

University of Central Florida

Oral History Program

Project: Veterans History

Interviewee: Micheal Anthony Acevedo

Interviewer: Austin Chalfant

Date: April 15th 2012

A: Greetings I am Austin Chalfant a student at the University of Central Florida. I am a part of the UCF Veteran History Program. Today we have with us a special guest. Would you mind introducing yourself?

M: Hi, Yes, Austin I'm Micheal Acevedo. Um Micheal Anthony Acevedo. Uh, But I go by Mike Acevedo. And, um, I'm a student here at Valencia, and an Army veteran.

A: Would you mind telling us where you're from?

M: Yeah, I'm originally from the Bronx, New York. It was in '09 when I came back from Germany, I was stationed in Heidelberg in my last duty station.

A: When did you, uh, enlist in the army?

M: I enlisted in April of 2001, I actually, uh, I actually signed my contract in March. I was part of the delayed entry program in New York. And uh, the delayed entry program, I guess, I was probably a month in there, and then I came in and went to basic training in April.

A: How did your family feel about you enlisting in the army?

M: Oh good my father, uh, my father, my father was in the army uhm, my grandfather on my mothers side served in the army, so it was, uh, it was nothing out of the ordinary for us at least.

A: Um, before entering the service what were views on Americas current, Americas military situation at the time.

M: Well, lets see, I went into the military at the age of 28, so out of high school I wanted to do the military, uh, I was also singing and acting, and kinda went into the entertainment business for about 10 years. And uh, at the age of 28 I was, I was, things were a little stagnant, and I said if I don't go into the military soon I probably don't wanna go in, uh, after 30. So I just uh kind of went right in there, and there was, there was always good stories from my dad and there's always good and bad everywhere, you know everywhere, even in school you know, so you take the good and the bad and, and, you run with it.

A: uh So you mentioned that your grandfather and your father are both veterans, were they veterans in any particular conflicts for the US?

M: My dad was a Vietnam era vet, though he served here in the states, he served at Fort Hood and Fort Gordon as a signal soldier. And my grandfather served in world war 2 and he uh, he actually stayed in uh, in, in state also. They didn't send him overseas but uh yeah I'm very uh, we have a lot of veterans in our family you know, from family, from my moms cousins, dads cousins, uncles, we have, we have quite a bunch of veterans in the family.

A: Uh, Do you mind telling us about boot camp, about your boot camp experience?

M: Yeah well, actually, the marines call it boot camp- *the army calls it basic training.*

A: ah, that's right.

M: The army calls it basic training, and uh, that's ok, that's ok, it's a common uh, common error, what happens uh, the boot camp, uh the basic training was interesting, I liked it a lot. Uh you go into basic training, and basically they uhm, put you in three phases at least where I went to basic training. The red phase, the white phase, and the blue phase, the colors of the flag. And uh the red phase is kind of a phase where they break you down, and the white phase is a lot of uh, a lot of shooting at the range and uh, you know learning the weapon, and uh, and helping build you up again physically, and just uh intellectually, and uh in many ways teaching you the army ways and the different activities with drill and ceremony. And uh, just to respect the military, and uh everything the soldiers before us had gone through. And then the blue phase of course is uh, where you end up graduating and at the end of that but you know your becoming full circle, learning how to shoot your weapon, learning how to qualify at the range, doing combatants. Training for self defense and uh, you learn a lot about the history of the army, and uh, and different things that are important. And physically your actually at a point that ^{if} you weren't prepared for it when you first came in, you're definitely a lot more physically conditioned towards the end, to um handle anything physical that they brought your way.

A: How was adjusting to military life for you?

M: For me it wasn't too bad, I was uh, it was uh, basic training is more of a mental thing, um though I did speak about a physical thing, your mind and your body, they kind of have to be one. And uh I saw for the younger recruits that came in, about 18 19, uh you know their um...they, not saying they're immature per ~~say~~^{se}, but uh, if you had a little more life experience you go in there knowing it's more psychological more mental where you got to get past those mental blocks, and those mental obstacles to complete anything, including the physical challenges, its more pushing yourself and knowing what you can do so, for me it wasn't much challenging in that sense, you know, I knew that I'd have to have quite a bit of uh, uh....just, quite a bit of, of, thinking on, on things that were going on, not psyching myself out of things per say.

A: Do you have any interesting stories of note you wish to share?

M: Oh, lot of interesting things, now uh I was a broadcast journalist for the army, I did television radio and news. So uh, one very interesting thing is um, after graduating from basic training uh at the end of June 2001, I went to Fort Mead, Maryland. I served my basic training at South Carolina at Fort Jackson.

And uh, after that we went up to Fort Mead, they bused us up there and we go to our, our school, which is for uh, which is called the defense information school there. And that's where it was a joint service kind of thing, so all the broadcasters from the army, the navy, the air force, the marines, and the coast guard, we all went to school together, and it was, it's called Advanced Individual Training, AIT, that's the next phase of basic training. So you go to your basic training then you go to your Advanced Individual Training, that's where you learn your job for the army. So broadcasting was a lot of fun but um, as you can see, our school lasted 3 months, and it lasted well into 9/11. So I remember, being sitting in class during 9/11 and um writing on some scripts for TV. And our instructors came in and turned on the television and said um, "just keep working" but uh a plane had hit one of the twin towers and we saw that in the news, and uh, they just said "keep working and don't worry about it" so as we're watching, and then we see the other plane hit the other tower and then automatically we went to uh Force Protection Delta uh from Alpha, and you know we were roving guard around, you know we all kind of got gathered up our instructors went to the pentagon to fight the fires that were burning up there, it was a pretty hectic time, we had to do 20 hour roving guard so every building uh on post there we got, we set up so we were roving around. It was 100% ID check not only on the base but just to enter any building. And our student company was right next to the national security agency which was also based at Fort Mead so it was pretty much walking distance from the NSA so you can figure out that it was a really high tense post at uh that moment. But that's just one interesting story of many others I can tell you about.

A: Wha-That does sound, That must have been pretty hectic. Would you mind telling us about your first post?

M: Yeah I got, I got selected to um, well let me tell you, when I was AIT my idea of being a broadcaster [was] I wanted to go into uh, to airborne school. And after Airborne school I wanted to be attach at Fort Bragg to the psy-ops unit uh to work uh, to work in South America and different places that psy-ops went. Um...but when we got our orders in, you know, its kind of like "hey what did you get in the mail today?" Everyone's kind of waiting on their orders, and uh you know, its like "hey I'm going to Korea", hey you know, because you had a mixed services there, so you had Navy guys there "Hey I'm going on the U.S.S. Vincent" you know, and uh so mine kind of took a little while to come, and when it came it said I was going to Japan. Now I love Asian culture and japan, and I said, "uh you know japan, this is not going to work with my Fort Bragg, and my Airborne, and now I'm going to have to skip airborne school" and I was actually on the route to the airborne school. And I do remember my drill sergeant telling me she was a hetro sergeant. And she had to have a um, she needed to have a conversation with me. She said, she basically told me, you know, shes been trying for 8 years to get to Japan, been in the army at least 12 years, and you know, it's a hard assignment to get, and now that I have it I want to give it away so fast and go to Fort Bragg. Anytime you can go to Fort Bragg for Airborne school, but you can't get Japan that quick. And uh she kind of made it much more valuable to me. And I said "well you know it's japan" and I went out to the orient and uh I had a great time, Japan is probably one of the best duty stations you can serve in the whole army. It's like the gem of the orient over there.

A: What was your, so you were in the 9th Theatre Support Command? Yeah-

M: That's a part of USAJ, that's United States Army Japan slash 9th Theater Support Command.

A: What exactly was your uh, specific role with them? The duties that you carried out?

M: I went there as a private E2. I got there and I met the um, my commander. I was in public affairs office. And I found out we ran a television show called The USAJ This Week. Which was the United States Army Japan This Week. And that I will be the new host, and I will be the new producer, and the editor, and the correspondent, and you wear many hats in the army so, you are, you wear every, every hat in the army. As far as, with the role in the job your playing. So I, uh, it was great! I had a Japanese counterpart Takashi Matsuda, he's actually still my counterpart today, and we actually had a newspaper called the Tory(Tori?). And the Tory newspaper, that was uh, that was really nice, so our officers were right next to each other and we did a lot of stories around Japan. And it was really great, we really really got to immerse ourselves in the culture. And there was, what I like about Japan, and I'll tell you this because I served in Germany after, is we did a lot of uh, collaboration with the Japanese army. Um, every 3 months or so we'd have a Japanese soldier attached to us, um of course they had to speak English, there were prerequisites for them to come, and they really enjoyed, they really enjoyed, serving with you know an American unit, and uh, we've come to you know, adopt them as a brother in arm, or a sister in arms, and it was a really really great experience. And I uh, just really liked the, just the collaboration between the U.S. And Japan over there.

A: So it wasn't hard to adjust to life in Japan?

M: No in japan the people embraced us uh, very openly uh, over there, it was a great culture they, they, opened up that post, and you know I've been to a lot of posts but japan, I mean they would open up the post on the 4th of July, have Bonadori festivals there in August, the Japanese local population can come on post and see helicopter demonstrations, and uh, Japanese carrying uh different kind of shrine kind of things around, and doing things with American soldiers, teaching them, uh, in kimonos and all of them were wearing kimonos and different things so you really got into the culture, and it's a really fantastic experience.

A: Well that's awesome. So uh, you mentioned that uh, your stationed, uh you were, you were stationed in Germany, would you mind telling us about that transition From Japan to Germany?

M: Yeah well, the first, the first transition was of course I was where the dollar and the Yen are. And at that point the dollar was stronger than the yen. When I went to Europe the Euro and the Dollar were not as friendly to the U.S. Service member, I think, I think I uh it was about 120 yen to the dollar in japan when I was there, and I think I got about maybe 76 euro to the dollar. 76 Euro cents to the dollar when I went to Germany. Um, it was a little different over there, things were um, were uh, it was much uh...beautiful, there were a lot of castles, a lot of things, but I saw more separation as far as serving over there. You know the Germans did their thing, The United States Army kind of did our own thing, you know they worked on posts, sometimes they were the gate guard, uh you know um, and uh only when, only when we um worked in homefells and Grafenfir(?) would we sometimes join them. I would see joint things kind of going on there and those were the training areas in Germany. But outside of that the regular post itself I didn't see the integration that I saw in Japan.

A: So they didn't welcome you as warmly as they did in Japan-

M: Uh...I have a lot of great friends in Germany. The, I thought the uh that culture wise they were a little bit harsher than the Japanese per say. The Japanese were very open, VERY open, and very very friendly. Um, the Germans were too, but um, uh...I and I can just give you a little example, per ^{se} say, um, What I would say as I walked into Japan, you walk into a little shop and uh, a soup shop, a sushi shop, or whatever, you'll uh say hi from the hostess, the waitresses, the cook might say hi, and uh what they would say was "Arashima-sen" and so you'd say "Arashima-sen!" and you would take a uh, "Arashima-sen" because they would open the door and someone would come through. Whereas in German you can come in and someone would stand there waiting for like you know 3 minutes before you get acknowledged at some places, even at the gas stations just to buy a soda, you kind of walk in and the person is doing something, and um and sometimes, just can be on a case by case basis. You know where like instead of say "oh hold on one second I'll be with you" it's kind of like, 'lemme' just do what I'm doing,* and then, and then you could leave, and it seemed like they wouldn't care at times. You know so its uh, it was a little different, had a lot of fun in Germany too though. A lot of people were great there though.

A: What did you spend your uh free time doing in Germany?

M: In Germany in my free time? Well we worked quite a bit in Germany, we worked quite a bit, um but in my free time I would just like to uh travel around, uh go up the rivers, and see different castles and a lot of ruins they had there, um, though I was a broadcaster, when I was in Japan, after a couple years in japan, I got selected to sing, uh, for the Army Soldier show, which was a it's kind of like MTV meets Broadway, but everyone's soldiers, the tech guys a soldier, the talent are soldiers, we wanted uh our soldiers on tour and you go on kind of like a 6 to 9 month tour, and you tour the world. Uh you tour the whole United States, and one year you'll tour Asia, and the next year it'll be a tour of Europe, so whatever year your in you'll tour in one of the two places overseas, and see the bases over there. But that was a fantastic, fantastic experience. In Germany I got a chance to sing, be a vocalist in the Army Europe band which is uh the premier band for the army outside of the U.S. And that was fantastic to and uh we sand everything, I sang for the king of Norway in Norway, Oslo, we got to sing in Germany and Denmark, and Belgium, and Luxemburg, I mean quite a bit, we've been around in Germany of course, all over Germany, we the United States Army Band is very well known in Europe. When, when we come, (laughs) people fill that place up, 'cuz we bring them a piece of America and we sing everything 30's, 40's, 50's, all the way um to modern day. We do lots of stuff, Glenn Miller, everything up to everything that's out on the radio right now.

A: How would you compare your experience singing with the army, as opposed to being, uh...

M: Well the regular army, well it's different, as far as hour wise, the regular army you get up at 5 In the morning, go to work and uh you can be there till 7 or 8 o'clock at night. And uh the mantra is, that you're a soldier 24 hours a day. Ok? Um, the band was a little different, it was an elite band with the USRA band. Now the user band they actually, we met at the band hall at 9, um, if you had a high PT score, of

course you didn't have to do PT In the morning, you could do it on your own you could be trusted as an adult to handle your physical fitness on your own. And at about 3 or 4 o'clock during the day, that was kinda' going at the day there so that was a fantastic, I mean we got, to do a lot of music, of course, we didn't just sing or play instruments, everyone in the band also took drills, I was a part of public affairs, a part of uh, information management, where you know I uh did the computers for the courses for the band, there's of course you know operations, there's all the different, like every unit has, they fill all the same responsibilities in addition to the band duties. But, the hardest probably, duty I ever had, was probably, with the army soldier show. Uh the army soldier show was a very, it was a 9 month kind of thing, you rehearsed for 2 months, and you create this 1 ½ hour show, that you go on the road with, and not only are you uh, a part of the talent of the show, but you're also part of the crew, so you come to town- I think we traveled with about 18 tons of equipment, and we would come and we would set up all the equipment, and do shows, one or two shows, and we would break [down] the equipment. So we would go into work at 7 in the morning, and get out at 1 in the morning, then we would get some sleep and the next day we would do it again and again, and we had at least 12 to 15 hour days everyday with maybe a day off every 10 to 12 days. Um, so it was a much much higher speed schedule. Setting up 18 tons of equipment, and breaking it down within a day or two, is quite uh, its quite the job every day, uh every other day.

A: Sounds like it, um one thing I'm incredibly curious about is on your biographical data sheet, it mentions your an honorary black hawk with the first squadron 1st Calvary division, uh black hawk pilot? I would love to hear about that.

M: Ok now they're called the black hawk units the 1/1 Cav. The 1/1 Cav. are a very historical unit. They were stationed in Germany, um, when I first went to Germany I was assigned to the 1st Armored Division public affairs office. So I went down with their tanks, and we went do to Grafenfir, which is one of the big big training areas, uh, especially for the tanks. Um I did a lot of stuff with the 1/1 Cav. I did a lot of stories with them. Um I was very um, lets just say I made great friends with their sergeant major, and a lot of well actually one of their, one of their sergeant 1st class' was one of my drill sergeants from basic training. So I ran into him there he was a top tank commander he was just you know doing all kinds of things there. And uh I covered them so much, uh that the sergeant major wanted to make me an honorary member of the 1/1 Cav. I, I was really grateful for that, It was such an honor to be bestowed on someone that's not a tanker, and not a part of the unit there, um so that's something, that's actually, actually one of my highlights in the military. Um, very much so uh, as well as another highlight uh, right before I left the army uh, or finished my time uh, I was ETSing, I was invited to sing at the army birthday ball in Washington, D.C. Which is the huge army birthday ball, it usually has the president at attendance. The year I was getting out they selected me and 4 other singers in the whole entire army uh to go there and to uh represent the military there. And that was quite an honor 'cuz the president was in attendance and I had sang there before in an Army Soldier Show but this was different, this is kind of like they were saying Sergeant Acevedo, uh I came out as a sergeant, and they asked sergeant Acevedo to come and uh sing some songs. So that was quite, that was quite the honor to be picked for that so.

A: And how long were you in Germany for?

M: 4 years. 4 years in Germany, 4 years in Japan. Yeah, so 8 ½ total. With basic training and AIT and leaving for 4 years uh to Japan and uh reenlisting for 4 years over in Germany.

A: And uh, how was the reception you received when you returned to the United States?

M: Uh, very low key, very low key, I was, I came here and kind of wanted to be under the radar, you know I was, I'd done my time and I was ready to move on to my next step, now my initial intention of going into the military also was for the G.I. Bill. I had gone to school for a little while and had some loans uh out there and I wanted to uh finish school again and I wanted to have the G.I. Bill uh help pay off my old loans and help pay money for me to go back to school and finish my education. And my initial plan was to come here for four years, I'd do four years, get my G.I. Bill go to school that's another four years, and by the time half the years are up I'd have my bachelors. So uh, but I actually liked the military and 4 years turned to 8 years, and I uh, recommend 8 years, uh and the only reason why, in addition to uh liking it or not if you come up with 4 years you still have 4 years in active reserve okay? Let me give you an explanation, when you join the military you sign up for 2 years, 3 years, 4 years, 5 years, 6 years okay? But you're still signing an 8 year contract. And what you're basically saying is that the years that I'm signing on 2, 3, 4, 5 or 6 those are my active duty years, and whatever's left of 8 years will be my inactive duty. And now with the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan we actually had a lot of people being recalled back. Okay from the IRR, okay? The Individual Ready Reserve, now that's what you would be a part of. So I said well if to come out and start school and get a letter in the mail that said "hey get activated again" that's a little, you know, 'cuz your, your getting out and starting life again and to be interrupted in that way, um I thought it would be easier to just reenlist maybe some place you wanna go and finish out the 8 years. At least make a decision in the matter as opposed to being [just] called up and you have to go where the army sends you, there's a difference, you know where you can reenlist and have options, they say "hey where do you wanna go, do you want a bonus?" this and that, where in a sense you wouldn't have those options if you were recalled in those 8 years. So I think 8 years is a good uh chunk of time to uh serve, and you get to learn a lot more about the army too, and you get to see maybe new places that you might not have been. It was a great experience traveling on the governments dime, I can say its, you know its an awesome thing. You live overseas they pay for everything, the only bills you worry about is paying for the cell phone bill, or your cable bill and your food, you know, everything else is taken care of. So, I mean, you know, you have money and you can save money, and you can go to school on bases, they have campus' like Central Texas College and the university of Maryland and um, uh quite a lot of schools that provide colleges courses that let you go to school on base there so it's, it's quite the experience.

A: Was it difficult at all coming back from military life and into civilian life?

M: Not at all, not at all, I didn't find it difficult at all, um you know depression sets in on soldiers, you know, I suffered depression, um for reasons, well for military reasons, because there is some, there is still some good 'ol boy system in the military, I had a great experience I met some great people, but I also met some really really horrible people that I thought uh, that the military could do without. You know I think there's some racism or favoritism there in the military sometimes that undermines the readiness of a soldier and I think the military in that sense has come a long way but there's still some remnants of bad news in you know the military. And you can see in the news that people are doing things outside of the

ordinary that make the rest of uh the military look horrible, especially the ones that work hard every day, go to work every day, and you know, really try their best to serve their country, and and respect people no matter where they are in the world. You have, you know, many different stories in the news of people that kind of lose it, or you know they think its a joke to do something uh, you know, that will be horrific, you know to other people of other cultures, so um, most people in the military don't take that lightly you know so its those knuckleheads that kind of stick out, yeah the army should you know rid themselves of those kind of people and make it stronger. 'Cuz they've actually let in integration and a lot of integration you know with people of different color and different races and stuff like that, they've actually tried to leap in front of that um and I would and I think there's still some work to be done at that end. But uh, other than that it was, it was a great time.

A: So how has your view of the army changed from before you entered to now?

M: Uh, I see it from the inside out, not the outside in, you know, when you look at it from the outside in you can talk to people, who experience stuff, veterans. You can watch movies and think what you think might be acted and what might be not acted. The one that can say the accuracy of that are the ones that actually served and done those things, know how operations are run, know how different things are, and especially if they're in a war area in wartime you know. Um it's, I see it from the inside out and, there's a lot that people, that people sway their views on the military by what the news says about it, and there's too much negative in the news per say, but the news does that in regular society too, there's too much negativity always being um I guess sensationalized rather than the positive things that happen. You know positive things kind of go by the waist side there might be a little one liner about it but they won't delve into it when they have a couple of days of story. There's not too many positive stories that have more than one day of it being talked about. But negative stories will last much longer and they linger for much longer. So I think uh yeah most peoples judgments go over what the news goes on.

A: I agree, um, upon returning how was, how has central Florida or America in general changed from when, from how it was when you left for-

M: Ah, the recession big time, you know we're in a recession, I come back into a recession that makes it harder to work, um I'm glad to have the opportunity to come back to school, um you know veterans some have PTSD or depression or some things with integrating, some have it worse than others um you know society and school everybody just has to understand that you know that sometimes when, you know, when your in the military it's kind of like a suck it up kind of thing, you know? Its like, you have a suck it up mentality, you have to get the mission done, you have to execute the mission, you know, everything else is secondary you know? Whatever is going on uh, is secondary you know, the mission counts in the end. Um so its uh its you kind of come from that suck it up mentality, with something more relaxed people have to understand that, you know, its an adjustment for some veterans and especially in class sometimes you might have uh, ADHD issues you know because being in the military you have to be responsible for many things at the same time, and many, many many things, and if you're in a war zone I can imagine that escalates even more. Uh 'cuz, one thing I can speak on the army and the military itself is that we train to fight, whether you go to war or not no matter where you are in the world serving you are training exactly the same ready to fight, so that when you're called upon you go. And there's, of

course there's a little bit of training before you go also, but you're always training as you fight, you know your not doing separate, different kind of training 'cuz you're not in war as opposed to those that are in war that's not how it works um, the military changed in my year in the army. The old army and the new army kind of became transitioned while I was in, going ^{is} before 9/11 and serving most of my time after 9/11 showed me a little bit of what the old army was and everything changed after that. We went from pilot caps and BDU green camouflage to ACU's and gray and different material Velcro mounts instead of buttons, berets instead of pilot caps everything was uh, training was being revamped you know, we ~~where~~ ^{were} where the army was training for years for jungle warfare after the Vietnam conflict um now we were implementing urban warfare, how to fight in cities and getting uniforms that blend in in cities as opposed to vegetation uh some, uh lots of green lush vegetation. So lots of changes were implemented into the army while I was there, so I did see that, that whole changing of the guard thing, and I was a part of that uh you know, part of that changing of the army.

A: Now I see that it says you received injuries while in the military do you mind-

M: I did, I uh, I hurt my knee in the army in japan um doing some training, I had some knee surgery and I had a stress fracture on my foot and a uh, double hernia, you know um, a couple different things but you know its a suck it up kind of thing. You know you kind of, you kind of enter your own operations and move on, move on and get to the next uh you know, get to the next uh mission I guess of course whatever office ^{or unit} you're attached to. But uh yeah, not in war, I didn't serve in Iraq or Afghanistan, I served in mostly Europe and Asia. But uh, I did train soldier in Germany, because I was in the media, I was in public affairs so we were in charge of doing media operations and training for soldiers that going to Kosovo with the K-Forces, that is the Kosovo forces, that are still in Kosovo. So say for instance we put together 18 national guard reserve units from the states, fly them out to Germany and make them one big division and send them, uh send them off to uh to training, in training they would go through Hoenfells, Hoenfells is called "the box" in Germany. And the box you know, is a city we have uh kind of all the buildings kind of made of, it's a made up city that uh everything is done as in the real world. And we do our training for Iraq and Afghanistan there, and when you're in the box you're in another world. You're not in Germany or Iraq and Afghanistan. It's its own, you know there's a lot that goes on in the box, its a lot and its, and its so that a lot of soldiers can make those mistakes there and they use Miles Gear and real rifles and stuff. But it has Miles Gear so if you get shot it beeps and stuff like that. And you get shot by snipers, you can be somewhere where a bomber comes in, you go through real, real training. And we push, we really push. And with media training, I taught soldiers to stay in their lane, and speak on things that they're not responsible for speaking of, 'cuz public affairs officers usually handle that, and media operations officers handle that. And just you know we don't want soldiers that are throwing off the yin yang with the media, and there's soldiers whose job is to handle those situations.

A: What other jobs did you performed while you were in the public affairs?

M: Well some of the other jobs I've done uh, I was an MC for all ceremonies in Japan, I was a host and MC for most ceremonies, I was in anything from retirement ceremonies to 4th of July ceremonies to all kinds of festivals and any kind of military kind of thing uh, I'm Mike Acevedo, uh my sergeant major called me the "Voice of Zama" there, and he requested me all the time, and he always wanted me. He

said you know, I do a great job, and uh, yeah it was very interesting. It was great the command sergeant major would always kind of lean on me for that kind of stuff. And I would make sure the scripts were done right, and those duties did fall upon me, and I, and I uh, gratefully accepted them. Besides that I also, you know, I taught uh, I taught English on the side there in Japan. I did have a couple of students signed up to teaching them, because that's a big thing to Americans [who] actually teach things over there. So that was great, that was great because I met many Japanese people there also as their teacher, and teaching them English. And a lot of military folks over there actually teach English to Japanese, so that was a lot of fun. Now it was quite a bit, we learned quite a bit about Japan, and they learned quite a bit about America in the process.

A: Wh-What are one of the more interesting, or unique things you learned about Japan?

M: Uh, well the Japanese I can tell you, they are very, very accepting of many, many cultures. And when I tell you this I for instance uh, I'll give you an example, I'm from the Bronx New York, born and raised in the Bronx, I'm 39 years old, so when I grew up, I grew up with hip hop, hip hop music grew up with me, it came from the Bronx, and kind of spread out there, I'm with the early early jams, and I know a lot of break-dancing, graffiti guys and artists, I used to break and boogie and do all that stuff, and it was an uh, interesting kind of epiphany, because one day I was covering the American league, uh major league baseball all-stars that go to Japan and they would have a series of games against the Japanese all stars. They'd have a 5 game series so uh, the army band would be scheduled to go and perform at the uh, Tokyo Dome you know for the event and because you know where ever U.S. are we are. And of course I'm tagged as a broadcaster to you know go with the band get the story, and make a story out of it. So after the wonderful event you see, you know, Barry Bonds, Derek Jeter, Bernie Williams, and all the all-stars kind of playing ^{there} ~~their~~ and you know just leaving the stadium and walking in Tokyo and seeing about 5 Japanese young teenagers with cardboard on the with a boombox playing old school hip hop and break dancing against each other. That was incredible because, god it just reminded me of when I was young in New York, and I said "God that was...that was" and they kind of really try to absorb something. When they like something they go like head first into it, uh. Another instance I go to Tokyo to a Spanish club and you see Japanese dancing the Salsa and the Merenge like any Spanish person anywhere, and I'm talking about dancing and talking in Spanish, "Quieres ir a balar?" "Do you want to dance?" or something, and it's like whoa you're blowing my mind you know, 'cuz they actually, not only do they like the music they get into the culture and they learn the uh language, and they really really jump into stuff. And that's what I like about the Japanese people. They were not afraid to actually go into a culture, uh into every facet of a culture and try to uh, accept every level of it, try to actually accept it, learn about it, speak it like it, and that was very interesting to me.

A: Do you uh, keep up with any of the people you uh met in Japan?

M: Oh I still have friends in Japan, I still keep up with a lot of friends in Japan, uh all over the world I have friends that I stay in touch with and that's, that I do like. Um I learned, I learned quite a bit uh from my army Japanese friends over there to the civilian Japanese friends over there to uh my former students and just uh any Japanese people that I met up there. That was uh, I consider Japan my second home outside the U.S. That's actually how enduring it became to me, and not just me but everyone I know that

served over there they miss it, they always miss it. We can talk like "Ah we miss japan" and this and that. It's just an awesome feeling, if you get the chance to go over there I definitely, I would embrace that with both arms.

A: Um, what lessons did you, that you, learned from the army are that you, can use, are still applicable to today.

M: Lessons that uh, just because you're in the military and just because of the structure. Okay you have a chain of command, doesn't mean that you should not stand up for yourself if ever someone in the chain of command uh, say for say became uh, racist per ^{se} say, or did things that aren't becoming of an American citizen or what an American service member can be. Um I did have a back and forth with a sergeant major that had a lot of issues, there was uh, a lot of issues, some racism that I went through in Germany that I didn't expect, you know always be respectful, you always have to be respectful because you never know. Let's say that you disrespected their rank or something, but never be afraid to they do have equal opportunity, uh, you know, uh sergeants do have inspector generals that can investigate that, so never be afraid to actually stand up for yourself. And uh fortunately you know, most people stand up for America, where the army goes Americas there and uh even in war time soldiers are coming through with their flag of the United States flag on their arm there. You know they have a flag, people see freedom coming, people that are oppressed they know that, that's a good thing for them. They know that their life is supposed to get better. You know, and its not to abuse them at all in any way, or to be condescending to them, its just to say you know, this is how we live in America and we want everyone to have a taste of freedom.

A: Yeah of course, I uh, I also just saw that you were a part of a Chemical, Biological, Radiological team in Japan.

M: Yes, my last duty in Japan, I left public affairs for about, uh 8 months. And I, I went to the company, and I became the uh, NBC sergeant. Okay, NCO, okay. NBC is Nuclear, Biological, and Chemical non-commissioned officer. Though, I was an E4 specialized I was running the NBC system, and I was, you know accountable for uh, all our masks, all our equipment, doing uh, taking inventory, distributing not for training purposes. And being responsible for at least 100,000 plus dollars of equipment. And uh, when it came to Nuclear, Biological. I was also a part of the Sea burn team. That was the Chemical, Radiological, and Biological team okay? And uh, these are like the first responders if uh if there was some sort of chemical biological or radiological incident. When we would, when we trained the sea burn team would do our own training and we'd have uh, different you know uh, we'd have uh scenarios that would happen, and we'd have actors uh, that would pose, uh play you know we, we lined them up and now, 'cuz, [it's] like they say, we train as we fight. So even in training we'd have to train exactly how we'd handle everything from response time unit, to clean up, to exactly how everything we do. We cannot wait for something to happen, to make those decisions. You have to make them in training, then the great thing about them is we have After Action Reviews, or AAR's and you know we think about what went well, and what didn't go well. And uh, that's a great time to have that information. That type of data just will, insure success, if something does happen. And ensure a smooth transition to stuff as

opposed to everyone running everywhere for their lives, and just chaos everywhere. You know, it'll put some sort of structure there, you know things can be handled, and no one will be hurt in the lesson.

A: Um, well, uh, is there anything else that we, uh I didn't ask you that you would like to go over or cover.

M: Yeah I think, yeah I the military is a great um, uh a great experience you know, I, I think everyone should go into the military, at least for 2 years to you know kind of get a thing. Um basic trainings' great, a great experience, going to AIT, and just going to duty stations somewhere across you know, all across the world, I mean that's an exciting thing I mean you never visited a country, visiting a country as a visitor for maybe 2 weeks or 3 weeks or maybe a month, you know, on vacation will never be the same like living there, and actually you know saying: "Oh I'm going home, you know, I'm going to my house, I live here in Japan, I live here in Germany". Um, and actually being able to immerse yourself in the culture, you know, when your on vacation your on a time schedule, well like "what can I do, what's going on this time? Let me go, let me try to do this, do that." When your living there you have time to go to work, and on the weekends plan out after work, and ^{integrate} get yourself into the culture and see, see it and feel it, and be a part of it for yourself. So I think it's a great thing, it's a great skill set, and uh, I'm a big uh, fan of free money for college and scholarships and I'm really against loans you know, so, anything that can put you in a position that then you can go to school, I mean that's, to me that's, that puts you on the right track. 'Cuz not only do you get real experience, you get to see the world, ok um, you get paid pretty much to, um, to work and have fun ok, and then you get to go back home and have school paid for and do whatever you want to do. I mean its just like the best of many many worlds.

A: Nice, um and, I just would like to also ask you about, do you keep up with any veterans or are you a part of any veteran organizations?

M: I am, I am, I joined the American Legion when I got out, and, I'm also part of the veterans of Valencia student veterans of America. And that's uh, that's one of the challenges of the student veterans of America which is a national organization. Um, there are many issues that we're trying to deal with here at Valencia, and what most colleges have, uh. My biggest issue was the in-state residency. I uh, get a lot of veterans, some here even, that uh, the G.I. Bill pays for a portion and they have to pay out of pocket for the rest their being charged. I would say resident, It's because they moved from another state when they came out, but, you know uh, I don't think veterans should wait a year here in this state to gain residency, 'cuz when they serve, they serve for the country, they don't serve for the state. Even the national guard and reserve is not just a uh, stateside mission anymore. These guys get sent to Iraq and Afghanistan too so, I think America and the educational institutions need to get with the program when it comes to that, and say: "You know what, the military did change, we are academia, meaning that we're intelligent enough to recognize that, that we can-" The lense just closed

A: Yeah I think it just died...

M: Ok I'll keep going with the radio(?) here. "Yeah, academia, that we're here to recognize and that when changes happen across America, we need to recognize those changes, and when people are serving overseas for the country, we need to not impose them, and compart them, per ^{it} say, by state. And say 'well you served active duty while you were an Ohio resident so coming here to school we have to

charge you an out of state residency." I don't think that should apply to veterans, there's only, there's less than 1 million people in the military, how many people are in America? 290 plus, right? So 1 million is not even 1% of that number, so when less than 1% go out to protect America, Americas interests, I don't think its 'gonna break the bank if they don't say: "Hey, you know what we don't do in state residency for you, and we don't do out of state residency for you". So that's one issue I'm trying to get out the way when I'm running for student government president. That's a issue I wanna make sure I have presented as well as setting up a veterans adviser committee here. Um, to look out for scholarships and different things for veterans, and dealing with issues that have to, have to come to veterans. They shouldn't come home to any problems and issues like that.

A: I would like to hear some more about the issues honestly, I don't really-

M: Yeah there's um, there's uh different issues as far as issues go, when you have PTSD and you need to be, um, you know. They do try to have veterans classes where like a veterans only speech class, and you know, its not that we wanna be in different classes but, instructors need to understand some veterans might be uh, you know, dealing with issues that others aren't, um but they need to have at least a um, at least you know the knowledge to deal with that, that they might, you know, some guys can't get sleep at night, you know, where that might affect homework, that might affect work, you know, if teachers work with them I think that transition period is very important. So whatever veteran gets first uh, I guess uh exposure to the first teachers in school, the first term that can determine whats going to happen uh, after that. And the military's gonna be downsizing,'kay? We all know uh pulling out of war, wars, does not mean, that we have to maintain such a large force here in America. And with downsizing leaves a lot of veterans that are gonna go back to school. There's a lot of, the G.I. Bill so it uh if schools are going to recruit veterans they need to do the right thing, you know, first they need to get rid of the in-state residency, out-of-state in-state residency for veterans, as well as you know, accepting um, there's quite a couple of issues I can let you, I can invite you to a meeting one time with the uh, student veterans of America and you can see where we come from, and the different cases. Some of them are on a case by case basis for our armed brothers, who are all veterans that matter, like country wide. Um but this is uh, I definitely, I definitely want to set something up for veterans, a good support system uh, there.

A: What could I as a non veteran do to help besides, other than going to the meetings, um help spread awareness?

M: Well for instance you're a student at UCF, so uh you need to see if there's a chapter there for the veteran students of America. And you need to see what the veteran populace is there. You need to see if there's any veteran clubs or organizations there, um so that, um 'cuz people move mountains you know. I, Valencia won number 1, you can look around and it says the winner of he Aspen prize for excellence, which I'm very fortunate to be there at that time. Uh, Valencia pushed out more associate degrees than any community college, and in the country they've been voted number 1 now. Ok but, um, but the students did that work, the students came here, the students worked hard, the students graduated. You know, Valencia can only provide us the facilities and the instructors, its the students that have to actually do the work to make that happen, so in essence the students actually won the award for the university. And I'm glad the university is receiving the accolades, but I want to lead Valencia from the front on

actually doing something on their part. Besides providing the tools and the facilities but say hey you know what the veterans this year we want to do this and we want to lead from the front. Because we think it's a right and a wrong thing, you know its not, if it's an administrative issue or something an addendum needs to be made somewhere to you know, include that. That's one issue and as far as students I think when you're number 1 you need to act like number 1. You shouldn't act like number 3, there's benefits to being number 1. You know you're number 1, and its, it should be more than just what the students are doing, what are you doing to actually be number 1. Um you know what are you gonna do there's a back log of some majors here that need to be addressed and different things, but uh for the most part its a great school and ucf also. I would like to have the veterans collaborate with each other um so we can actually do bigger things. Um bigger events um I'd like to bring the army bands here to perform here and at ucf, you know uh where we can do stuff together. There's pots of money at both schools that if we can put our heads together we can both do bigger things when it comes to veterans.

A: That's an outstanding idea actually, but uh, that's all the questions I have for you thank you so much for all this-

M: Thank you!

A: And we all really appreciate it.

M: Well thank you very much, and I will try my best to help veterans, uh recruiting them for this program, and to uh documenting in any sense for uh, for uh RICHES right? You said-

A: Oh yeah, yes.

M: Yeah for sure. Thank you Austin I appreciate it.

A: The pleasure was all mine.