no it was good. We actually never got sick.

JC: That's a good thing.

SD: Luckily. Umh, we, they would get soda somehow, so they would have Pepsi for us or

JC: Laughing.

SD: Laughing. Instead of just the Chi tea.

JC: Yeah.

SD: Umh, but no we didn't mind eating with them.

JC: Okay.

SD: Umh, a lot of, you know, eat, using your fingers to eat

JC: Okay.

SD: versus using utensils.

JC: Did you like that or?

SD: It's alright.

JC: Laughing. Different.

SD: Yeah, I wasn't, I mean. I grew up with four brothers who took me hunting and stuff,

JC: Yeah.

SD: sleeping in the wood or, roughing it was not abnormal for me, so.

JC: Okay. Let's shift gears a little bit and talk about the media as far as the American media goes. Umh, do you think they gave an accurate portrayal of what was going on over there?

SD: No.

JC: What about now?

SD: Probably still not. I mean.

JC: And why do you think that is? Did you have media over there when you were over there or

SD: We did so I'm like, the Para rescues were getting mad when they took the Afghans tour of law because

JC: Okay.

SD: they weren't all surviving and then again we had to go to their cultures so, if they don't want to save someone, they didn't.

JC: Mhmm.

SD: So the Para rescues didn't want to bring them to our Afghan FOB. They wanted to bring them to the airfield where they would survive but they would survive just to die months later because of the aftercare

JC: So the aftercare was really poor.

SD: but, so in fact it made our, it went on the news, on an Afghan news channel

JC: Oh goodness.

SD: that the Para rescues were refusing to bring them. The Afghan General got mad. Wouldn't let us off our FOB. We only had one exit so, he grounded us

JC: Goodness.

SD: cause he got mad. Umh, because it disrespected, you know, his culture.

JC: So he made, he, he made the decision. So you've, so this is something different than what I'm used to hearing. The Afghan General actually controlled what you guys could, could not do.

SD: Yeah, it was.

JC: So they had, started the takeover of taking back responsibility militarily? Was that what was going on?

SD: Just on like, it was just a weird FOB setup because

JC: Okay.

SD: again, we had to go through the Afghan base to get in to ours. So here's a bullseye and we're `kind of in the corner of it

JC: Okay.

SD: and we only had one way in and that was through their base. So if the General said we couldn't leave, we couldn't leave

JC: Okay.

SD: and by the time I left, they were building a back exit because we had to have an escape route that we didn't have before.

JC: Okay.

[00:44:05]

SD: So, umh, but he can make decisions on

JC: Wow.

SD: umh, whether he wanted umh, us to leave

JC: Wow.

SD: and go over to the airfield

JC: Okay.

SD: cause a lot of times, sometimes the Afghans would go to the airfield. So we'd have to go over to the airfield in the morning and get a report from the hospital if anyone is going to transfer back to the Afghans side

JC: Okay.

SD: and so he stopped us from going.

JC: Oh man.

SD: He told them he didn't want Afghans taken there anymore either.

JC: Oh my goodness.

SD: But he himself, I had to take over there for care because he doesn't like care of his own

JC: Oh my goodness.

SD: Yeah.

JC: So more frustration.

SD: Was so frustrating. Laughing.

JC: Oh my goodness. So coming back to the states, umh, from Afghanistan. How did you feel? How did you feel change and how do you feel today?

SD: Yeah, I mean, you

JC: This can be positive or negative.

SD: Yeah I mean even my husband when I left said, you know, come back the same person you are and you can't. You can't see

JC: Yeah.

SD: things like that and come back and be the same. You know, you have, to me, it makes you realize how short life is

JC: Mhmm.



SD: you know, so make a difference.

JC: Okay.

SD: Umh, and chose to do what you want to do to be happy.

JC: Yeah.

SD: Umh, it's, again I told you that first it was frustrating, come back and care for people with just minor complaints when you were dealing with umh, people with major wounds.

JC: Yeah.

SD: And then of course there's the driving and situational like, you are going from carrying three weapons all the time, your pistol, your, your Leatherman, Laughing. And your

JC: Yeah.

SD: rifle to coming home and you're not carrying any weapons. So, I had to wear my Leatherman, at least to have a knife on me.

JC: Yeah.

SD: For probably a month or two.

JC: Just out of .

SD: Just to transition

JC: Yeah.

SD: down. Umh, batteries, seeing batteries laying around and

JC: Yeah.

SD: like that was a big thing. In fact, when I get to the VA, there's a stand for disposable batteries

JC: Yeah, I know

SD: and it's the same stand we had in Afghanistan to put because

JC: Yeah.

SD: even though a battery was dead, it was enough, if we thought it was dead, it was enough to charge the IED's.

JC: Exactly.

SD: So you got,

JC: Yeah

SD: you know every time you saw one on the ground you had to pick it up and

JC: That stuff sticks with you and

SD: It does.

JC: and you look at it differently as a civilian would look at it. A battery, you wouldn't even look twice about it.

SD: No, they would be like why are you. Yeah why are you picking that up?

JC: Or trash on the side of the road or umh.

SD: I was ashamed of that and Afghanistan was nothing but water bottles.

JC: Yeah.

SD: Everywhere.

JC: Water bottles are everywhere.

SD: And.

JC: Yeah.

SD: And then the Afghans burn them and there cancerous if you burn them.

JC: Yeah.

SD: So, and that was the other thing, we were exposed to all the Afghan's

JC: What are some

SD: burn stuff. Laughing.

JC: Yeah, yeah and the effects, who knows the effects of that.

SD: Right.

JC: Has on you.

SD: Cause the U.S. learned not to burn

JC: Yeah.

SD: but the Afghans still burn, so

JC: So, yeah.

SD: if you're with the Afghans,

JC: Did, didn't matter.

SD: you are still exposed to it.

JC: Wow. Goodness. Umh, what, what are some of the challenges that your facing, or do you face challenges today from your time overseas?

SD: The only thing I had, when I first came back was, of course umh, fireworks.

JC: Mhmm.

SD: More than once the ones that are like the whistle, that sounded like an incoming rocket.

JC: Incoming rocket.

SD: Umh, so, cause our FOB didn't get attacked too much.

JC: But it did, but it did get attacked?

SD: Umh, but you would hear those. Yeah. So you would hear those occasionally. Umh, so that took some time and then, flies. I hate flies.

JC: Cause there's a lot of them over there.

SD: Well, and I mean that, umh, bodies and parts and

JC: Okay.

SD: sick people. They just, you know.

JC: So that.

SD: Even when they're sick and just lying there, the Afghans don't even shake them off and of course every time you ate, the flies would be on your food and I know, just that the other six months. I was like, that was my thing, like I hated flies.

JC: Hated flies.

SD: Laughing.

JC: That's understandable.

SD: So.

JC: So, it made you, it brought you negative feelings and these were possibly, would it be safe to say triggers as well?

SD: Yeah.

JC: Okay.

SD: I guess. Umh, those were my only two big things.

JC: Two big things.

SD: I mean

JC: Umh, as far as American's go today, if you were talking to your average, we'll say millennial. Umh, what would you tell them about veterans, combat veterans, veterans who have served in Iraq, Afghanistan or in the Global War on Terror? What would you tell them about them? It could be positive, it could be negative.

[00:48:45]

SD: That they just don't understand how much they went through, whether that we were just following orders to go. Doesn't mean we agree with what was

JC: Okay.

SD: going on

JC: Yeah.

SD: but it is our job to, to do what we're told to do.

JC: Yeah.

SD: Umh, and how much that they are protected. They don't know what's going on in the world, cause it doesn't come to our shores too often.

JC: And that goes back to media's.

SD: Right.

JC: They all.

SD: You know, if all the stuff happened, you know, I mean look at 9/11. It only happened once

JC: Mhmm.

SD: and the attention that it got, you know.

JC: Yeah.

SD: If we got more attacks on our own soil, then I think people would have a different mindset of what the military does.

JC: Yeah.

SD: But because we protect the states and then we take the battle over to there,

JC: Yeah.

SD: they don't see that

JC: They don't see it.

SD: and they don't understand it.

JC: And the population that served in Iraq and Afghanistan is pretty low

SD: Right.

JC: and I want to say maybe one percent?

SD: It is one percent, yes.

JC: Yeah. So, very small population of us have, had been there and is it ever angry you when, or have you had any experiences with people speaking out against the war? That maybe don't understand?

SD: No, only thing that upsets me is more people not assuming I'm a veteran because I'm a female.

JC: Okay and that's,

SD: So.

JC: is that frustrating?

SD: That, that's frustrating especially at the VA itself. You know, who's your sponsor, who's your,

JC: Oh.

SD: where's your spouse sir and I'm like no.

JC: And that's, your, you served.

SD: I was a veteran. Yeah.

JC: And I, and I have heard that before from other female veterans and so that's got to be frustrating because you're very small population in the military but a very integral, important part. So, I, I'm thankful.

SD: Oh, thanks. Laughing.

JC: Laughing. Umh, knowing what you know about past wars, you said you had a grandfather who served in World War II.

SD: No, my dad.

JC: Your, I'm sorry, your dad.

SD: It's okay.

JC: Your dad served in World War II.

SD: Mhmm.

JC: Wow, what was that like umh, being raised by a World War II veteran?

SD: My dad never talked about it.

JC: Okay.

SD: Umh, until and I understand, like my dad always went to the VFW and I think that

JC: Okay.

SD: was great for them.

JC: Now though.

SD: is that, that was there way of kind of, group therapy and being able to talk about it because I think talked about things there or even if he didn't talk, just being around someone who knows what you've been through

JC: Yeah.

SD: is reassuring and my dad started telling some stories that end cause he had Alzheimer's and was, would, remember things

JC: Yeah.

SD: and you know. share, you know and they were nasty memories he would have.

JC: Yeah. Did he, did you feel a connection with him because you felt that you had, there was a similarity there, you both had served in area warzones

SD: Mhmm.

JC: and did you ever connect on that level with him?

SD: Umh, a, somewhat. Again, my dad had Alzheimer's so.

JC: So it was tough.

SD: But, I am at least would know what he went through.

JC: Yeah. Absolutely and ah, and your brother served as well. Yeah.

SD: Yeah.

JC: Did, and he, I, I forget if you said or not, but did your, your brother didn't serve in combat but he served during the 80's?

SD: Right.

JC: Okay.

SD: And he just died in a training exercise.

JC: Oh my goodness. So sorry.

SD: Still hurts, yeah.

JC: Yeah.

SD: It's like every time you hear taps you cry. Before I even,

JC: Goodness gracious.

SD: Yeah.

JC: Where was he stationed at, if you don't mind me asking?

[00:52:34]

SD: Umh, oh, California.

JC: Camp Pendleton.

SD: Yes.

JC: Okay.

SD: Yeah, but he was in the movie Heartbreak Bridge with the Clint Eastwood, cause they filmed part of

JC: Great movie.

SD: it there. Laughing.

JC: Yeah, but up at, up until like a, I know exactly where it was filmed,

SD: Yeah.

JC: I was stationed.

SD: So he was on the, they did the scene like he was a helicopter mechanic.

JC: Okay.

SD: And there's a scene on the aircraft carrier where he's directing planes.

JC: Really?

SD: That's him. Like you can't see it.

JC: I've watched that movie a million times and I knew exactly who.

SD: Laughing.

JC: So I have seen your brother, wow that is pretty cool

SD: Yeah.

JC: Wow. Umh, so how do you look at, at war now compared to before?

SD: Umh.

JC: And how did you look at it before?

SD: I looked at it, again, always, in the caring and nurturing side of, you know, are we helping?

JC: Mhmm.

SD: Umh, the people, are we making a difference for the people and not politically, are we getting the piece of land we need, or are we

JC: Yeah.

SD: showing a show of force or whatever. Umh, it's.

JC: The, the humanity side.

SD: Correct. It's just

JC: Are, what did, is it safe to say you're A political, you don't care about politics or do you care about politics now?

SD: No. I'm pretty much A political.

JC: Okay. Especially when it comes to



SD: You have a, I don't know. It's, for me I have to be, because if you get into it

JC: Mhmm.

SD: and then you, you hear the deep seated sides of, you know, why we fighting for this piece of land when there's all these other people dying in Africa and stuff

JC: Okay.

SD: that we don't fight for. You know, it's

JC: There's a lot of yeah.

SD: that piece of land in Afghanistan is more important than the land in Africa. If you get to that

JC: Yeah.

SD: you'll hate the military

JC: True.

SD: and so

JC: You're really just focused on helping people but also being a part of the military that is doing.

SD: Right and helping not just those countries, are own soldiers and you know. So,

JC: Yeah.

SD: we don't have a say in where we're going or what we're doing

JC: Yeah.

SD: per say. So, if I can take care of them and at least show them someone's here, you know, to keep them healthy and

JC: Yeah.

SD: safe then that's doing my part.

JC: Absolutely. Umh, have you had any experience, in your time back, medical care at the VA or, experience with any VA benefits?

SD: Yeah so,

JC: Okay.

SD: I get VA disability so I get the VA for my healthcare. Umh.

JC: How's that experience, your experience personally?

SD: I've had excellent care there.

JC: Okay.

SD: Never had a complaint about it. My only complaint is the other veterans saying who's your spouse and

JC: Yeah.

SD: where did he serve, but as far as healthcare,

JC: Okay, that's frustrating.

SD: umh, always well taken care of.

JC: You go to, and you go to Pittsburgh?

SD: I go to, two of them. The one in Aspinwall,

JC: Aspin mall.

SD: cause that's the clinic for OIF, OEF

JC: OEF, OND yeah.

SD: and then when you have to do specialty care you go up to the university one in Pittsburgh.

JC: Okay.

SD: And that one, never had any issues.

JC: So, good care?

SD: Yeah.

JC: What about the GI bill benefits, or?

SD: I'm using it right now. So.

JC: Free doctoral.

SD: For my doctorates, umh, I didn't fill out the paperwork properly so I couldn't transfer it to my kid's cause of, umh

JC: Okay.

SD: time in. So, I have it to use and Robert Morris is a yellow ribbon school

JC: Yeah.

SD: so whatever the GI bill doesn't cover umh, the school will cover.

JC: So taking advantage of benefits that are well deserved.

SD: Yes.

JC: Umh, before we close up, let's just talk a little bit about what you're doing now. I know what you're doing but tell us what's happened since you've been back and what's the route and what, what do you do in as well as work and as far as life and

SD: Sure.

JC: aspirations?

SD: So, I separated out of the military to come home to take care of my parents. Umh, I'm working in, as a family nurse practitioner in a, umh, clinic at a corporation, and take care of their employees.

JC: Okay.

SD: Umh, trying, it's hard to try and find that job that you feel like you're still making a difference for people. So, I like this job, cause umh, it's not money driven.

JC: Yeah.

SD: Yeah its corporation pays the health center a certain amount and I get to educate the patients on how to save money and

JC: Okay.

SD: what's important in their health.

JC: Okay.

SD: So, that's made a difference cause it took me a couple jobs to find that one and like, cause you get out of the military and you feel like you don't have a mission anymore or that

JC: Okay.

SD: camaraderie anymore.

JC: Sure.

SD: Like.

JC: Lack of purpose.

SD: Same mindset of other people who think about helping others and caring and it's not

JC: Mhmm.

SD: just about money or, umh, status

JC: Okay.

SD: So.

JC: Then your, now you're working on?

SD: Yes, so now I'm in school, here at Robert Morris for my doctorate in Nursing.

JC: In nursing, okay.

SD: Nurse practitioner, so.

JC: Okay.

SD: Eventually nurse practitioner's will have to have a doctorate.

JC: Oh, okay.

SD: Umh, I would be grandfathered in.

JC: Okay.

SD: Cause I already am one for eight years.

JC: So you're certified.

SD: Right.

JC: Is that board certified or is it

SD: Board certified.

JC: Okay.

SD: Yes.

JC: But you're getting your doctorate, sigh that, I didn't know how that worked, okay. That's interesting. And how far into the program are you?

SD: Just started.

JC: Just started, so.

SD: A couple of weeks, three weeks and.

JC: Wow.

SD: Laughing.

JC: Congratulations.

SD: Thank you.

JC: Well, umh, if you don't have anything, is there anything else that on your mind, that as far as your service? Umh, I really appreciate ah, your service

SD: Thank you.

JC: and for taking the time to do the interview and ah, interview will end now.

[00:58:27]

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