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# Building Bridges Over Troubled Waters: A Phenomenological Study of Post-9/11 Guard and Reserve Military Veterans Transitioning to the Civilian Workplace

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BUILDING BRIDGES OVER TROUBLED WATERS:  
A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY OF  
POST-9/11 NATIONAL GUARD AND RESERVE MILITARY VETERANS  
TRANSITIONING TO THE CIVILIAN WORKPLACE

by

Jean Marie Pyzyk

A Dissertation Submitted in  
Partial Fulfillment of the  
Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy  
in Urban Education

at

The University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee

May 2017

## **ABSTRACT**

### **BUILDING BRIDGES OVER TROUBLED WATERS: A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY OF POST-9/11 NATIONAL GUARD AND RESERVE MILITARY VETERANS TRANSITIONING TO THE CIVILIAN WORKPLACE**

by

Jean Marie Pyzyk

The University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, 2017  
Under the Supervision of Professor Barbara Bales, Ph.D.

This qualitative, phenomenological study examined the lived experiences of 25 National Guard members and reservists representing the United States Air Force, Army, Navy and Marine Corps returning to civilian careers following a post-9/11 deployment to Iraq or Afghanistan. The research question asked: What are the lived experiences of post-9/11 National Guard and Reserve military veterans as they transition back to the civilian workplace? The literature review revealed numerous studies focused on active duty military personnel transitioning out of the military and seeking civilian employment, but few studies were found regarding National Guard members and reservists serving in a post-9/11 deployment for over 90 days and returning to their civilian jobs — citizen soldiers. The transition experiences of these members are the focus in this study. Interview questions were designed based on Schlossberg's 4-S model and Bridges's transition theory. Six themes emerged from the analysis of this data offering insights on the experiences of these citizen-soldiers: (1) Getting to the core of what matters most and what is valued, (2) adjusting to the civilian workplace, (3) united in education: insider perspectives on Department of Defense workshops, (4) to have, or not to have, transition support, (5) wrestling with a new normal, and (6) transferring military skills to the civilian workplace: hiring our heroes.

Recommendations for future research are to examine the curriculum and design of Department of Defense transition workshops, continuing and adult education for recruiting and retaining military veterans in the civilian workplace, and adult leadership programs for military-connected college students.

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## **DEDICATION**

I dedicate this dissertation to my loving husband, Attorney Roger C. Pyzyk, who on the same day of my PhD graduation, May 21, graduated from Marquette University Law School and was admitted to the State of Wisconsin Bar in 1974. Most important, I'm grateful to him for being my very special military spouse, and best friend. During the past 5 years, as I completed graduate classes, conducted my research, and spent hours writing this dissertation, he was always at my side. By emulating Roger's work ethic, professionalism and passion to serve others is what motivated me to complete my doctorate and provide ongoing research on military veterans' issues. Without Roger's inspiration and believing I could succeed, completing this doctoral journey would not have been possible.

To my mother, Patricia George, and my siblings, Leo George and Kathy George-Pocian, I have been blessed with your kindness, love, and friendship over the years. I remain grateful for your support and interest in my research study. Being the baby of the family has many benefits, but having your unconditional love and knowing you care means everything to me.

Finally, this dissertation is dedicated to all our military veterans, both past and present, who have defended our great nation and who continue to make sacrifices back home. September 11, 2001, is the day everything changed for the U.S. military, and the world. We continue the fight on the Global War on Terrorism, and I salute all those who made the ultimate sacrifice along the way. We will never forget.

“No Mission Too Difficult. No Sacrifice Too Great. Duty First!”

— 1<sup>st</sup> Infantry Division, United States Army

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**Introduction:**  
**Building Bridges over Troubled Waters:**  
**A Phenomenological Study of Post-9/11 National Guard and Reserve Military Veterans**  
**Transitioning to the Civilian Workplace**

Deciding to join the military is a very personal choice and one that requires a high degree of discipline, commitment, and complete dedication to the mission and vision of the United States Armed Forces. The United States military today is an all-volunteer force (AVF). An AVF is different than conscription, which is commonly known as the draft. From 1940 until 1973, during both peacetime and war, men were drafted for military service to fill vacancies in the armed forces that could not be filled through voluntary means. According to Cooper (1977), in a report titled *Military Manpower and the All-Volunteer Force*, “Approximately 2 million young American males who come of military age each year, there is probably no single public policy decision in the past 25 years more important than the termination of the draft in 1973”. Without the authority to conscript young men into military service, the beginning of the AVF marked the beginning of one of the nation’s largest and most important decisions given its national defense and global military responsibilities.

Today, members serving in the National Guard and Reserves have been restructured to mirror active duty forces. Regardless of whether members choose to join full time (active duty) or the National Guard or Reserves, they all sign the same Oath of Office. The Oath of Office is a document that every service member must swear to — to defend the Constitution of the United States, and not a person, for his or her entire military career. It is also important to note that all military members vow to face the Uniform Code of Military Justice (UCMJ) should any disputes arise. For instance, in the event that a member of the National Guard or Reserves is called to serve on active duty, but decides not to participate in the deployment, then he or she falls under

the UCMJ because non-deployment is punishable by law, and may result in a dishonorable discharge and/or imprisonment. This code is explicated in the Oath of Office as follows:

I, \_\_\_\_\_, do solemnly swear (or affirm) that I will support and defend the Constitution of the United States against all enemies, foreign and domestic; that I will bear true faith and allegiance to the same; and that I will obey the orders of the President of the United States and the orders of the officers appointed over me, according to regulations and the Uniform Code of Military Justice. So help me God. (Title 10, US Code; Act of 5 May 1960 replacing the wording first adopted in 1789, with amendment effective 5 October 1962)

When someone volunteers to join the military, their decision to serve fulltime (active duty) or with the National Guard or Reserves is made when they take the Oath of Office. Before every citizen of the United States voluntarily takes this Oath of Office, the individual executing it makes sure they understand what they are swearing or attesting to. Both the enlisted and officer Oaths of Office are not to be taken lightly because, once administered, the newly-sworn-in military member will be bound to it for at least the next four to six years.

Despite the fact that National Guard members and reservists all attend the same basic military training and/or officer training; only those who elect to serve on active duty are considered full time military members. Individuals choosing to serve in the Reserves or National Guard return to their civilian home and are obligated to serve one-weekend per month and two weeks per year on a designated military installation. However, both active duty members and National Guard members and reservists can be activated to serve full time at a location other than their home base at any time should the need arise.

Military members who choose to serve in the Reserves are under the command of their respective military branch (e.g., Air Force Reserves, Marine Corps Reserves, and Army Reserves). The purpose of both the National Guard and Reserves is to provide ongoing education and training and to maintain a high level of readiness of qualified persons to be available for active duty military service. For instance, during time of war or major conflicts, military members serving in the Reserves may get activated or called up to active duty as needed based on threats to national security. Their orders may be to serve either stateside or overseas. The primary job of the National Guard and Reserves is to fill gaps in stateside service positions when the active duty forces ship overseas. However, during the most recent war and conflicts, many overseas missions were filled by members serving in both the Reserves and National Guard, with 90 days to 365 days per deployment.

It is the civilian work/military balance that attracts recruits to join the National Guard or Reserves versus committing to joining active duty military. Vest (2013), conducted a qualitative dissertation study with 48 National Guard members and focused on why members elected to join the National Guard. She found, “Participants expressed wanting to join the military for the college benefits, enlistment bonuses, to fulfill a family tradition, and for patriotic or altruistic reasons” (p. 108). Though flexibility and the ability to maintain a civilian life appear as important reasons for choosing the Guard or Reserves, it is this dual role that creates the practical problem of negotiating multiple and, often, competing obligations. Vest (2013), argues, that the reality of post-9/11 National Guard and Reserve service is not as flexible as initially perceived.

The National Guard and the Reserves requires citizen-soldiers to work 12 days straight, as they work a full week at their civilian job, attend a drill weekend, and then go back to working

their civilian job the following week. For some, this creates challenges. For instance, “Matt, who holds a full time job and is also a full time student, said of his National Guard obligations,

They (civilian employers) give me a hard time about it (missing weekends at work for drill), because my job’s 100 percent commission and I can’t work the weekends and they won’t give me the time during the week to make it up (Vest, 2013, p. 109).

Although National Guard members and reservists do receive compensation for the time they spend at drill; for some, the amount does not always equal the civilian pay they would earn during the same hours at their civilian employment (Vest, 2013, p. 109).

When members of the National Guard and Reserves are called up to active duty and deployed for more than 30 days, the transition back from a combat zone to a civilian job can be particularly challenging. Vest (2013) reports in terms of their civilian employment, National Guard members and reservists cannot legally be penalized for this absence, and employers are required to bring returning military veterans back to the same or equivalent job position. Still, their absence has effects. “Tim said that even though his civilian job is still available to him, everyone he worked with has moved on and been promoted, and he has been left behind because he has had frequent interruptions in his career path” (Vest, 2013, p. 111).

Those serving in the National Guard and Reserves complete intensive, advanced training where they learn military customs and courtesies, job specific skills pertaining to their specialty, and readiness training in preparation for a wartime scenario. Yet, upon leaving the military and/or serving in a combat zone, these same military veterans receive minimal to no training to assist them transitioning back to the civilian workplace. In 2002, the General Accounting Office (GAO), Washington D.C., conducted a study on the military’s transition assistance program

(TAP), which Congress established in 1990 during a time when the military was being downsized and service men and women were returning to civilian life. The findings from this report, titled *Military and Veterans' Benefits: Observations on the Transition Assistance Program* were as follows: (1) each branch of the military provides mandated TAP workshops, but not all service members are receiving the transition assistance; (2) the content and delivery of TAP varies among branches of service; (3) access to the TAP workshop depends on service members' duty station and region they are located in; (4) service members who completed TAP were generally satisfied, and (5) isolating the impact of transition assistance regarding employment and continuing education is challenging because of inadequate data and methodology. The need for additional research on the topic of transition assistance on employment was identified (GAO-02-914T). This proposal for research addresses this identified need.

### **Problem Statement**

The relationship between the National Guard, Reserves and full-time active duty has changed over time as the needs of the country have changed.

For much of its history, the U.S. maintained a small active component that was expanded by draft or mobilized Reserves during times of war. Following the Vietnam War, the shift to an all-volunteer force and the heightening of tensions with the Soviet Union led to sustainment of a large standing military that changed the relationship between active and Reserve/Guard elements, with active elements kept in a ready status that would enable them to respond immediately to any Soviet aggression while the Reserve and Guard elements served as a strategic reserve. (Dunn, 2016)

The next major change between the active duty and reserve components occurred after the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001. During what has now become known as the post-9/11 era, the relatively small active duty component ground forces became increasingly strained to sustain the high numbers of forces needed in support of the ongoing conflicts overseas (Dunn, 2016).

Over 800,000 reservists have been activated since 2012 (U.S. Department of Defense Public Affairs, 2011a). “At one point in 2005, half of the combat brigades in Iraq were Army National Guard, a percentage of commitment as part of the overall Army effort not seen since the first years of World War II” (Dunn, 2016). At the peak of mobilization, nearly 40% of service members in Afghanistan and Iraq were Reservists (Moskos, 2005; U.S. Department of Defense Public Affairs, 2011a). As of 2010, a fifth of United States military members serving in Iraq and Afghanistan were reservists, a third were active duty military, and half were contractors (Schwartz & Swain, 2010). Deployment rates among reservists rival those among their active duty counterparts. Nearly half (47%) of currently serving reservists have been deployed at least once between 2001 and 2010, and 19% have had multiple deployments (U.S. Department of Defense Manpower Data Center, 2010). By comparison, 61% of active duty members have been deployed at least once since 2001, and 33% have had multiple deployments (U.S. Department of Defense Manpower Data Center, 2010). Few military members serving in either the National Guard or Reserves voluntarily deploy. In fact, 74% of the 90,903 reservists mobilized as of February 2011 were involuntarily activated and deployed in support of a conflict and/or combat zone (U.S. Department of Defense Public Affairs, 2011a).

When members of the National Guard and Reserves are deactivated, they return to their civilian life, including to their civilian employers. However, many of these National Guard and

reserve members struggle with adjusting to post-9/11 circumstances. Recent Bureau of Labor statistics indicate that reservists who have served in Iraq and Afghanistan are more likely to be unemployed (14%) versus their active duty peers (12.1%) and nearly 50% are more likely to be unemployed when compared with the population at large (9.4% unemployment rate) (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2013). The increased unemployment rate among our citizen-soldiers is due, in part, because many National Guard members and reservists leave their civilian jobs prior to being deployed on lengthy multiple tours. That situation—the current job market and their individual transition experiences—makes finding new employment for these deactivated citizen-soldiers a challenge.

Faurer (2014) emphasized that the impending downsizing of U.S. military forces in Afghanistan and a \$1.05 trillion reduced budget over 10 years to align with a postwar military environment will significantly reduce the active duty military personnel force. This projection makes it timely and important to address the experiences of military veterans transitioning to the civilian workplace. This dissertation study comes at a time when tens of thousands of veterans are searching for jobs along with millions of civilians seeking employment. “Although a Transition Assistance Program (TAP) was initiated in Congress in the early 1990s, its effectiveness has been limited and unemployment rates among veterans remain high” (p. 56). According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics report dated June 2013, the unemployment rate for military veterans who served in the Reserves or the National Guard since 9/11 was at 7.2% for those, which is 2.8% lower than those coming off of active duty military service (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2013).

The advantage National Guard members and reservists have over their active duty counterparts is their dual military-civilian work experience. However, it is because of their

lengthy deployments and time spent building close bonds with other military veterans, especially during combat missions, that many of these veterans experience a loss of belonging upon returning to their civilian jobs. Demers (2011) suggests that this loss comes from a cultural and identity association with other military veterans developed over a long period of time, numbers of years of military service, and the desire to be near people who understand them. To illustrate, some said that returning to their civilian jobs was like being in a sea of strangers (Demers, 2011).

For many military veterans, returning to civilian jobs can be a bit of a shock. The job environment they left now appears to be a chaotic mess: devoid of order, discipline, or teamwork, and seemingly run by a completely different set of values and rules compared to the military jobs those serving in a heightened state of awareness, such as in a combat zone, have become accustomed to. However, it is also important to recognize that the return of military veterans to the civilian scene may be somewhat of a shock to civilian employers as well. As Bauza (2006) noted,

“The biggest adjustment has been the disconnect from coworkers that don’t understand what it was like,” said Cummings, a controls engineer at the plastics maker in Ohio. “I can’t relate,” said Cummings about being back at work. “It’s like having culture shock in your own culture” (p. 1).

According to Klein and Pappas (2002), “In response to the tragic events of September 11, 2001, the United States mobilized more than 83,000 members of the Reserves and National Guard” (p. 75). This call to active duty removed National Guard and reserve members from their workplaces in all 50 states, the District of Columbia, and Puerto Rico. Because National Guard and reserve members constitute almost half of the deployed U.S. troops, employers, especially during times of national crisis, may experience ongoing disruption of the workplace arising from

military service obligations of their employees serving in the National Guard or Reserves (Klein & Pappas, 2002). So, while there are numerous government-funded programs to assist military veterans' transition to civilian life, few transition programs are specifically designed for National Guard members and reservists who transition between their military and civilian jobs simultaneously, and for some, multiple times during their military and civilian careers.

Therefore, this qualitative phenomenological dissertation study will explore the meaning of the lived experiences of National Guard members and reservists and their transition back to their civilian careers after serving on active duty in support of post-9/11 deployment missions.

### **Purpose Statement**

Historically the National Guard and Reserves were created to be a strategic reserve in case of national emergencies, such as natural disasters or terrorist attacks. For decades, they trained one weekend a month and assisted others in need when the snow got too deep or a tornado destroyed a community. Since 2004, approximately 309,000 military veterans separated from the military; of these, about 192,000 were full-time, active duty military veterans. The remaining 117,000 were members of the National Guard and Reserves, many of whom had been employed in civilian careers before they were activated to serve in a post- 9/11 deployment (Bascetta, 2005). Today more members of the Reserves and National Guard have been called to active duty and sent overseas than at any time since the Korean War. Furthermore, the numbers of consecutive days National Guard members and reservists are being activated to serve on active duty on average are for more than a year per deployment. Many of the same National Guard members and reservists are also being asked to serve on multiple deployments during the course of their military career.

The makeup of those serving in the National Guard and Reserves has changed dramatically since September 11, 2001. As Manderscheid (2007) noted, “United States service members who served in the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq faced long and often multiple deployments and a constant risk of injury and death” (p. 122). The frequent and lengthy deployments are not expected to change as the global war on terrorism continues. There are numerous complex issues between military members serving on active duty and those serving in the National Guard or Reserves who maintain a dual role of military member and also work in a civilian career. The dual role in military and civilian communities further implies the transition from a combat zone back to their civilian job may not be fully understood by their civilian colleagues in the workplace.

When National Guard members and reservists are not serving on active duty orders, they are not getting paid by the government, meaning they must find civilian work on their own. Although there are numerous articles written regarding National Guard members and reservists transitioning to college after leaving military service, very little research has explored the meaning of these lived experiences among National Guard members and reservists transitioning back to the civilian workplace. Therefore, this dissertation study will explore this duality and document the lived experiences of those National Guard and Reserve military members transitioning from a combat zone back to a civilian job. It also seeks to understand these transition experiences when they occur over multiple deployments during one’s military career. As such, the central phenomenon of this research dissertation study is the transition experience.

### **Research Questions**

National Guard members and reservists who served in a post-9/11 deployment faced constant risk of injury and death during their military service, as well as repeated disruption of

connections with family members and friend often leading to difficult transitions back to the civilian workplace. Ahern et al., (2015) research article titled “The Challenges of Afghanistan and Iraq Veterans’ Transition from Military to Civilian Life and Approaches to Reconnection” described her ability to conduct one in depth interview with her participants using an inductive thematic analysis approach. From here she developed three overarching themes: military as family, normal is alien, and searching for a new normal. Ahern et al., (2015), associate professor of epidemiology at UC Berkeley School of Public Health, wrote “During the initial interview veterans were asked to narrate their experiences, with probes for experiences with family, friends, other veterans, and the general community” (p. 1). This same approach will be used for my dissertation study where I will conduct one interview per participant knowing some of my participants may have experienced traumas during deployment, and may not want to revisit the same conversation after the initial interview has been conducted. During the interview process it is important to remain cognizant that some interview questions might trigger stressors, which is why my questions will remain focused on the transition experience to the civilian workplace only. Any follow-up interviews will be conducted at the request of the participants.

This dissertation study seeks responses to the following questions:

What are the lived experiences of post-9/11 National Guard and Reserve military veterans as they transition back to the civilian workplace? There are three attendant questions:

- What common situations do these military veterans experience in the transition process?
- What types of support mechanisms did these military members have during the transition process?
- What personal strategies did these military veterans use to manage their transition to the civilian workplace?

## **Significance of the Dissertation Study**

Over 1.6 million United States military veterans have served in the ongoing conflicts in Afghanistan and Iraq (OEF/OIF). According to Burnett-Zeigler et al. (2011), National Guard and Reserve military veterans represent 38% of the total U.S. forces deployed to Afghanistan and Iraq between September 2001 and November 2007. Prior studies report that military veterans returning from Afghanistan and Iraq experienced numerous challenges. These challenges include higher rates of interpersonal conflict, posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD), depression, and overall risk following their return from OEF/OIF conflicts and are referrals to treatment centers at higher rates than their active duty counterparts (Burnett-Zeigler et al., 2011).

The transition period for members of the National Guard and Reserves is dictated by the amount of time they served on active duty. More important to this dissertation study, they are not separated from the military but continue to serve one weekend a month and two weeks each year until receiving orders to return back to active duty service for multiple deployments if needed. Some National Guard members and reservists can deploy multiple times, requiring them to transition back and forth between their military service and their civilian employment.

Few studies have examined the transition among of OEF/OIF military veterans, particularly in the early months following their return to civilian employment, which is a critical time in their transition into the civilian workforce. Therefore, this dissertation study examines the meaning of the transition experience to the civilian workplace for post-9/11 National Guard members and reservists after serving in a combat zone. Study findings may have implications for developing interventions to assist National Guard members and reservists during their downtime after returning from a post-9/11 deployment and prior to returning to the civilian workforce.

National Guard members and reservists tend to be older than active duty personnel and have families and more developed career paths (Griffith, 2010). The significant contribution this dissertation study makes is identifying the need to develop and design future military transition programs specifically with the aim of facilitating the successful reintegration of National Guard members and reservists back to the civilian workplace. This study will also serve as a resource for potential future research and development of effective transition programs that may result in the recruitment and retention of National Guard members and reservists, who are increasingly relied upon for our nations' national defense.

A potential practical application this dissertation study offers is an awareness of the multi-faceted skill sets National Guard members and reservists bring to the civilian workplace. For civilian employers seeking to hire and retain National Guard members and reservists, this dissertation study will offer additional insight to the lived experiences of these military members transitioning from a post-9/11 deployment to the civilian workplace. Human Resource personnel may benefit from learning more about the lived experiences of their employees and future employees by reading this dissertation study. Finally, President Barack Obama's decision to reduce our military force in Afghanistan and Iraq and potentially end the war elevates the importance of this study since the deployment of National Guard members and reservists continues for an unforeseeable future resulting in citizen soldiers transitioning from a post-9/11 deployment to their civilian jobs.

### **Definition of Terms**

Following are some of the key terms that warrant definition to avoid vagueness and to enhance understanding of military terminology. Other key terms will be defined as needed throughout the literature review.

*Active duty or active military service:* Military personnel working full time in the U.S. Armed Forces' service branches that include the Department of Defense's (DOD's) U.S. Army, Air Force, Navy, and Marine Corps, with the U.S. Coast Guard serving under the Department of Homeland Defense during peacetime and the Navy in times of war (Military Homefront, 2010).

*All-Voluntary Force (AVF):* The all-volunteer force that replaced the draft in 1973, following a report by the President's Commission on an All-Volunteer Armed Force. The report unanimously recommended that the United States return to an all-volunteer-force. On July 1, 1973, the legal authority to draft U.S. citizens to serve in the armed forces was terminated.

*Career adaptability:* A term initially coined to describe the process adults use to make adjustments for meeting the challenges of an evolving workplace. Later the term was described as a psychosocial construct associated with a person's readiness and resources for coping with career, occupational, and traumatic experiences and transitions (Rottinghaus et al., 2012; Savickas, 1997).

*Post-9/11 deployments:* Deployment refers when a military unit is sent to a forwarding operating location during both peacetime and wartime missions after September 11, 2001.

*Global War on Terrorism (GWOT):* "Using all elements of our national power and international influence to attack terror networks; reduce their ability to communicate and coordinate their plans; isolate them from potential allies and form each other; and identify and disrupt their plots before they attack" (Bush, 2002, p.5).

*National Guard:* Members serving in the National Guard fall under the command of the governor of the state in which they serve, and their main mission is to protect the citizens of their respective state. However, the National Guard is also called upon to serve nationally and internationally as needed by the DOD.

*Phenomenological:* A research approach that derives scientific meaning as a result of interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) to understand lived human experiences (Moustakas, 1994).

*Reserves, or Reserve component:* Category of military personnel who augment the active duty military when necessary; this category includes DOD's Army and Air National Guard; Army, Naval, Marine Corps and Air Force Reserves, and the Department of Homeland Security's (DHS) Coast Guard Reserves (Military Homefront, 2010).

*TAP:* To fight the high number of unemployed veterans, Congress passed the Veterans Opportunity to Work to Hire Heroes Act of 2011, (VOW to Hire Heroes Act), part of President Barack Obama's Jobs Bill in November 2011. The government-sponsored military veteran Transition Assistance Program's (TAP) is designed to reduce the veteran unemployment rate and is offered to all service members upon their discharge from the armed forces. Each branch has its own program designed to meet the needs of its specific corps.

*Transition GPS:* In 2012, the DoD launched a redesigned Transition Assistance Program (TAP). The new program, Transition (Goals, Plans, Success) aims to provide the information, tools, and training to ensure service members and their spouses are prepared for the next step in civilian life, whether pursuing education, civilian careers, or starting their own business.

*Veteran:* Service persons who are in the process of separating or retiring from active service and persons who have previously transitioned after serving on active military service.

## **Chapter 1: Review of the Literature**

This chapter represents an analytically synthesized review of the literature that frames the purpose and rationale for this research. It details supporting literature that examines challenges National Guard members and reservists experience when transitioning from a post-9/11 deployment to the civilian workplace. The purpose of this dissertation study is to contribute to understanding the meaning of the post-9/11 National Guard members' and reservists experiences transitioning to the civilian workplace, with the anticipated outcome of enhancing adult continuing education workshops offered by various government agencies.

Numerous online databases, such as ABI/Info Global, PsychInfo, SAGE, ERIC, Journals Online, Military OneSource, and Google Scholar, were accessed during the literature search. In addition, peer-reviewed, full-texted dissertations relating to this study were retrieved from ProQuest. To better understand the research being conducted, the researcher retrieved articles from scholarly journals, along with articles published by the Veterans Affairs Administration, the Department of Labor, and the Department of Defense, and focused on research conducted after September 11, 2001. Articles retrieved prior to this date were used for historical purposes only. By accessing the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee library system, key word searches for this dissertation study included among others: *National Guard, reservists, transition, post 9/11 military veterans, reintegration, civilian employment, and transition theories*.

### **Post-9/11 Call-up of the National Guard and Reserves**

Where were you when the world stopped turning? This is a question many asked each other after terrorists attacked the United States on September 11, 2001. For those serving in the United States National Guard and Reserves, the term "weekend warrior" would never be the same. On September 14, 2001, President George W. Bush ordered the mobilization of up to

50,000 National Guard members and reservists to active duty in response to the September 11 attacks (U.S. Department of State, 2001). On September 17, 2001, President Bush announced at a Pentagon briefing, “I proclaimed a national emergency and authorized the Secretary of Defense and Secretary of Transportation to call up the Ready Reserve Units of the armed forces and the Coast Guard to active duty” (The White House, Office of the Press Secretary, September 17, 2001). The last time the Ready Reserve had undergone a partial mobilization was on January 18, 1991, for Operation Desert Storm. Then 265,322 Guard and Reserve members were activated. To date reservists and National Guard members are called upon to provide port operations, medical support, engineer support, general civil support, and homeland defense.

For those serving in the military, the years following September 11, 2001 are described as post-9/11 deployments. And, because our nation has come to heavily rely on our citizen soldiers, United States policy-makers, Congress, and the Department of Defense have had to activate both National Guard members and reservists on a massive scale in order to fight two simultaneous conflicts overseas in both Iraq and Afghanistan. The term ‘citizen soldier’ refers to that dual status as both civilian citizens and military members working in the civilian workplace while also serving in the military. It is now synonymous for National Guard and reservists.

For National Guard members and reservists post-9/11 means 36 months of absences from their civilian careers, multiple deployments, and transitions back to the same civilian employer, in addition to months of family separation during each deployment cycle. While many serving with the National Guard or Reserves try to downplay tensions between competing obligations between military service and civilian employment, by saying things like, “but I don’t sweat it” or “could be worse”, other military veterans said they deal with the situation by being proactive and making sure they are selective when choosing employers and schools that are understanding of

their military obligations, and support their need or flexibility so as to reduce any tension that could arise from competing obligations. (Vest, 2014).

Even though today's military is an all-volunteer force (AFV), this also means National Guard members and reservists cannot decline their military orders when activated to serve with their active duty counterparts overseas. Most deployments or activations for war or other emergencies are inherently involuntary. In fact, only the President or Congress can order reservists to active duty for an extended period. However, "If a war or national emergency is declared by Congress, all Reserve and Guard component units are eligible for involuntary call-up. They can be kept on active duty for the duration of a declared war or emergency, plus six months" (U.S. Department of Defense, 10 U.S.C. 12301(a)).

During a national disaster, the Secretary of Defense may involuntarily activate any Ready Reserve units and other individuals under federal authority to a domestic emergency or major disaster for up to 120 days. However, state governors or territorial chief executives must first make a request for such support. Finally, if the president of the United States declares a national emergency, such as the Global War on Terrorism (GWOT), this type of authority allows a partial mobilization of up to one million Selected Reserve and Individual Ready Reserve troops. Under this authority, reservists can remain on active duty no more than 24 consecutive months.

Currently numerous courageous men and women of the United States Armed Forces have been fighting conflicts continuously on a global scale for over a decade. With these wars and conflicts winding down, thousands of National Guard members and reservists are transitioning home and returning to their civilian workplaces. According to the United States Defense Manpower Data Center (2010), nearly 2 million active duty, Reserve, and National Guard military members from all five branches have served in the Global War on Terrorism (GWOT),

Operation Iraqi Freedom (OIF), Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF), and Operation New Dawn.

“The federal statute governing the employment and reemployment rights of employees with military service obligations is the Uniformed Services Employment and Reemployment Rights Act of 1994 (USERRA)” (Klein, Pappas, Nicholas, & Herman, 2015).

National Guard members and reservists transitioning to the civilian workplace are protected under USERRA in three areas:

1. The right of re-employment upon the employee’s return from active duty military service.
2. Any seniority status and other benefits of military veterans are preserved.
3. The federal statute also prohibits discrimination with regard to hiring, retention, promotion, or any other benefits of employment regardless of employee’s military obligations are current, completed, or pending. (Klein et al., 2015).

This means there are thousands of civilian employers are obligated to hold military members’ civilian jobs for when they return. Few researchers have studied the transition of National Guard and reservists struggling to balance civilian, military and family obligations. Unlike their active duty counterparts, National Guard members and reservists who depart from their civilian jobs and deploy overseas, return to their civilian status once they are discharged from active duty and are demobilized. This transition process is the defining characteristic of post deployment.

### **The Transition Experience**

Since the Cold War, the National Guard and Reserves have become a larger percentage of the total force concept, remaining essential partners during both wartime and peacetime operations. For example, “The Air National Guard and Air Force Reserve provide the nation a vital capability that is functionally integrated and operationally indistinguishable from the active

force” (Secretary of the Air Force Public Affairs, 2016). Even though the Department of Defense considers all military veterans to be a seamless force between active duty members and those serving in the National Guard and Reserves while deployed to a forwarding location, the transition experience from a combat zone back home varies. Bridges (1991/2009) explains that change is “external, transition is internal” (p. 3). Change leads to a transition and is situational. Change represents the new career, the new co-workers, and new beginnings, as well as new rules and regulations. Transition, on the other hand, “is the psychological process people go through to come to terms with the new situation” (Bridges p.3).

The Government Accountability Office (GAO) conducted a study based on the increased role of military operations globally and the increased reliance on National Guard members and reservists. With a focus on assisting military veterans transitioning to civilian life, the GAO study found military and veterans’ benefits could improve for Reserves and National Guard members (GAO-05-544). To ensure that National Guard members and reservists have opportunities to benefit from transition assistance similar to their full time, active duty counterparts, the GAO recommended that the Department of Defense, in conjunction with the Departments of Labor, and Veterans Affairs, determine what National Guard members and reservists need and explore options for meeting the identified needs (GAO-05-844T). This is where a gap appears to exist in the current literature.

In support of this dissertation study, the author has read over 70 dissertations and peer reviewed articles regarding the transition of post-9/11 military veterans back to the civilian workplace. The majority of the research topics included the transition of female military veterans; the transition of active duty military veterans being separated from the military and returning to college; the hiring of military veterans from an employer’s perspective; and making

the transition from post- 9/11 deployments to civilian life. For instance, some of the research titles included: “The Challenges of Afghanistan and Iraq Veterans’ Transition from Military to Civilian Life and Approaches to Reconnection” (Ahern et al., 2015); “Coming Home – A Group-Based Approach for Assisting Military Veterans in Transition” (Westwood, McLean, Cave, Borgen, & Slakov, 2010), and “Managing the Re-employment of Military Veterans through the Transition Assistance Program” (Faurer, Rogers-Brodersen, & Bailie, (2014). All of these articles focus on active duty military members. Of the 70-plus articles and papers written on the transition experiences of post-9/11 military veterans, *only 10* specifically focused on the population of military veterans serving in the National Guard and Reserves transitioning back to the civilian life and the workplace after being deactivated from a post-9/11 deployment. These include:

*Figure 1.* Papers addressing transition experiences of National Guard and Reserve members.

| No. | Title   | Author                         | Type  |
|-----|---|--------------------------------|---|
| 1.  | <i>Civilian Employment Among Recently Returning Afghanistan and Iraq National Guard Veterans</i>                              | Burnett-Zeigler, et al. (2011) | Article<br>Military Medicine,<br>176, 6:639 |
| 2.  | <i>Military Deployments: An action research study examining the unique experiences of National Guard and Reserve families</i> | Deveraux, Sterling (2015)      | Dissertation<br>Capella University          |
| 3.  | <i>Understanding the reintegration of female reservists activated after September 11, 2001: A phenomenological approach</i>   | Peele, Reynolds (2014)         | Dissertation<br>University of Phoenix       |
| 4.  | <i>Work after war: National Guard soldiers’ experience of the post-deployment return to civilian employment</i>               | Petersen, Stacey (2010)        | Dissertation<br>Chestnut Hill College       |

|     |   |                         |   |
|-----|---|-------------------------|---|
| 5.  | <i>Finding Balance: Individuals, Agency, and Dual Belonging in the United States National Guard</i>   | Vest, Bonnie (2014)     | Article<br>Human Organization,<br>Vol. 73, No. 2            |
| 6.  | <i>The relationship between personal communication and dispositional optimism for Reserve and National Guard women while deployed in Iraq</i>           | Christie, Jeanne (2007) | Dissertation<br>Walden University                           |
| 7.  | <i>The effects of job-related strains and stressors on mental health symptoms in National Guard veterans returning from Iraq</i>                        | Schult, Tamara (2013)   | Dissertation<br>University of Minnesota                     |
| 8.  | <i>I am a citizen-soldier: negotiating civilian and military in the post-9/11 National Guard</i>  | Vest, Bonnie (2012)     | Dissertation<br>University of Buffalo,<br>State Univ. of NY |
| 9.  | <i>The reintegration myth: an interpretive phenomenological inquiry into the reentry experiences of Air Force Reservists returning from Afghanistan</i> | French, Brent (2012)    | Dissertation<br>Antioch University                          |
| 10. | <i>Military and Veterans' Benefits: Improvements needed in Transition Assistance Services for Reserves and National Guard</i>                           | GAO-05-844T (2005)      | Article<br>U.S. Government<br>Accountability Office         |

For military members of the National Guard and Reserves, the transition experience from active duty back to the civilian workplace can often be challenging, and, for some, a dramatic emotional experience. Transitioning from a military combat zone back to the civilian workplace can last from a few weeks to several years (Hinojosa & Hinojosa, 2011). For many military veterans, the friendships and close bonds formed with other military members during a deployment are an important part of personal survival and an integral aspect of building strong teams among military members. These personal bonds of friendship are often referred to as their “extended military family.” Maintaining those bonds during the transition back to civilian life would be most beneficial to military veterans (Hinojosa & Hinojosa, 2011). Research even

suggests that staying connected with other military veterans who shared the same combat experience, plays an integral part in easing the transition from a combat zone. “For weeks or sometimes months after they returned, some of the men attempted to hold tight to the intimacy of their military friendships. They sought former unit mates, shunning civilian family and friends” (Hinojosa & Hinojosa, 2011).

Research supports the idea that being part of a military unit creates an uncommonly strong bond between military members. Both formal military training and military culture are built around the concept of service members developing profound reliance on their comrades, and reliance can foster deep friendships. (Hinojosa & Hinojosa, 2011)

For many National Guard members and reservists, the loss of these close bonds occurs upon being discharged from active duty service, and returning to both their civilian jobs and their part-time National Guard or Reserve status. The reason for this loss is that many National Guard members and reservists return to their civilian life and careers shortly after returning from a lengthy deployment. Moreover, they may not be in contact with other military veterans for approximately 60 to 90 days until they are required to attend their next Unit Training Assembly (UTA) at their assigned National Guard or Reserve station. “The process of reintegrating into civilian life can be particularly challenging for Reserve and National Guard Veterans (Lane, Hourani, Bray, & Williams, 2012, p. 1213) who comprise approximately 37.3% of the military” (OMB, 2012). During this decompression period, many National Guard members and reservists do not have anyone to talk to about their combat experiences—no one in their post-deployment life can relate to their military experience. In addition, many may also struggle with a sense of loss, and may also experience times of depression during this transition period.

Depending on individual circumstances, the period of reintegration can be a difficult time for many returning service members. Civilian reintegration may be particularly challenging for National Guard members and reservists. Unlike active duty service members, National Guard members and reservists are typically leaving civilian roles (family and employment) and are more likely to deploy with unfamiliar units (Schult, 2012, p. 5).

In contrast, military veterans serving on active duty have the benefit of returning to an active duty military installation where they are able to seek out other military combat veterans, if needed, and have access to transition workshops as well as other available resources such as the Transition Assistance Program (TAP). In 2014, TAP was reshaped into a cohesive, modular, outcome-based program known as Transition GPS (Goals, Plans, Success), which transforms the way the military prepares its military veterans transitioning to civilian life (ARPC, 2014). The Transition GPS program was designed by the Department of Defense (DOD) in coordination with the Department of Education, the Department of Labor, and the Veterans Administration. The program is available for all military veterans transitioning from the military to work, life, and home after active duty military service.

### **Transition Assistance Program (TAP)**

Historically, as long there have been wars, military veterans returning home often have struggled to readjust to civilian life. In 2011, President Obama gave a speech at the Washington Navy Yard directing the departments of Defense and Veterans Affairs to design a “reverse boot camp” (Clark, 2014). During this period the unemployment rate for separated military veterans was 12.4 percent and was anticipated to reach as high as 20 percent in the years to follow. What needed to be done was a complete makeover of the 1990 TAP program, with an objective to help

ease service members transition from serving in a military culture to working in a civilian workplace. The new program would include teaching skills sets necessary to gain employment such as resume writing, interviewing skills, and how to dress for success, among many other topics needed to give service members the confidence they need to make a successful transition.

The goal of the newly created TAP initiative was to increase the number of training days to include psychological and career counseling programs and to “transform the military’s approach to education, training and credentialing for service members” (Clark, 2014, p. 33). A six-agency task force began meeting twice weekly, while working subgroups met daily. One year later the administration was prepared to launch the revitalized Transition Assistance Program (TAP), which is now mandatory and serves over 250,000 departing service members annually in up to 6,000 classes at 206 military installations worldwide. According to Pat Tamburrino, former deputy assistant Defense secretary for civilian personnel policy who co-led the Veterans Employment Initiative Task Force with VA executive John Gingrich (now retired), “It was clear Obama wanted something different for the young men and women putting their lives on the line for their country,” (Clark, 2014, p. 33). Clark (2014) also observed that “many veterans can’t translate their military experience to the civilian environment and fall through the cracks because they don’t know how to use their benefits” (p. 33). Also, many civilian hiring officials are not equipped to translate military jargon or lack a military background, which is why it is important that veterans learn how to translate their skills, knowledge, and abilities clearly to civilian employers.

When President Barack Obama announced the changes in 2011, a new perspective on the Department of Defense (DOD) Transition Assistance Program (TAP) was born. The newly redesigned TAP movement the Department of Defense (DOD) now mandated a five-day

workshop in which military veterans were taught the basics of landing a job: resume writing, interview tips and dressing for success. According to Beth Barton, director of Marine Corps Community Services at Camp Lejeune, "The Marine Corps got a jump start on the rest of DOD. Our commandant implemented our brand-new transition readiness seminar, and our headquarters command and leadership had been attending the White House task force and basically sharing our ideas with the folks on that task force" (Wilcox, 2012, p.1). This was different from the former Transition Assistance Program, which was a mandatory five-day workshop, where service members were taught the basics of landing a job but did not include discussions about obtaining a post-secondary education versus returning to the civilian workforce.

The revamped Transition Readiness Seminar offered the Marine Corps at Camp Lejeune an opportunity to choose among four pathways when they leave the military: (1) the preparation for employment pathway; (2) the career/technical training pathway; (3) the college/university education pathway; (4) or an entrepreneurship pathway. As Shawn Conlon, Personal and Professional Development Branch head for the Marine and Family Programs Division of Headquarters Marine Corps, stated, "Our primary efforts to date have focused on revitalizing (the program) from a mass training event and information overload into a tailored and practical learning experience with specific transition readiness standards which are effective and beneficial to Marines,"(Wilcox, 2012, p.1).

The newly designed Transition Assistance Program (TAP) provided military veterans with a choice, something not offered 20 years prior. According to a press release from the Department of Defense,

One of our fundamental responsibilities as a government is to properly prepare and support those serving in our military so they are career ready as they

transition back into civilian life. With this new initiative, we can better ensure veterans receive the care, benefits and employment services they have earned. This collaborative effort will have an impact well beyond this current generation of individuals returning from combat. (Wilcox 2012, p. 1)

In the past, TAP, was designed to support retention and retirees entering employment, but it did not reflect the fact that the majority do not spend 20 years in the military. In fact, 80 percent now depart with less than 20 years of service. The one-size-fits-all was helpful in the early 1990s, but did not reflect current day realities (Clark, 2014). Efforts to revamp the TAP gained momentum after September 11, 2001.

The other two departments instrumental in revitalizing the TAP included the U.S. Department of Labor and the Department of Education. The newly created, five-day, orientation TAP workshop was facilitated by professional educators in collaboration with the Veterans Administration (VA). According to Tamburrino, the Department of Education helped model classroom instruction in terms of platform delivery and techniques, such as virtual delivery. Education officials also created a seminar on how to behave on a university or college campus. “Many veterans may have never been to an institution of higher learning,” he says. “They’re a bit older, and have had a different experience.” Universities, he says, must “make sure they have good veterans support programs” (Clark, 2014, p. 35). For example, veterans support programs such as the Military Assistance Veterans Resource Center (MAVRC) located on the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee’s campus is committed to ensuring that military and veteran students successfully transition from the military to college and throughout their higher education degree programs.

## **Transition GPS 2014**

The new Transition Goals, Plans, Success (GPS) program was specifically designed in 2014 to replace TAP and make adjustments easier for veterans separating from the military and transitioning to the civilian workplace. The curriculum offered all the skill-building training, services, resources, and tools they needed to transition to the civilian workplace. All transitioning service members are now required to take part in Transition GPS, including National Guard members and reservists demobilizing after 180 days or more of active service (U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, 2016).

The Department of Defense, Department of Labor, and Veterans Administration collaborate consistently to improve the content of the Transition GPS workshops and increase participation among full-time active duty military veterans. However, the challenge remains to adequately serve National Guard members and reservists. Since post-9/11, more than 900,000 National Guard members and reservists have been called to active duty in support of contingency operations around the world. It is the meaning of the transition experience these members experience when they return from active duty to families, friends, careers, schools, and communities to begin the difficult task of finding their new normal (U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, 2016).

In 2005, the Government Accountability Office (GAO) made recommendations to ensure that members of the National Guard and Reserves have the opportunity to benefit from transition assistance programs. “The Department of Defense (DOD), in conjunction the Department of Labor (DOL), and the Veterans Administration (VA), determine what demobilizing Reserve and National Guard members need to make a smooth transition and explore options for providing that assistance” (GAO-05-844T). All three of these government agencies have taken actions to

improve the content of transition assistance programs for full-time active duty service members. However, the challenge remains for military veterans serving with the National Guard or Reserve members because of their rapid demobilization, multiple tours, and the ongoing dual-role serving in the military while also working for civilian employers. The GAO report summed it this way,

Notably, few members of the Reserves and National Guard had time to attend most of TAP. The delivery of TAP varied in the amount of personal attention participants receive, the length of the components, and the instructional methods used. Participation also varied. (GAO-05-844T)

While full-time, active duty military members may participate in the full range of TAP services, members of the Reserves and National Guard participate in a shorter version; a version that does not include information regarding transitioning to the civilian workplace but continue to serve as a citizen-soldier. To meet the needs of this particular group, the U.S. Department of Defense created a program specifically designed for them called the Yellow Ribbon Reintegration Program.

### **Yellow Ribbon Reintegration Program**

The Department of Defense's Yellow Ribbon Reintegration Program (YRRP) was designed to ensure that National Guard members and reservists, as well as their external support groups, have access to resources and assistance needed throughout and beyond the military deployment cycle.

About 309,000 servicemen and women separated from the military in fiscal year 2004 with sufficient time on active duty to meet the TAP eligibility criteria. Of these, about 192,000 were members of the full-time active duty armed forces, and

the remaining 117,000 were members of the Reserves and National Guard.

(GAO-05-844T)

Many of the National Guard members and reservists were employed in civilian jobs before they deployed to active duty service, and the number of days they spend on average on active duty status has doubled since 1990, when TAP was established. Today, the average number of days National Guard members and reservists spend on active duty during one deployment cycle is a minimum of 12 months. National Guard members and reservists may also choose to volunteer for active duty assignments (for instance, Border Patrol), and again, the length of deployment will vary (National Guard FAQs, 2016).

For many National Guard members and reservists, the return to civilian jobs after a long absence and intense post-9/11 combat zone experiences presents some unique challenges. The transition period is inevitable, but it can be made easier by preparing ahead of time and receiving continuing education and training as to what to expect. Most important, for some citizen-soldiers, their military experiences may cause a change in their perceptions and attitudes. According to Military OneSource/Deployment and Transition, “It is normal for all this sudden change to seem a bit overwhelming, and it’s ok to need a period of adjustment to feel connected to your work and your coworkers again” (2016). The Yellow Ribbon Reintegration Program was designed to assist with this transition.

Through the Department of Defense, the Yellow Ribbon Reintegration Program (YRRP) assists National Guard members and reservists, along with their families, to connect with local resources before, during, and after deployments. During these events, “Service members and their families attend Yellow Ribbon events, where they can access information on health care, education and training opportunities, financial services, and legal benefits” (Military

OneSource/Deployment and Transition, 2016, p. 1). Thus, the purpose of the YRRP is to assist National Guard members and reservists transition at any state of their military career: pre-deployment, deployment, demobilization reintegration, and beyond.

Many National Guard members and reservists return to their civilian jobs without giving the readjustment process enough time to deal with potential physical or emotional issues; issues that could interfere with their civilian job performance. Beyond transition assistance programs, such as the Yellow Ribbon Reintegration Program, simply meeting with a fellow veteran—someone who can relate to the same post-9/11 experiences—can help National Guard members and reservists gain a healthy perspective about work-related concerns (DoD YRRP, 2011, p. 6). In addition, many employers offer employee assistance programs where military veterans can receive confidential, non-medical counseling and support during this adjustment period. The meaning of these transition experiences is the focus of this study.

### **Literature on the Transition to the Civilian Workplace**

A few studies regarding the transition of military veterans to civilian life have been conducted prior to this dissertation study. For instance, Kleykamp (2013) explained why some military veterans have positive experiences obtaining employment after transitioning from active service, while other military veterans struggle assimilating as employed civilians, noting that some individuals viewed their military service as an enhancement to being successful in the civilian labor market, while others viewed it as a hindrance. Some reasons why military service was considered to be an improvement included: (a) veterans may have gained employment advantages from the specialized, on-the-job training they received, such as electronics, healthcare, and communications; (b) veterans may have characteristics that are valued by employees such as work habits, attitudes, behaviors, leadership, and supervising others; (c)

veterans may develop contacts or be exposed to job networks and have or gain access to information about employment opportunities; and (d) some veterans' prior military service may serve as an employability indicator to some employers (p. 153). Other veterans viewed their military service as a hindrance and cited reasons such as (a) veterans' military occupations did not translate well into civilian job experiences; (b) civilian employers may have difficulties evaluating prior military experience; (c) some veterans may not have access to information about future employment opportunities; and (d) some veterans may suffer a loss of human capital in the form of years of civilian job experience and skills (Kleykamp, 2013, p. 154).

According to Berger (2015), "The process of civilian adjustment for Reserve and National Guard members involves a wide range of stressors such as reconnecting with friends and family, disconnecting from military culture, re-adjusting to a civilian job, and managing one's household and personal finances, in addition to managing intrapersonal stressors (p. 5). Numerous potential factors and situations may prevent or encumber the transition of National Guard members and reservists to the civilian workplace. Examples include having limited access to transition training and timely counseling, receiving inadequate access to DOD transition programs, and the lack of necessary core competencies or soft skills (e.g., interpersonal skills, teamwork, and cultural awareness) to succeed in the new environment. Other National Guard members and reservists suffer from Post-Traumatic Stress Syndrome (PTSD), or some other mental health issues that may have either gone undetected or unaddressed by a health care professional. Lane, Hourani, Bray, and Williams (2012) found that PTSD and suicidal ideation are higher in Reserve and National Guard members compared to active duty personnel. "Overall, Reserve and National Guard members are often forced to repeatedly manage an abrupt disconnect between their military and civilian life in ways that are different than active duty

personnel resulting in mental health issues going undetected” (Berger, 2015, p. 5).

Clemens and Milsom (2008) also offered insights into challenges faced by military veterans as they transition into the civilian workplace. These challenges included:

- having a decreased ability to establish and maintain private professional and social networks due to the propensity for making frequent moves and relocations during their careers;
- not attending or limited attendance at transition assistance workshops;
- having little or no post-graduation civilian work experience to help guide their post-military job searches;
- having significant military work experience but lacking transferrable-to-civilian-workforce job skills;
- not seeking the needed help of career counselors during the transitioning process.

Another challenge faced by National Guard members and reservists transitioning from active duty service is access to higher education. This is strongly influenced by the geographical area in which they live and the availability of affordable higher education (Smole & Loane, 2008). Many National Guard members and reservists volunteer to join the military in order to receive higher education benefits. In 2009, along with the Yellow Ribbon Program, a component of the GI Bill known as the post-9/11 GI Bill, along with the Yellow Ribbon Program, was implemented to assist military veterans and their pursuit of higher education at higher frequencies at both private and public institutions (Shankar, 2009). However, only veterans who have served at least 36 months, or served continuously for 30 days and were discharged for a service-connected disability, are eligible for tuition assistance via the Yellow Ribbon Program. Thus, the Yellow Ribbon Program provides additional benefits for National Guard members and

reservists to attend institutions of higher learning, previously priced beyond some military veterans' affordability (Shankar, 2009).

Prior research also found that “The agencies administering the transition program have taken several actions to improve TAP and increase participation, but they face challenges in tailoring the program to the Reserves and National Guard” (GAO, 2005a, p. 3). In fact, any denial or slow provision of entitlements could detrimentally affect transitioning veterans and their families (DVA-OIG, 2008; GOA, 2005a). Still, as Faurer (2014) noted, “As with many government transition assistance programs aimed at aiding the recipients, the scope of the bureaucracies involved in the programs, in and of themselves, become limiting factors to the intended success of the established programs” (p. 57). According to the Government Account Office (GAO) Report to Congressional Committees (2005),

Agencies face the challenges of providing TAP so its timing and location can accommodate the Reserves and National Guard. During their rapid demobilization, the Reserve and National Guard members may not receive all the information on possible benefits to which they are entitled. Notably, certain education benefits and medical coverage require service members to apply while they are still on active duty. However, even after being briefed, some Reserve and National Guard members were not aware of the time frames within which they needed to act to secure certain benefits before returning home. In addition, most members of the Reserves and National Guard did not have the opportunity to attend an employment workshop during demobilization. (GAO-05-544, p. 3)

Although transition GPS and the Yellow Ribbon Reintegration Program is offered, it does not mean the all National Guard members and reservists took advantage of attending these

workshops. This dissertation study will specifically look at the meaning of the lived experiences of National Guard members and reservists as they transition from a post-9/11 deployment to the civilian workplace.

## **Chapter 2: Theoretical/Conceptual Underpinnings**

This dissertation study combines Schlossberg's 4S Transition Theory (Schlossberg, 2011) with Bridges's Transition Model (Bridges, 2004), both of which are described below. Combining these two theories will be useful in this study because the research question, "What are the lived experiences of post-9/11 National Guard and Reserve military veterans as they transition back to the civilian workplace?" examines the transition experiences of military veterans. As such, the combination of the two theories will guide the study's questions and will serve in my analysis of the generated data.

### **Transitions**

A transition can be any event or a nonevent that impacts or changes the relationships, roles, and/or routines of an individual. For some military veterans, the transition may be perceived as a critical turning point in their lives (Schlossberg, 2011). Other military veterans may view the transition as a nonevent and do not give the transition experience a second thought. Whether transitions are viewed as a critical turning point or a nonevent, they present unique challenges, along with opportunities, for personal and professional growth, according to transition theory. Regardless of the type or perceived nature of the change, transitions require certain coping mechanisms. Bridges's (2004) three-stage concept shows us that moving through a transition requires letting go of aspects of the self, letting go of former roles, and learning how to deal with new roles and environments.

People live, grow, and experience changes within the social context around them. For instance, individuals experience career transitions, choices, and stability, as these are all incorporated into the daily contextual issues of everyday life (Goodman & Anderson, 2012). While characteristics of Schlossberg's (2011) 4S model (e.g., situation, self, support, and

strategies) may impact or create challenges within the transition process, they can also encapsulate characteristics or strategies that may positively influence the transition process and the person engaged in it (Schlossberg, 2011). Of importance in the transition process is also the adaptation one must go through as a part of the process. According to Schlossberg (2011), “Within a developmental framework, transitions occur in stages, with each stage relating to the next for adaptation and successful adjustment” (p. 30).

Work-life transition is most relevant to this research, which is why this dissertation study will use Schlossberg’s (2011) description of the process adults go through when transitioning through work-life events. In this study, Schlossberg’s 4S model will be used to frame the research questions. For instance, transitioning from the military to work life is an experience thousands of military service members are undertaking, and the 4S framework identifies stages service members might expect to move through. By applying Schlossberg’s Transition Theory, one can determine whether a National Guard member or reservist’s individual resources—the situation, self, support, and strategies—are sufficient to support the change or transition. If the individual’s resources are not sufficient, understanding Schlossberg’s 4S Transition Theory may lend insight in strengthening resources offered to National Guard members and reservists.

### **Schlossberg’s 4S Transition Theory**

Schlossberg’s 4S Transition Theory not only provides an understanding of transitional experiences, but also provides the strategies needed to cope with the “ordinary and extraordinary process of living” (Schlossberg, 1984, p. viii). The framework of Schlossberg’s (2011) 4S Transition Theory provides a structural approach to four variables that influence how one copes with transition. These 4S variables are:

1. Situation refers to what was happening at the time of transition. Does the transition come at a time of multiple stressors?
2. Self refers to whom it was happening to at the time of transition. Each individual is different in terms of life issues and personality.
3. Support refers to what help was available.
4. Strategy refers to how the person copes. People navigate transitions in different ways.

(Anderson, Goodman, & Schlossberg, 2012)

Situation — addresses what was happening at the time of transition — is the first category in Schlossberg's 4S model. Eight factors define important aspects of the situation of the National Guard members and reservists' experience during their transition: trigger, timing, control, role change, duration, previous experiences with a similar transition, concurrent stress, and assessment (Evans et al., 2010). Goodman et al. (2012) define these terms as follows:

- Trigger (What precipitated the transition?)
  - Timing (How does the transition relate to one's personal and social clock?)
  - Control (What aspects of the transition can one control?)
  - Role change (Does the transition involve role change?)
  - Duration (Is the transition seen as permanent or temporary?)
  - Previous experience with a similar transition (How has the individual met similar transitions?)
  - Concurrent stress (What and how great are the stresses facing the individual now, if any?)
  - Assessment (Does the individual view the situation positively, negatively, or as benign?)
- (p. 60).

When the transition occurs, influences the degree to which National Guard members or reservists experience the other stressors. If the individual National Guard member or reservist is free from additional stressors, then they are more likely to adapt better and have a more positive experience during the transition process.

Self — Schlossberg's (2011) second category in the 4S model, addresses both personal and demographic characteristics. According to Evans et al. (2010), an individual's life perspective typically is affected by personal and demographic characteristics such as socioeconomic status, age, gender, stage of life and health, and ethnicity and culture (p. 217). In comparison to one's personal and demographic characteristics, Evans et al. (2010) define and categorize psychological resources as coping strategies, outlook, commitment and values, and spirituality and resiliency. Personal and demographic characteristics, along with psychological resources, determine an individual's inner strength for coping with the transition and situation (Schlossberg, 2011). For National Guard members and reservists, the category of 'self' addresses gender, rank, years of service, level of post-secondary education, race/ethnicity, marital status, branch of service, military-related disabilities, and available psychological resources.

Support — is Schlossberg's third category of the 4S model. According to Schlossberg (2011), "The support available at the time of transition is critical to one's sense of well-being" (p. 160). There are four types of social support: intimate relationships, family units, networks of friends, and institutions and communities (Evans et al., 2010; Goodman et al., 2006). With respect to returning military, having a strong support group consisting of family, friends, co-workers, and other military veterans is critical to the ongoing well-being of returning military veterans. In addition, the Department of Defense (DOD) Transition Goals, Plans, Success (GPS) transition workshops, mandated for all returning veterans, are designed to prepare military

veterans transitioning to civilian life building on specific skill sets in support of their return to the civilian workplace. Schlossberg (2011) argues that a strong support system can positively influence an individual's emotional and physical well-being, thereby influencing the transition experience. In turn, strong support systems result in an individual's ability to adapt and integrate the transition into his or her life, as opposed to being solely preoccupied with the transition.

Strategy — the final category of Schlossberg's 4S model, points to the coping mechanisms used during transitions. The strategies aspect of Schlossberg's theory is about developing a means of helping military veterans cope. Once situation, self, and support are accomplished and understood, National Guard members and reservists need to implement various strategies that will aid in their success as they transition from a post 9/11 deployment to the civilian workplace.

Building on psychosocial development, Schlossberg's primary goal (Schlossberg, 2011) was to develop a theoretical framework that facilitated an understanding of adults in transition (Evans, Forney, Guido, Patton, & Renn, 2010). First, National Guard members and reservists transitioning from a post-9/11 deployment back to the civilian workplace may identify with the Schlossberg's 4S framework as the initial process can be framed as the *moving in* phase of the transition. This initial phase of the transition model is significant, as it indoctrinates these military veterans into a new way of working with different expectations determined by the situation. Second, the *moving through* phase of transition involves National Guard members and reservists adjusting and coming to terms with their new working environment. Theorists define the study of psychosocial development as the examination of "the content of development, the important issues people face as their lives progress, such as how to define themselves, their relationships with others, and what to do with their lives" (Gardner, 2009, p. 18). This will

require National Guard members and reservists to adapt to a different world view and develop an awareness of their co-workers' attitudes, beliefs, and reactions to their return to the workplace. This theoretical framework would not only provide an understanding of transitional experiences, but would also provide the strategies needed to cope with the “ordinary and extraordinary process of living” (Schlossberg, 2011). Finally, once the post-9/11 deployment ends, National Guard members and reservists begin a new stage of transition, the *moving out* phase, which is often characterized by grief and hope as they let go of close friendships made during their deployment coupled with leaving their military duties and returning to their civilian jobs.

The focus of Schlossberg's 4S Transition Theory is based on “an examination of what constitutes a transition, different forms of transitions, the transition process, and factors that influence transitions” (Evans et al., 2010, p. 214). Figure 1 illustrates how the four components of Schlossberg's Transition Theory are a helpful tool to better understand National Guard members and reservists' transition experiences. Schlossberg's theory suggests that having four kinds of resources can assist military veterans with transitioning to the civilian workplace: receipt of caring and affirmation (support), enacting behaviors that shift how problems are seen (strategies), the internal skills a military veteran has that can help with coping (self), and having a sense of control over the transition experience (situation).



Figure 2.1. Schlossberg's 4S Model

Adapted from *Counseling Adults in Transition*, by M. Anderson, J. Goodman, N. Schlossberg (2012).

Schlossberg's Transition Theory (2011) provided a theoretical framework that facilitates an understanding of National Guard members and reservists in transition, and Bridges (2009) provides differences between *change* and *transition*. According to Bridges's (2009) Transition Model, "Several important differences between change and transition are overlooked when people think of transition as simply gradual or unfinished change or when they use *change* and *transition* interchangeably" (p. 6). For example, when National Guard members and reservists move from serving with the Wisconsin Army Guard to the Arizona National Guard, the change involves crossing the country and then learning their way around the new unit. Bridges purports, "Transition is different. The starting point for dealing with transition is not the outcome but the ending that you will have to make to leave the old situation behind" (2009, p. 7). Situational change focuses on the new thing, but psychological transition requires letting go of the old reality National Guard members and reservists had before the change took place.

### **Bridges's Transition Model**

Change happens in everyone's life. The problems associated with change are generally not because of the change itself but more likely the transitions involved with change. According to Bridges (1980), change can be most effectively be dealt with by concentrating on where an individual puts his or her focus during the transition process from the military to the civilian workplace. Bridges (2004) begins by distinguishing *change* from *transition*. Change is situational. For example, being fired from a job or returning home from a deployment are *changes*. Transition is the psychological shift necessary to adapt to a change, "the inner re-orientation and self-redefinition that you have to go through in order to incorporate . . . changes into your life" (Bridges, 2004, p. xii).

Bridges's three-stage concept of life transition will be used to explore the broader career

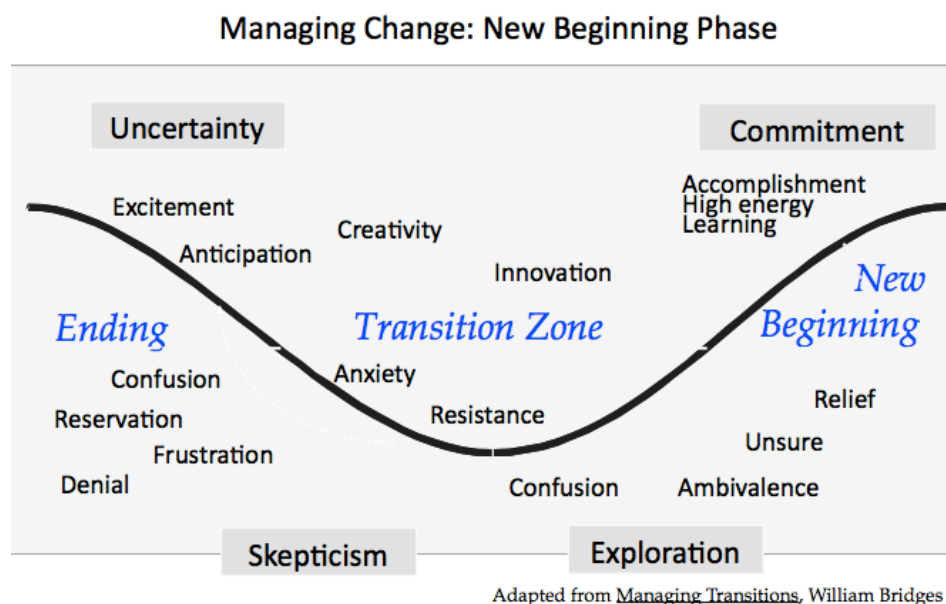
change returning military personnel experience as they move from one career to another. After having moved forward through the ending, where the individual lets go of the old career, and the neutral zone, where things are puzzling and nothing feels solid, the individual enters the phase of a new beginning (Bridges, 2004). This is the phase where the individual finally takes hold of a new reality, attitude, and self-image. It is where the individual has finally started a new chapter in life, with a new sense of purpose and possibility. These three stages provide a second component of this dissertation study's theoretical framework. The stages will be used to examine the process of letting go of a military deployment, coming to terms with the ambiguity of not knowing what's next, and launching into a new situation of hope, readiness, and excitement about either a new civilian career or returning to a job and experiencing a sense of new normalcy at work.

Successful transitions are a three-part process wherein a person lets go of an old situation, experiences a disorienting state of being in flux, and emerges with a new orientation. The first step, letting go, is the most difficult part of the process (Bridges, 2004). Letting go involves *disengaging* from the current situation, effectively unplugging oneself from it and saying goodbye to the old circumstances. The neutral zone is "where the business of transition occurs" (Bridges, 2004, p. 154). This seemingly unproductive period is disorienting, and people may rush to escape it, either by attempting to move forward too quickly or regressing to a former state. A person's reaction to this disorientation is difficult to predict because "the impact of a transition does not bear any relation to the apparent importance of the change that triggered it" (Bridges, 2004, p. 18). Seemingly uneventful circumstances, for example, can cause significant disorientation because of the cumulative effects of change. Certain meaningful and non-meaningful events can occur during the transition and overwhelm one's adaptive capacity.

Similarly, events that are expected to be happy occasions, such as returning home from a deployment, can produce feelings of disorientation that lead to anxiety and depression. In order to survive the neutral zone, Bridges and Mitchell (2000) recommend surrendering to the process rather than seeking an escape route, and they further recommend giving oneself time to think and finding places of solitude. The final phase of the process is an inner realignment that leads to taking steps in a new direction. The phase is still marked by vulnerability, and Bridges (2004) recommends a combination of taking concrete steps and self-reassurance about the value of the new alignment.

Figure 2 shows that transition is psychological and is a three-phase process where National Guard members and reservists gradually accept the detail of the new situation and the changes that come with it. Transition is the psychological shift necessary to adapt to a change, “the inner-reorientation and self-redefinition that you go through in order to incorporate . . . changes into your life” (Bridges, 2004, p. xii).

*Figure 2.2 Bridges’s (2004) Transition Model*



## **Using Transition Theories to Study the Experiences of National Guard and Reserve Military Veterans**

Certain elements of both Schlossberg's and Bridges's transition theories may resonate with National Guard members and reservists. Other elements are less obvious. Both National Guard members and reservists do not completely exit their civilian or military role. Their construction of a fully civilian or fully military identity is never quite complete. Someone who transitions completely out of one role into another, such as an active duty military member, leaves behind a full-time military career and transitions to a civilian career. For National Guard members or Reservists, the transition experience is very different, because they maintain both roles as a citizen-soldier returning to their civilian jobs and returning to their one-weekend-a-month and 2-weeks-a-year obligation. For others, this period lasts until their next deployment.

It is important to recognize that National Guard and Reserve members do not fully leave their role but rather suspend their role. The role is suspended until they choose to retire or leave military service. Returning to the workplace comes with its own challenges, because the National Guard member and reservist still have an obligation to perform periodic military duties and can expect to deploy again within a few years. Thus, their transition experience may require alternating back and forth between letting go, the neutral zone, and accepting a new beginning during multiple deployments.

In this dissertation study, the theoretical framework created by the blending of these two theories—Schlossberg's 4S Model and Bridges's Transition Theory—offers opportunities to examine the transition experiences of National Guard members and reservists. Figure 3 illustrates Bridges's Transition Model, with a hypothetical example of an Air Force reservist making the transition from a post-9/11 deployment to the civilian workplace. Figure 4 illustrates Schlossberg's 4S Transition Theory with that same hypothetical reservist.

Figure 2.3 Bridges's Transition Model as applied to the transition of an Air Force reservist.

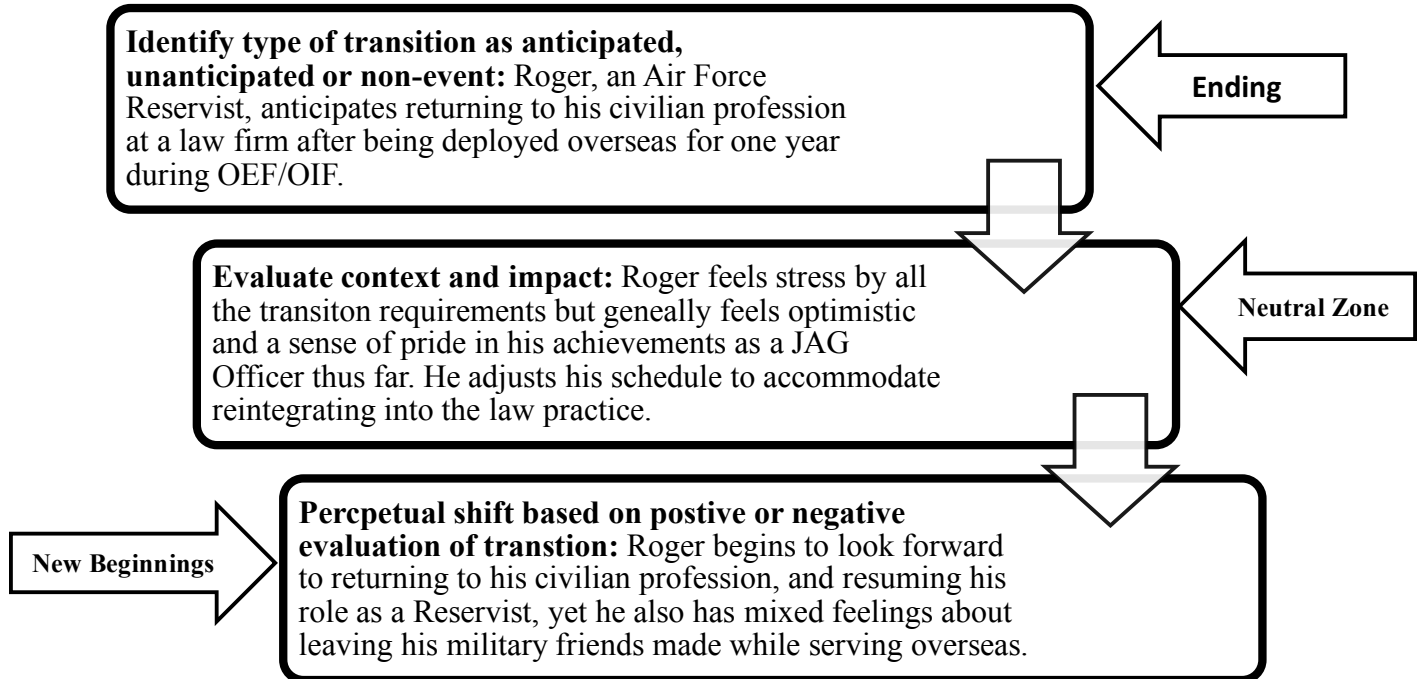
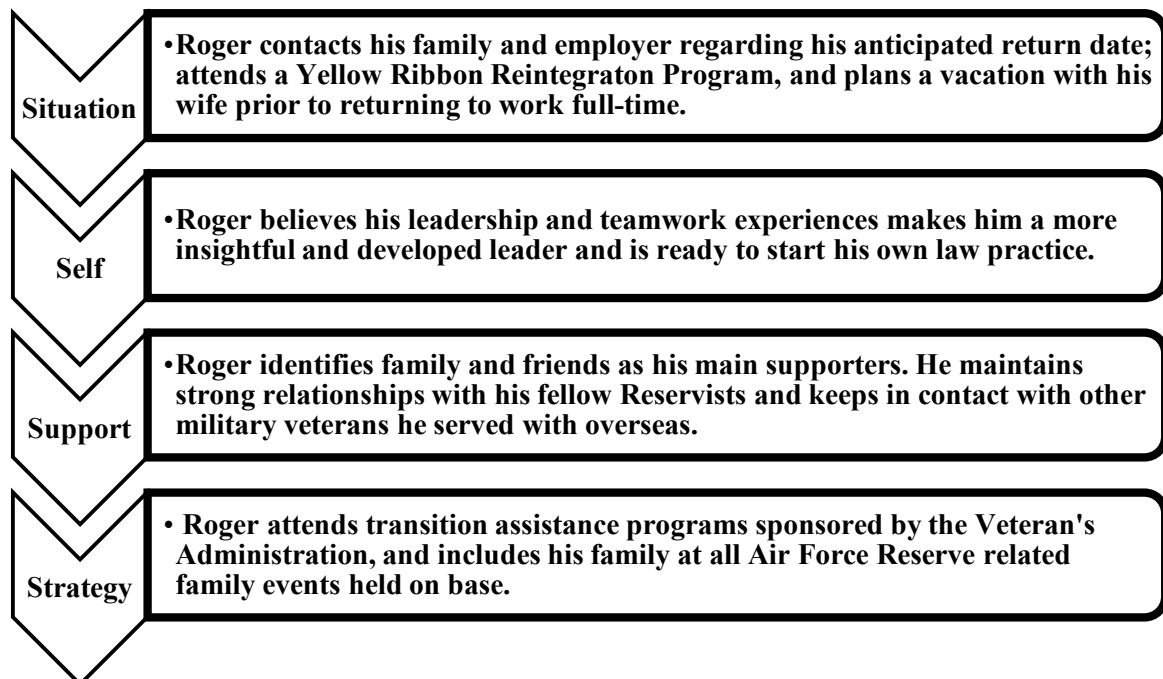


Figure 2.4. Schlossberg's 4S Transition Theory as applied to the transition of an Air Force Reserve officer.



## **Conceptual Framework Summary**

More than 730,000 of the post-9/11 military veterans were deployed in support of either Operation Iraqi Freedom (OIF) and/or Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF) with 255,000 representing the Reserves or National Guard, forcing them to place their civilian lives and jobs on hold for as long as a year, sometimes more than once. This has been the largest use of both forces since World War II, greater even than during the Vietnam and Korean wars.

Being discharged from active duty upon completion of their post-9/11 deployment, military veterans serving with the National Guard or Reserves return to their civilian employment, often with little time to transition between being a member of the armed forces and their civilian profession. In this research, both Dr. William Bridges's (2004), and Dr. Nancy Schlossberg's (2011) transition theories will be used to explore the meaning of the lived experiences of post-9/11 military veterans, serving in the National Guard and Reserves, as they transition from working in a combat zone to their civilian jobs. Both transition theories provide a framework, as they consider transitioning from one point to another a dynamic process by which employees and employers respond to each other's needs.

In attempting to understand the situation, self, strategies, and support systems surrounding a veteran's experiences transitioning from the military back to a civilian profession, one can easily appreciate how Schlossberg's model of adult transition fits with the experience military veterans face, especially when many of today's National Guard and Reserve members are being deployed involuntarily overseas in support of the ongoing Global War on Terrorism (GWOT). Both Bridges (2004) and Schlossberg (2011) speak of the differences between change and transitions. With change, one can relate to changing vehicles or changing jobs, but transition

it is a process that warrants further exploration and documentation through a qualitative phenomenological research, such as is proposed in this dissertation study.

### **Chapter 3: Methodology**

After September 11, 2001, National Guard members and reservists were called to serve on active duty for extended deployments, mainly in Iraq and Afghanistan. These tours of duty may last anywhere from 12-18 months, depending upon the branch of service members are attached to and their respective missions. All involved — the military, families, and the veterans — hope for a successful transition from a military deployment to the civilian workplace. This dissertation study researched the lived experiences of post-9/11 National Guard members and reservists as they transitioned from military deployments to their civilian careers. Specifically, this study responded to the question, *What are the meaning of the lived experiences of post-9/11 National Guard and Reserve military veterans as they transition back to the civilian workplace?* This question calls for qualitative research.

#### **Qualitative Research**

Qualitative research attempts to identify the why, how, and what is occurring (Yin, 2003); qualitative methods were selected for this dissertation study. Transitioning from a post-9/11 deployment to the civilian workplace is a personal experience, and one that would be difficult to quantify. Each National Guard member and reservist who transitioned from a post-9/11 deployment to the civilian workplace constructed their own personal recollection based on their unique experiences during the time of the transition. Therefore, quantitative methods would not benefit this study. Because this research examined the meaning of National Guard members and reservists' lived experiences as they transition back from deployments to civilian life, it is phenomenological in design, and face-to-face interviews were conducted to collect data for this dissertation study.

## **Phenomenological Case Study Research**

Phenomenological research is the study of lived experiences. According to Van Manen, (1990), “Phenomenology asks, ‘What is this or that kind of experience like?’ It differs from almost every other science in that it attempts to gain insightful descriptions of the way we experience the world pre-reflectively, without classifying, or abstracting it” (p. 9). The essence of a phenomenon can be described through a study of the structures that govern the instances or particular manifestations of the phenomenon’s essence. For instance, a National Guard member or reservist cannot reflect on a lived experience while living through the experience. Therefore, phenomenological reflection is not introspective but retrospective. “Reflection on lived experience is always recollected; it is reflection on experience that is already passed or lived through” (Van Manen, p. 10).

Phenomenological studies are interested in the way people make sense of their thoughts, perceptions, emotions, and social activity from past experiences (Klenke, 2008). Whereas a narrative study will report a single individual’s life, a phenomenological study explores and describes the meaning for several individuals of their lived experiences with a phenomenon (Creswell, 2007). For instance, this dissertation study explored and described the meaning of the lived experiences of National Guard members and reservists, and the phenomenon is the transition from a post-9/11 deployment to the civilian workplace. A phenomenological study was chosen because of its emphasis on the lived experiences of participants, as opposed to other qualitative methods. The intended outcome of this research is to understand the meaning of a particular transition experience of a member of the National Guard or Reserves versus identifying a correct method of facilitating transition assistance programs or a specific approach.

This phenomenological study seeks to understand the lived experiences of a select group of National Guard members and reservists — U.S. Air Force Reserve, Air National Guard, Army Reserve, Army National Guard, Navy Reserve, and Marine Corps Reserves — as they transition from a post-9/11 deployment to the civilian workplace. As such, this is a collective case study; a “qualitative collective case study is an approach to research that facilitates exploration of a phenomenon within its context using a variety of data sources” (Baxter & Jack, 2008). According to Stake (1995) and Yin (2003, 2006) the objective of case study research is to generate sufficient data about the phenomenon and reconstruct it so its essence is revealed.

Thus, the philosophical underpinning of phenomenological case study research rests in constructivism. Constructivism is built upon the premise of a social construction of reality, which provides an advantage to the researcher due to the close collaboration with participants, allowing participants to tell their stories (Baxter & Jack, 2008). It is the narratives of the post-9/11 experiences of both National Guard members and reservists that allowed me to describe their views of reality, allowing me to better understand the meaning of their transition experiences. As such, this group of military veterans became a case in this study.

### **Data Collection and Rationale**

The primary data-generating tool for this dissertation study was face-to-face interviews. Interviews were appropriate because they focused on participants’ storytelling to gain insight into their lived experiences (van Manen, 1990). Fontana and Frey (1998) suggest an open-ended and semi-structured interview guide be used in order to gather information in the distinct areas that the researcher is examining.

I used semi-structured interviews as the primary method to collect data. I conducted interviews with willing participants at a location of their choosing. My goal to interview each

participant in their natural setting, and one that was comfortable, private, and easy to access was accomplished throughout this study. Finally, during each interview, I recorded the information gathered using an electronic recording device, which was transcribed verbatim, along with paying attention to each participant's tone of voice and degree of engagement.

Interview questions designed for this dissertation study were linked to the research question "What are the lived experiences of post-9/11 National Guard and Reserve military veterans as they transition back to the civilian workplace?" There were 3 attendant questions supported by a list of open-ended questions designed to document the lived experiences of participants' transition to the civilian workplace.

Figure 3. Interview Protocol Guide

| <p style="text-align: center;"><b>Interview Guide</b><br/>(For Interviewer Use Only – Not for Distribution to Study Participants)</p>  |
|--|
| <p><b>INSTRUCTIONS</b><br/> <i>Good morning (afternoon). My name is Jean Marie Pyzyk. Thank you for volunteering. First, I will explain my research study and provide you with a copy of my letter of intent describing my dissertation research study. Second, I will ask you to sign an agreement to participate form that will be kept in a secure file for the next 3 years. Third, I will begin tape-recording our interview session asking you a series of questions that are asked of each participant in my dissertation study. Finally, at the conclusion of our interview I will give you an opportunity to ask any questions regarding my research, and I will provide you with my contact information in the event you want to add any new information to our conversation.</i></p> <p>(Explain procedures to ensure participant confidentiality, length of data retention, and participant rights to withdraw from the interview at any time. In addition, encourage participants to expand upon any questions and add anything that may come to mind about experiences during their transition from their post-9/11 deployment to the civilian workplace.)</p> |
| <p><b>TAPE RECORDER INSTRUCTIONS</b><br/> <i>If it is okay with you, I will be tape-recording our conversation. The purpose of this is so that I can get all the details but at the same time be able to carry on an attentive conversation with you. I assure you that all your comments will remain confidential. I will be compiling a report which will contain all students' comments without any reference to individuals.</i></p>   |
| <p><b>PREAMBLE/CONSENT FORM INSTRUCTIONS</b><br/> <i>Before we get started, please take a few minutes to read this preamble (read and sign this consent form). (Hand R consent form/preamble.) (After R returns preamble/consent form, turn tape recorder on.)</i></p>   |

| <i>What are the lived experiences of post-9/11 National Guard and Reserve military veterans as they transition back to the civilian workplace?</i> |  |  |  |
|--|--|--|--|
| <b>No.</b>   | <b>Research/Attendant Question(s)</b>  | <b>Interview Question(s)</b>   | <b>Support for the question (pilot study, literature, etc.)</b>  |
| <b>Q1</b>  | What common <u>situation</u> do these military veterans experience in the transition process?          | Describe the <u>situation</u> leading up to joining the military, and once you joined. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a) What was your military specialty code?</li> <li>b) Which branch of service did you serve with?</li> <li>c) What was your highest rank you achieved before being discharged?</li> <li>d) How long did you serve during OEF/OIF before being discharged from active duty service?</li> <li>e) What civilian career did you transition to after serving in OEF/OIF?</li> </ul>   | Pilot study showed importance of gathering rank, time-in-service, and other demographic information.   |
|  |  | Describe your <u>situation</u> /civilian career prior to being activated to serve in OEF/OIF. Your <u>situation</u> during your deployment and your <u>situation</u> after being discharged from active duty service. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a) What transition assistance did you receive upon being discharged?</li> <li>b) How long did you attend a transition assistance program, if any?</li> <li>c) Was the Yellow Ribbon Reintegration Program mandated, and did you attend?</li> <li>d) How long were you on military leave before transitioning to your civilian job?</li> <li>e) When did you attend your next drill weekend after returning from OEF/OIF?</li> </ul> | Pilot study showed various time periods between being deactivated from active duty service to transitioning to the civilian workplace.<br><br>Literature supported YRRP for National Guard members and reservists. |
| <b>Q2</b>  | What types of <u>support</u> mechanisms did these military members have during the transition process? | Describe how you felt upon being notified you were being activated to serve in a post-9/11 deployment? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a) How many days of notice did you give to your civilian employer?</li> <li>b) What professional career were you working in as a civilian prior to being deployed?</li> </ul>  | Pilot study showed support from family and friends. Focus remains on support specifically from civilian employers.   |

|           |  |  |   |
|-----------|--|--|---|
|           |  | <p>c) Did your employer have someone to fill in for you during your absence?</p> <p>d) Did you return to your same professional career upon transitioning back to the civilian workplace?</p> <p>How did your civilian employer show <u>support</u> prior, during and after being activated to serve in OEF/OIF?</p> <p>What role did ESGR (Employer Support of the Guard and Reserves) play in your transition to the civilian workplace, if any?</p> | <p>Literature indicates the importance of ESGR regarding reintegration of National Guard members and reservists rights during and after deployments.</p>  |
| <b>Q3</b> | <p>What personal strategies did these military veterans use to manage their <u>transition</u> to the civilian workplace?</p> | <p>Describe your experiences during your transition from OEF/OIF to your civilian workplace.</p> <p>a) How did you prepare yourself to make the transition from serving on active duty back to your civilian job?</p> <p>b) Describe how you felt during this transition period?</p> <p>c) What measures did you take to prepare your civilian employer of your return?</p> <p>d) How did your civilian employer prepare you for your return?</p>      | <p>Minimal literature found on the transition experiences regarding National Guard members and reservists returning to the civilian workplace.</p> <p>Pilot study supported need to research NG and reservists.</p> |
|           |  | <p>Describe any strategies used during your transition from OEF/OIF back to your civilian employer.</p> <p>a) How did you personally prepare yourself to make the transition?</p> <p>b) What professional services did you use to assist with the transition, if any?</p> <p>c) What strategies were offered through your military unit, if any?</p> <p>d) What transition assistance programs were offered thru your civilian employer, if any?</p>   | <p>Literature regarding transition theories focused on individual strategies used to make a successful transition.</p>  |

|   |                          |  |   |
|---|--------------------------|--|---|
|   |                          | <p>Describe your work responsibilities while serving on active duty during OEF/OIF.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a) How do these skill sets apply to your civilian employer?</li> <li>b) What measures did you take to inform your civilian employer of your military training and responsibilities during OEF/OIF?</li> <li>c) How well did you make the transition from serving in OEF/OIF back to your civilian job?</li> <li>d) What benefits did you find from serving in OEF/OIF that you bring back to your civilian employer?</li> </ul> | Pilot study indicated data be collected regarding unique skill sets of the citizen soldier. |
|   |                          | Describe any unique experiences you had while transitioning from a post-9/11 deployment to the civilian workplace, if any.   |   |
| <b>Q4</b>   | Conclusion of interview. | Is there anything you would like to add that we didn't already cover?  | Provide opportunity for interviewee to add additional information.                          |
| <p><b>CONCLUSION:</b></p> <p>Thank you for your participation and willingness to speak about your transition experience from your post-9/11 deployment back to the civilian workplace. As stated, your comments and participation will remain confidential and may help improve civilian employers' knowledge about the recruitment of military veterans as well as aid the improvement of future transition assistance programs.</p> <p>Please feel free to contact me if you have any questions related to this study. I can be reached by phone (414) 530-4577 or email <a href="mailto:jmpzyk@uwm.edu">jmpzyk@uwm.edu</a>. As this research is part my dissertation, if you have overarching concerns, my major advisor, Dr. Barbara Bales, can be reached by email at <a href="mailto:bbales@uwm.edu">bbales@uwm.edu</a>.</p> <p>At this time, I have no further questions; however, if additional questions arise, may I contact you? Thank you and feel free to contact me at <a href="mailto:jmpzyk@uwm.edu">jmpzyk@uwm.edu</a> if you have future questions or comments you would like to add to this study.</p> |                          |  |   |
| <p>Present participant with a \$10.00 Starbucks card and thank participant for their time, their participant in my dissertation study, and for their service to our great nation.</p>   |                          |  |   |

During the interview process with participants, any judgment or preconceived ideas were removed regarding my own transition experiences going from a post-9/11 deployment to the civilian workplace. Moustakas (1994) describes this process as bracketing, the first step in “phenomenological reduction,” the process of data analysis in which the researcher sets aside all preconceived experiences to best understand the experiences of participants in the study. In interviewing,

The data generated is dependent upon accurate, empathic listening; being up to oneself and to the participants; being flexible and free to vary procedure to respond to what is required in the flow of dialogue; and being skillful in creating a climate that encourages the participants to respond comfortably, accurately, comprehensively, and honestly in elucidating the phenomenon. (Moustakas (1990, p. 48)

In addition, I created separate hard-copy files for each participant, and took detailed notes to help record my impressions of nonverbal data from the participant interviews. My own thoughts, emotions, and all other considerations I encountered during the research process were documented along with specific outcomes.

### **Participant Recruitment and Selection**

Justification to only include National Guard members and reservists in this dissertation study is based on findings from a pilot study conducted spring 2016. Seven participants were interviewed regarding the lived experiences of military veterans transitioning from a post-9/11 deployment to the civilian workplace. The findings from the pilot study described the lived experiences of active duty military members’ transition as being final once members were discharged from active duty service. For instance, full-time military members are discharged

from active duty and transition to the civilian workplace, and do not return to military service. National Guard members and reservists are discharged from a post-9/11 active duty deployment, but are obligated to continue their military service one weekend per month and 2 weeks per year while transitioning to the civilian workplace, and maintaining their dual status as a member of the military and as a civilian employee.

The decision to refine my dissertation study is based on the lived experiences of active duty military members differs from those serving in the National Guard or Reserves. The two transition theories (e.g. Schlossberg's 4S model and Bridges's transition theory) used in this study suggests letting go of one experience and transitioning to another experience. This describes active duty military members leaving the military altogether and accepting a job in the civilian workplace. However, this same conceptual framework can also be used for those transitioning back and forth from military service to the civilian workplace, which is why this dissertation study has been refined to only include National Guard members and reservists since they are committed to transitioning back and forth during their military careers. There is minimal prior research found on the lived experiences of National Guard members and reservists transitioning to the civilian workplace versus a plethora of prior research conducted on active duty military members transitioning to the civilian workplace, to college, and to life in general.

National Guard members and reservists were notified of the dissertation study through email and/or via a telephone call requesting their participation in this study. Names, email addresses, and phone numbers were requested through networking with fellow military veterans, and also requested through the director of the University of Wisconsin Milwaukee Military Veterans Resource Center (MAVRC). The recruitment process involved distributing a Request for Participation letter, which included information about the study's purpose as well as asking

participants to sign a *Consent to Participate* form. Interested participants were contacted, and a brief telephone conversation or face-to-face meeting took place to discuss the study's purpose, allow for questions, and establish rapport. The *Consent to Participate* form was completed followed by questions about transition experiences and demographics prior to each participant's discharged from active duty military service. Next, dates/time of the interviews were scheduled; and interviews took place at a location and time of the participants' choosing.

For this study, the focus was on understanding National Guard members and reservists' transitional experiences from the military to the civilian workplace. Thus, criteria for selecting participants included:

- Post-9/11 National Guard members and reservists who served in either Operation Iraqi Freedom (OIF) or Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF) and transitioned to the civilian workplace, or military veterans currently seeking civilian employment, who completed an overseas post-9/11 deployment of at least 90 days on active duty orders.
- Military veterans serving in the National Guard or Reserves who remain in the military, are retired, or were honorably discharged, and also returned to their civilian employer.
- Post-9/11 National Guard or reservists who experienced only one deployment and transitioned to the civilian workplace within 90 days of their discharge orders.
- Total participants included 25 participants representing the Air Force, Army, Navy and Marine Corps. This study did not include members from the Coast Guard Reserve.
- Participants were available for a single, individual interview lasting between 45 to 60 minutes, and all participants agreed to be tape recorded.
- This dissertation study excluded National Guard members or reservists who served in a post-9/11 deployment, and transferred back to being self-employed.

The rationale for selecting the above method is based on the increased number of National Guard members and reservists activated to serve on active duty in support of a post-9/11 deployment. Thousands of National Guard members and reservists left their civilian employers for lengthy tours of duty; many of them experienced multiple tours of duty while working for the same civilian employers. It was not until after 2001 that the U.S. Department of Defense mandated transition assistance programs for all military veterans transitioning from active duty. Still, many of these programs focused on active duty military departing from the military or retiring from the military all together. This dissertation study documented the lived experiences of National Guard members and reservists as they transitioned from a post-9/11 active duty deployment to the civilian workplace, and, for many, back and forth again.

### **Data Analysis Plan**

Data analysis began with comparing and contrasting responses from the interview questions, I developed a code, and noted themes and patterns. Using the computer-assisted qualitative data analysis software program NVivo 11, I was able to organize and analyze the data. Through the use of open coding, I was able to establish codes and themes from the raw data and examined the data to search for words and phrases that were similar in order to group the data into similar categories (Maxwell, 2013). Also, my goal was to segment the interview data to compare the responses for similarities and differences, as well as name and identify conceptual categories. For instance, this dissertation study compared the different stages of the Schlossberg's 4S Transition Theory among military veterans being interviewed, detailing the military veterans' experiences at each level of transition, along with Bridges's Transition Model, with its three life phases of endings, neutral zones, and beginnings.

## **Data Storage and Confidentiality**

All transcriptions from the interview responses is stored and backed up in several ways. First, all electronic data is stored on a password-protected computer located in my home office with a locked door. Access to this computer requires a username and password. Hard copies of document drafts, notes, and correspondences are stored in a locked filing cabinet located in a locked office in my home, which also has a security system. All collected data collected is also backed up on an external hard drive and kept in a separate, secure location.

The following steps further detail data confidentiality:

- All data collected during qualitative data collection is de-identified. A unique pseudonym was assigned to each subject, which was used for all data organizing, coding/scoring, and entry of interview data. A pseudonym dictionary and attribute table was created and kept separate from the participants' transcriptions.
- All printed notes and information derived from the interviews is stored in a locked filing cabinet, only accessible by the researcher.
- All audio recordings are secured from the beginning of the interview process and throughout the time the data was used for this dissertation study. Upon completion of recorded interviews, the recording device and password-protected computer will remain locked and secure in my security-protected home.
- All recorded and transcribed reports will be destroyed three years after the dissertation is published.

These safeguards follow the University of Wisconsin Milwaukee Institutional Review Board guidelines for conducting research with human subjects.

## **UWM Institutional Review Board**

Conducting face-to-face interviews with National Guard members and reservists who experienced serving in a post-9/11 combat zone might be a very stressful experience that could trigger psychological stressors such as depression, post-traumatic stress disorder, and other mental health issues after leaving the military (Resnick, 2009). As such researchers are morally obligated to conduct their studies in such a way that there is minimal or no potential harm to participants (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2012). As mandated by the guidelines of the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee Institutional Review Board (IRB), I conducted my research with the highest ethical standards to guard against any harm or discomfort to human subjects. In preparation for this research, I completed my certificate of completion in Protecting Human Research Participant form the National Institutes of Health (NIH) March 2016. The training discussed being aware of beneficence, justice, and respect for human beings and assuring no intentional or unintentional harm to participants.

Remaining cognizant of how my interview questions might trigger psychological discomfort among respondents as they reflect on their transition experiences, I informed all of my participants of the sensitive nature of the study to minimize any distress prior to signing the consent form. In addition, to prevent or reduce any potential rise of these triggers, I ensured each participant that my dissertation study is safeguarded against harm, as required by the University of Wisconsin Milwaukee's IRB guidelines. I continued to take every measure to maintain confidentiality and develop an atmosphere of mutual trust. During the interview process none of the participants experienced or displayed any psychological stressors.

On March 8, 2016, I received notice of IRB Exempt Status was received to conduct a pilot study titled “Understanding the meaning of post-9/11 military veterans’ experiences to the civilian workplace.” Per the IRB Administrator, “After review of your research protocol by the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee Institutional Review Board, your protocol has been granted Exempt Status under Category 2 as governed by 45 CFR 46.101(b).” The protocol was approved for three years, expiring on March 7, 2019. With IRB approval for a pilot study, I conducted seven interviews were conducted between the months of March 2016 and May 2016.

During the course of coding the transcriptions from the pilot study, the researcher decided to narrow the focus of the study to include only the meaning of the lived experiences of post-9/11 National Guard members and reservists transitioning to the civilian workplace as opposed to including all military veterans from the post-9/11 era. An amendment to my original IRB application was submitted, which will continue to protect participants by providing them with accurate and informative consent forms along with a detailed explanation of the research study.

On August 26, 2016, the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee accepted an amendment to study 16.266 to read, “Understanding the lived experiences of post-9/11 National Guard and Reserve military veterans transitioning to the civilian workplace.” A “Modification/Amendment Notice of IRB Exempt Status” was received on August 26, 2016, stating, “Your protocol still meets the criteria for Exempt Status under Category 2 as governed by 45 CFR 46.101 subpart b, and your protocol has received modification and amendment approval”. By adhering to the criteria outlined by the IRB, this study is designed to protect all participants who choose to volunteer to be a part of this research study. A pilot study examining the transition period was conducted in spring 2016. The findings from the pilot study grounded the research design of this dissertation study.

## **The Pilot Study, Preliminary Findings, and Implications for Dissertation Research**

Seven military veterans were interviewed as part of a pilot study regarding this topic. Face-to-face interviews were conducted between April 2016 and May 2016. I spent 10 minutes with each participant prior to beginning the interview explaining the interview process and signing required consent forms approved by the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee Institutional Review Board (IRB). During this time, I addressed questions, reviewed the purpose of the study, and discussed consent to participate. At the same time, I focused on developing trust and a rapport with each participant. The interviews ranged from 34 to 66 minutes, with 47 minutes being the average amount of time participants spent answering questions. Six of the seven interviews were conducted at an Air National Guard base, and one was conducted in a private office located on the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee campus. Interviews were audio recorded to ensure accuracy in reported findings and transcribed within one week. The notes I took during the interviews were coded immediately following the interviews to highlight particular themes. Table 3.1 identifies the seven participating veterans (using pseudonyms), their length of the interview, the total word count from the question-and-answer sessions, and the transcription pages for each interview.

Table 3.1 *Demographics of Participants in Pilot Study*

| <b>Demographics of post-9/11 Military Veterans Participants<br/>(Interviews) Pilot Study</b> |                                     |   |                                 |   |               |
|--|-------------------------------------|---|---------------------------------|---|---------------|
| <b>No.</b>   | <b>Participants:<br/>Pseudonyms</b> | <b>Demographics of<br/>Participants</b> | <b>Length per<br/>Interview</b> | <b>Word Count<br/>Transcription<br/>Pages</b> | <b>Date</b>   |
| 1.   | Leo                                 | Male (Enlisted)<br>Army National Guard  | 34 minutes                      | 9 pages<br>4,275 words<br>375 lines           | March<br>2016 |
| 2.   | Kevin                               | Male (Enlisted)<br>Air National Guard   | 46 minutes                      | 10 pages<br>5,205 words<br>426 lines          | March<br>2016 |

|   |        |   |            |                                      |               |
|---|--------|---|------------|--------------------------------------|---------------|
| 3.  | Roger  | Male (Officer)<br>Air National Guard    | 56 minutes | 16 pages<br>9,986 words<br>727 lines | March<br>2016 |
| 4.  | Gina   | Female (Officer)<br>Air National Guard  | 66 minutes | 20 pages<br>9,995 words<br>880 lines | April<br>2016 |
| 5.  | John   | Male (Enlisted)<br>Air National Guard   | 40 minutes | 8 pages<br>4,480 words<br>350 lines  | April<br>2016 |
| 6.  | Joseph | Male (Enlisted)<br>Air National Guard   | 50 minutes | 10 pages<br>4,710 words<br>415 lines | April<br>2016 |
| 7.  | Kathy  | Female (Enlisted)<br>Air National Guard | 36 minutes | 8 pages<br>3,419 words<br>340 lines  | April<br>2016 |
| Interviews conducted with approval from University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee Institutional Review Board March 8, 2016. |        |   |            |                                      |               |

During the months of March 2016 thru April 2016, seven interviews were conducted as part of the pilot study for this research. The first three interviews were fully transcribed by the researcher through playback of the audio recording device and the use of a headset. The remaining four interviews conducted for the pilot study were transcribed by a trained transcriptionist for a nominal fee. All of the interviews were conducted within a 1-month time period, and each was immediately reread while the interview was played aloud to ensure accuracy of the transcripts. Also, a copy of each transcript was sent to each participant to ensure accuracy of the data, and an opportunity for each participant to review and confirm the information was shared 1-week after the interview process.

After the first four transcripts were completed for the pilot study, the researcher scrutinized each transcript in order to gain a general understanding of the participants' lived experiences as they transitioned from a post-9/11 deployment back to the civilian workplace. During the initial review of the transcripts, no coding or notes were taken, but instead a thorough reading was completed from start to finish. During the second reading of the transcripts, I began

identifying and pulling out key phrases, words, and themes that emerged from the participants' responses. Next, an analytical page was created using Microsoft Word, which was used for the remainder of the preliminary coding during the pilot study. The analytical form was used to collect emerging themes and ideas to establish codes. Various patterns of beliefs, comments, and themes were documented as well as any contradictory comments and/or themes. A third and fourth analysis of the data resulted in codes being assigned, and a coding dictionary was created for future use; it served as a placeholder for the researcher to refer back to while conducting future interviews with the next group of participants in this study. In addition, certain themes and patterns focusing on the individual's lived experiences of the transition period, which were identified and coded, establishing a concurrent theme throughout the pilot study.

The Pilot Study's Preliminary Findings. Two of the seven responses are shared as preliminary findings for this paper. The first was an enlisted male (pseudonym Leo) who served with the Army National Guard, and the second was a female officer (pseudonym Gina) serving with the Air National Guard. Both are post-9/11 military veterans and served on active duty for more than six months in support of Operation Iraqi Freedom. The enlisted Army veteran served in combat as an artillery specialist, and the Air Force Officer was stationed in Ballad Air Base in Iraq, where she described being under constant mortar fire. Both participants were asked the same set of questions regarding their lived experiences transitioning from a post-9/11 the combat zone to the civilian workplace.

Leo was asked the following question: *What was life like now, after you served in a combat zone and returning to a civilian work place, and how did you feel?* He responded:

I'm constantly aware of what is going on around me. I'm constantly sitting in the corner chair, keeping an eye on the room and what's going on around me. I

wouldn't say it's necessarily preparing for combat in every single meeting I go to, but it's just kind of instilled in me to know what's going on around me, keep awareness of where I am located in the room, prepared for whatever could happen. So yeah, when I went back to work, I definitely recognized that my head was always on a swivel, I'm always looking out, what's going on around me, where the potential risks and dangers are and what can be done to alleviate those dangers.

Gina was asked the same question. She responded:

You wouldn't have anybody to really relate to. You're going from a combat zone and maybe your civilian job is working behind a desk or whatever it may be, and you go back to okay, well, I was just in the middle of hell and now I am sitting in front of a computer and people are talking to me about stuff to me that is irrelevant. I literally just got done with trying to survive, and they're talking to me about such and such. I don't care if you're upset about somebody is talking about you because I literally just got back from being mortared every day. So that to me was what I would say would be a difficult experience to try to relate to somebody that has not been in that situation and then you have to work with them on top of that. There were some nights I remember it was the 4th of July and I had a hard time with fireworks. I eventually got over that.

Both participants reported some difficulty working with civilians upon transitioning from a combat zone to the civilian workplace. Both participants commented on feeling misunderstood by civilian coworkers upon return. Gina stated, "These people have absolutely no concept of what you did over there or what it's all about or my experiences; you just want to leave it behind

you or only share it with others who understand your same experiences.” Whereas, Leo reported, “Certain supervisors would be about taking care of themselves — that really bothers me,” He added:

The first few months back at my civilian job, one of the things I had trouble with was the "we'll do it tomorrow" attitude, the "we'll do it next week" attitude because when working in a combat area of operations you identify something that needs to be done and you do it because it needs to be done. You don't push it off. The lack of sense of urgency back here in the civilian world took a while to get used to.

It is important to note that both participants described positive adjustments to their civilian employment upon returning to work. However, both also acknowledged one of the major difficulties during the transition phase was the lack of camaraderie among their civilian counterparts compared to the 24/7 workweek they experienced with their military colleagues.

The Pilot Study's Implications for Dissertation Research. Findings from the collected data from the pilot study, data analysis, and literature research provided me with a preliminary coding for my dissertation research. By using a phenomenological method to understand the lived experiences of post-9/11 National Guard members and reservists transitioning to the civilian workplace, it is anticipated that each participant will provide a descriptive meaning of his or her lived experiences concerning this shared phenomenon. For instance, the emerging themes from the participants' responses to the interview questions during the pilot study guided the research study by establishing similar patterns of themes. Two themes that emerged during the data analysis and the interview responses based on the same question asked of each participant during the pilot study shed light on potential findings in my dissertation research.

These findings, however, do not represent the entire post-9/11 lived experiences of participants interviewed, but they do provide preliminary themes that emerged based on two questions asked of each participant:

- What types of support mechanisms did you have during the transition process?
- What was the experience like once you transitioned back to the civilian workplace after your deployment?

Six of the participants were Air National Guard, and one was Army Guard. Additional participants included members from the Air Force, Navy and Marine Corps Reserves. Following is a matrix of two of the shared themes by all seven participants during the pilot study:

*Table 3.2. Two themes shared by all seven participants during the pilot study.*

| <b>No.</b> | <b>Participant</b> | <b>Theme One:<br/>Support from Family and Friends</b>  |
|------------|--------------------|--|
| 1.         | Leo                | "I could not have survived without the support from my family and friends."  |
| 2.         | Kevin              | "Having my boss and co-workers send me care packages kept me grounded; was very appreciative of their ongoing support during my entire deployment."                            |
| 3.         | Roger              | "Being able to Skype with my wife and children kept me going day-to-day."  |
| 4.         | Gina               | "My entire community rallied around me when I returned home, and I couldn't be more grateful for their love and support."  |
| 5.         | Joseph             | "My Guard unit was an incredible support system and family readiness office that makes sure we are all taken care of and our families when we are away."                       |
| 6.         | George             | "As a college student, my professors understood when I was deployed before the end of the semester, and they all worked with me to finish my coursework when I returned home." |
| 7.         | Kathy              | "I had a lot of support from people I didn't even know, but mostly from my close family and friends."  |
| <b>No.</b> | <b>Participant</b> | <b>Theme Two:<br/>Adjustment Concerns upon Returning Home</b>  |
| 1.         | Leo                | "In my profession I already had a heightened sense of awareness, but when I returned home it was even greater than before I left for Afghanistan."                             |

|    |        |   |
|----|--------|---|
| 2. | Kevin  | “My co-workers invited me to a happy hour after work to celebrate my homecoming, but I had to leave right away because I could not handle the loud noise.”                      |
| 3. | Roger  | “It took me a long time before I could share what I experienced in Iraq with my co-workers and friends.”  |
| 4. | Gina   | “Each time I sat in a room I made sure I knew what my escape plan would be and where the nearest exit was in case of an active shooter.”  |
| 5. | Joseph | “I could no longer relate to my co-workers; everything they complained about didn’t matter any longer because it was always so trivial, and I was under mortar fire last week.” |
| 6. | George | “When I finally returned to work I was bored and was treated as if I didn’t know anything when I just returned from leading a troop of over 100 soldiers.”                      |
| 7. | Kathy  | “I ended up quitting my job when my employer held me back from a promotion because I was gone for the past year.”   |

Seven participants were interviewed as part of a pilot study for this research. Changes made to this study were the exclusion of active duty military veterans and the inclusion of National Guard members and reservists, and questions that focused strictly on experiences transitioning to their civilian careers. The title for the pilot study read, “Understanding the lived experiences of Post-9/11 military veterans transitioning to the civilian workplace.” Also, the question asked during the pilot study also was amended to exclude active duty and only include National Guard members and reservists. In addition, the title was changed to read, “Building bridges over troubled waters: A phenomenological study of post-9/11 National Guard and Reserve military veterans transitioning to the civilian workplace.” Finally, the coding completed during the pilot study provided an accurate preview of my coding manual and key operational definitions of the major codes found in my analysis of the data of the remaining transcripts.

Moustakas’ (1994) data analysis approach was used to organize the data for analysis. First, during the pilot study, I implemented phenomenological reduction (epoch), which was suggested by Moustakas (1994). This approach aids in identifying any potential bias and focuses

only on the participant experiences. Second, I listened to the audio recording data multiple times and reviewed the transcripts in depth to obtain the overall meaning of each participant's experiences, and identified similar phrases and statements. Finally, thematic units were identified according to the responses related to the research questions. During the pilot study, each transcript was coded with P1 through P7, and a pseudonym was assigned to that particular participant. The responses of the transcripts of the interview were loaded into NVivo 11, a data analysis software program used to analyze qualitative data, which assisted in analyzing and the collected data for emerging themes.

The pilot study's preliminary findings are reflective of the dissertation research I proposed. The purpose of the pilot study was to examine the lived experiences of post-9/11 National Guard members' and reservists transition to the civilian workplace. Both participants in the pilot study reported there is a lack of research conducted focusing on the transition experiences of military veterans serving in the National Guard or Reserves, as the majority of the literature and research focused on military veterans transitioning off active duty. At the same time, I am aware of my positionality in this research.

### **Positionality and Creditability**

Positionality allows for a narrative placement for researcher objectivity and subjectivity whereby the researcher is situated within the many aspects of perspective and positionality (Lave & Wenger, 1991). I come to this qualitative research projects having served in the U.S. Air Force Reserves for 24 years. My personal experiences transitioning from active duty after serving in both Operation Desert Storm (1990) and Operation Iraqi Freedom (2004), coupled with the lack of participation and access to a Transitional Assistance Program (TAP), offer me insider status to the phenomenon. This status brings with it access and limitations. I have extensive knowledge of

military culture and its systematic processes for enlistment or retirement, which will be a benefit to understanding the meaning of the lived experiences of National Guard members and Reserves military members transitioning to the civilian workplace.

As a traditional reservist, my service included working both as a civilian employee and as a citizen-soldier obligated to serve one weekend a month and 2 weeks a year except when deployed and required to serve on active duty. My background will have minimal effect on my research based on the fact that my first major combat deployment was in 1991 (over 25 years ago) and my second combat deployment was in 2004 (over 10 years ago). During my time-of-service, there were no formal transition programs offered, and any data collected will be entirely new information and insight into the transition process of post-9/11 military veterans. Today the U.S. government offers mandated transition assistance programs and resources to all military veterans; therefore, my bias remains minimal based on knowing that these transition assistance programs were not in place during my military service.

To ensure credibility, the findings in a qualitative inquiry must make sense (Maxwell 2013). I established credibility through using a phenomenological approach (Maxwell, 2013; Creswell, 2009). I immersed myself in the data to identify common themes of the concept under investigation (transitioning), and through constant observation. To further ensure credibility, I implemented member checking, triangulation, and saturation to validate that the analysis of the participants' experiences and provide an accurate interpretation of the data (Maxwell, 2013). Mason (2010) stated that qualitative research aims to reach data saturation to justify the reliability and validity of the dissertation study's outcomes, I provided each participant a draft copy of the transcribed interview to review for accuracy, recognizing that personal feelings and experiences can have the potential of affecting the results. To minimize any bias toward my

participants, I set aside any preconceived ideas or judgments during the data analysis phase of the study. This approach helped to improve efficiency and gives creditability to the dissertation study (Maxwell, 2013).

Transferability refers to the applicability, that is, the findings of the research that can transfer to another setting (Merriman, 2009). To enhance the transferability of this dissertation study, I present rich, thick narratives to enable others to make decisions about whether or not the data can be transferred (Maxwell, 2013). I used the field notes of my time spent with each participant, including the descriptive detail of the lived experiences as told by the participants (Maxwell, 2013). My goal was to ensure there is consistency in my dissertation study. Miles, Huberman, and Saldana (2013) suggest employing steps that will extend beyond the study's credibility. To ensure dependability, I documented coding schemes and themes as well as cross checked all of the data sources to identify commonality of themes (Maxwell, 2013). Finally, I confirmed that the findings of this study are reflective of the participants' lived experiences within their own descriptions (Silverman, 2015). I used a research journal to document each step of the interview process, including participants' follow-up questions, revision of any interview questions and participant checking (Maxwell, 2013; Silverman, 2015). Using these tools and techniques assisted in the enhancement of trustworthiness of the research study findings (Silverman, 2015).

### **Assumptions and Limitations**

Since service members differ in ethnicity, religion, age, level of education, and experiences, the study's participants will represent National Guard and Reserve members from the Air Force, Army, Navy and Marine Corps but will be limited to only those who served on active duty status after September 11, 2001. Although their lived experiences will differ based on

their respective branch of service, geographical location, and whether or not they have access to an active-duty military installation, or serve on a National Guard or Reserve military base, an assumption was made that all National Guard members and reservists selected for interviews accurately reflected their experiences and the perspective of their transition from the military to the civilian workplace. There was also the assumption that each interviewee either had access to or attended a Department of Defense (DOD) Transition Assistance Program (TAP), or the Yellow Ribbon Reintegration Program at a military installation. The difference between these two programs is defined in Chapter 1.

Similarly, there was an assumption about the interview methodology that the participants understood the questions and truthfully respond instead of providing an expected answer. It was also assumed that the participants remembered their experiences and the context in rich detail. These assumptions are essential to obtain a detailed explanation and meaning of the events from the participants as they described their experiences (Moustakas, 1994).

There are also limitations associated with this dissertation study. Phenomenological methodology is an approach of qualitative research that cannot be generalized for a larger population (Trochim, 2006). Researchers use phenomenology principles to embrace the ambiguous, and, as an adaptive, open system, to understand and describe patterns of meaning, as with military veterans' experiences transitioning from the military to the civilian workplace. However, the phenomenological approach is unlike other research methodologies in that phenomenology does not use empirical measurement and proof to substantiate the results. As such, limits are posted to the transferability of the findings due to: the study sample size, scope of the research, geographical location of the military installations, branch of service, rank, years of military service and experience.

Although I am a retired Air Force Reserve officer and have access to military installations globally, I have limited this study to military veterans stationed throughout the United States. I was limited to collecting data only when individual commanders at specific military installations provided permission for me to interview a select group of military veterans during a unit training assembly (UTA) or drill weekend. As such, the majority of the interviews were conducted throughout Southeastern Wisconsin, during their unit training assembly (UTA) or also known as drill weekends. For three of the participants' interviews, I traveled to Phoenix, Arizona, and Washington D.C., to conduct their interviews, and one participant interview, from Houston, Texas, was conducted via Skype.

Poggenpoel, Myburgh, and Van Der Linde (2001) suggested the reduction and control of any existing bias is linked to the researcher's acknowledgement that he or she is fallible or capable of making an error. Creswell (2003) introduces the concept of "epoche," or bracketing, as a way by which the researcher sets aside his or her experiences and approaches the research with a totally new perspective on the studied phenomenon. By applying the principles of bracketing effectively, I reduced the biases I have as a 24-year Air Force Reserve officer combat veteran. I retired from the U.S. Air Force Reserve in 2008, and did not attend any transition assistance programs upon returning to my civilian career.

It cannot be dismissed that a researcher without any prior military experience may have identified some variations of the participants' lived experiences transitioning from a post-9/11 deployment to the civilian workplace. Each of the participants remained engaged in conversation during the interview for over one hour per interview, which may have been reflective of the common ground shared between the participants and the researcher. An outsider may have had a different interview experience due to not being able to speak the same military jargon as the

participants. This limitation, however, was advantageous for the purpose of completing this study, because as a retired military veteran, the researcher had easy access to all military installations, and the participants openly shared their experiences in great detail knowing they were talking with someone who could easily relate to the customs and courtesies of the military culture.

My hope is that this dissertation study will inform future researchers and educators who work with returning military veterans, that many National Guard members and reservists may hold expectations of an uneventful transition to the civilian workplace. By incorporating both Bridges (2004/2009) and Schlossberg's (2011) transition theories, researchers may be able to assist in easing the transition experience upon returning to the civilian workplace described by participants in this study.

## Chapter 4: Findings

The purpose of this phenomenological dissertation study was to qualitatively explore the lived experiences of 25 National Guard members and reservists representing four of the five branches of the armed forces as they transitioned from a post-9/11 deployment to the civilian workplace. There are three sub-questions: What common situations do these military veterans experience in the transition process? What types of support mechanisms did these military members have during the transition process? What personal strategies did these military veterans use to manage their transition to the civilian workplace? Often untold, are the stories of our unsung heroes who continue to serve simultaneously with the military while maintaining a full-time civilian career. These members are also referred to as citizen-soldiers. It is my privilege to introduce each of the 25 participants who took the time to share their insightful and meaningful experiences with me in support of my dissertation study.

### Putting Service Before Self: Participants' Profiles

*Be a person of principle. Fight for what you believe in. Keep your word. Live with integrity. Be brave. Believe in something bigger than yourself. Serve your country. Teach. Mentor. Give something back to society. Lead from the front. Conquer your fears. Be a good friend. Be humble and self-confident. Appreciate your friends and family. Be a leader and not a follower. Be valorous on the field of battle. And take responsibility for your actions.*

*Major Doug Zembiec, U.S. Marine Corps  
Killed: May 2007, Baghdad, Iraq*

The findings from this study represent responses from 17 males and eight females from both the officer and enlisted ranks of the United States military. Of the 25 participants, 10 were officers and 15 were enlisted, and participants ranged between 25 to 55 years of age. The four branches of services representing the National Guard and Reserves included in this study are as follows: Air Force Reserve, Air National Guard, Army Reserve, Army National Guard, Navy Reserve, and Marine Corps Reserve. The Coast Guard Reserve was not included in this study.

All participants graduated from basic military training or officer training school along with their active duty counterparts. Upon taking the oath of office and successfully graduating from basic military training or officer training school, National Guard members and reservists returned to their respective duty stations. While maintaining a full-time civilian career, these members are also required to drill one weekend a month and two weeks a year until called upon to serve on active duty such as a post-9/11 deployment in support of Operation Iraqi Freedom (OIF) or Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF).

Upon meeting each one of the participants we spent the first 10 minutes getting to know each other on an informal basis, and that is when I collected the demographic data listed in Table 4.1 below. Pseudonyms are used in place of participants' names, and each participant is identified by their branch of service, gender, rank, age, and years of service.

*Table 4.1 Participants used for study.*

| <b>No:</b> | <b>Pseudonyms</b> | <b>Branch of Service</b> | <b>Gender</b> | <b>Rank</b>                | <b>Age/<br/>Years of Service</b> | <b>Location of Interview</b>                   |
|------------|-------------------|--------------------------|---------------|----------------------------|----------------------------------|--|
| 1.         | Janelle           | Army Reserve             | Female        | Enlisted (E-6)             | 25 – 30<br>9 years               | 337 <sup>th</sup> MI Charlie Co. Milwaukee, WI |
| 2.         | Grant             | Army Reserve             | Male          | Enlisted (Warrant Officer) | 35 – 40<br>18 years              | 337 <sup>th</sup> MI Charlie Co. Milwaukee, WI |
| 3.         | Patricia          | Army Reserve             | Female        | Enlisted (E-5)             | 25 – 30<br>7 years               | 337 <sup>th</sup> MI Charlie Co. Milwaukee, WI |
| 4.         | Mark              | Army Reserve             | Male          | Enlisted (E-4)             | 25 – 30<br>7 years               | 337 <sup>th</sup> MI Charlie Co. Milwaukee, WI |
| 5.         | David             | Army Reserve             | Male          | Officer (Colonel)          | 50 – 55<br>30 years              | 75 <sup>th</sup> Training Command Houston, TX  |
| 6.         | Marie             | Air Force Reserve        | Female        | Officer (Major)            | 45 – 50<br>25 years              | 440 <sup>th</sup> Airlift Wing Milwaukee, WI   |
| 7.         | George            | Air National Guard       | Male          | Officer (Major)            | 45 – 50<br>33 years              | 128 <sup>th</sup> ANG Milwaukee, WI            |
| 8.         | Mary              | Air National Guard       | Female        | Enlisted (E-5)             | 25 - 30<br>9 years               | 128 <sup>th</sup> ANG Milwaukee, WI            |

|     |         |                      |        |                   |                     |  |
|-----|---------|----------------------|--------|-------------------|---------------------|--|
|     |         |                      |        |                   |                     |  |
| 9.  | Anthony | Air National Guard   | Male   | Enlisted (E-7)    | 45 – 50<br>18 years | 128 <sup>th</sup> ANG<br>Milwaukee, WI |
| 10. | Collin  | Marine Corps Reserve | Male   | Enlisted (E-5)    | 25 – 30<br>9 years  | NOSC<br>Milwaukee, WI                  |
| 11. | Sharon  | Navy Reserve         | Female | Enlisted (E-3)    | 25 – 30<br>6 years  | NOSC<br>Milwaukee, WI                  |
| 12. | Susan   | Navy Reserve         | Female | Officer (Lt-03)   | 30 – 35<br>12 years | NOSC<br>Milwaukee, WI                  |
| 13. | Kevin   | Air National Guard   | Male   | Enlisted (E-5)    | 30 – 35<br>12 years | 128 <sup>th</sup> ANG<br>Milwaukee, WI |
| 14. | Leo     | Army National Guard  | Male   | Enlisted (E-5)    | 25 – 30<br>6 years  | MAVRC<br>Milwaukee, WI                 |
| 15. | Gina    | Air National Guard   | Female | Officer (Major)   | 40 – 45<br>19 years | 128 <sup>th</sup> ANG<br>Milwaukee, WI |
| 16. | Roger   | Air National Guard   | Male   | Officer (Major)   | 40 – 45<br>18 years | 128 <sup>th</sup> ANG<br>Milwaukee, WI |
| 17. | John    | Air National Guard   | Male   | Enlisted (E-7)    | 40 – 45<br>22 years | 128 <sup>th</sup> ANG<br>Milwaukee, WI |
| 18. | Robert  | Air National Guard   | Male   | Enlisted (E-8)    | 50 – 55<br>20 years | 128 <sup>th</sup> ANG<br>Milwaukee, WI |
| 19. | Kathy   | Air National Guard   | Female | Enlisted (E-5)    | 25 – 30<br>7 years  | 128 <sup>th</sup> ANG<br>Milwaukee, WI |
| 20. | Michael | Navy Reserve         | Male   | Enlisted (E-4)    | 25 – 30<br>7 years  | NOSC<br>Milwaukee, WI                  |
| 21. | Thomas  | Marine Corps Reserve | Male   | Officer (Lt Col)  | 45 – 50<br>16 years | JB Fort Meyer<br>Washington D.C.       |
| 22. | James   | Army Reserve         | Male   | Officer (Colonel) | 50 – 55<br>30 years | Fort Belvoir<br>Washington D.C.        |
| 23. | Chris   | Army National Guard  | Male   | Officer (Captain) | 40 – 45<br>25 years | Phoenix, AZ                            |
| 24. | Joseph  | Marine Corps Reserve | Male   | Officer (Captain) | 30 – 35<br>12 years | Milwaukee, WI                          |
| 25. | Marvin  | Marine Corps Reserve | Male   | Enlisted E-6      | 30 – 35<br>10 years | Milwaukee, WI                          |

Meeting all 25 participants for this study was an honor. Following are 25 participant profiles that describe their experiences before joining the military and also additional insight as to why they decided to join the military. All personal identifying information has been changed to ensure the privacy of all participants except for their gender, rank, and branch of service.

*Janelle, Participant 1* — is a female enlisted Army reservist. Before joining the military, she said her mother pushed her to go to college, but she did not know what she wanted to do and did not want to waste money in college, so she joined the military as a different option. Once she joined the military, she started getting more of a sense of purpose. Janelle stated,

My adulthood has been learning through the military's way, and then through that, I just learned how to become a leader, and so now I find that my strengths are in leadership, so that has helped with civilian careers as well.

*Grant, Participant 2* — Grant is a male warrant officer with the Army Reserve. Prior to joining the military, he was in high school. Grant was recruited out of high school during his junior year, and completed advanced military training after his senior year of high school. Grant completed his initial commitment but continued to serve in the Army Reserve for 18 years and does not have any intention of getting out, because serving as an Army reservist has become part of who he is, as both a military member and as a civilian police officer. For Grant, both missions are one and the same: protecting and serving our community and our nation against all enemies.

*Patricia, Participant 3* — is a female Army reservist who attended a college in Ohio, where she initially joined their Reserve Officer Training Corps (ROTC) program, but it did not work out, so she contacted a recruiter and joined the Army Reserve while working as a dispatcher for a local police department. Her military training as an interrogator also prepared her for her civilian profession working in law enforcement. She continues to serve past her initial commitment with the Army Reserve.

*Mark, Participant 4* — joined a year out of high school. According to Mark, "I was thinking of going to college, but I just did not see anything happening with my life, so I decided to join the Army Reserve." After graduating from basic military training, Mark enrolled at a

four-year university but took a year off when deployed to serve overseas in a combat zone. Mark will be graduating from college with a law enforcement degree and has no intentions of getting out of the Army Reserve. Mark's goal is to apply for an officer commission after graduating from college and apply for a full-time slot as an Army officer or join the Federal Bureau of Investigations (FBI) as a special agent.

*David, Participant 5* — is a colonel in the Army Reserve who entered active duty after graduating from West Point as an artillery officer. He served on active duty for 9 years before resigning his full-time commission and joining the Army Reserve. As an engineer, he commanded a military police battalion and served in a post-9/11 deployment overseas.

*Marie, Participant 6* — joined the Air Force Reserve to offset her college tuition. Her intent was to complete her initial commitment of 6 years, but when she graduated from college, she was offered a Medical Service Corps commission with the Air Force Reserve and continued to serve for the next 19 years as an officer. Marie was a traditional reservist but was called up to serve on active duty during both Operation Desert Storm and Operation Iraqi Freedom. Marie explained that she owes our nation a great debt of gratitude for providing ongoing educational assistance during her reserve career, which provided her with ongoing continuing education and professional development throughout her military career resulting in successful civilian careers.

*George, Participant 7* — graduated from a Chicago public school and did not know what he was going to do with his future. His parents did not have the financial means to send him to college, and George did not have the means himself, so he enlisted in the Air Force before his 18<sup>th</sup> birthday. After his 4-year commitment to active duty, he joined the Air National Guard and graduated from college. George has continued to serve as an Air National Guard officer for the past 33 years. George said, “My intention was to get in, get my education, secure my VA home

ownership benefits and get out.” However, once he learned the importance of living the Air Force core values - integrity first, service before self, and excellence in all we do - George knew these core values reflected who he was both personally and professionally, which is why he remains serving as an Air Force officer.

*Mary, Participant 8* — was familiar with the Air National Guard as both her father and brother served in the National Guard. Mary stated,

I always knew about the National Guard, but I always feared the whole basic training and everything, but when I was in high school, I started thinking about college. I knew I wanted to go to college, and I knew that it would be really difficult to pay for it if I did not have some sort of massive funding source.

Mary joined when she was 17 and needed her parents’ approval. At first, her mother did not approve, but her father did. Mary has been with the Air National Guard for 9 years and has achieved the rank of master sergeant. Today, both her parents are very proud of her military service, as well as her recent graduation from Marquette University. She has no intention of applying for an officer commission, as she loves her leadership role within the enlisted ranks.

*Anthony, Participant 9* — was at a crossroads in his life when he decided to join the Air National Guard at the age of 30. According to Anthony, “It was one direction or the other, and I chose the other, thank goodness. I am currently holding the rank of E7, Master Sergeant.” Anthony explained he could have continued working for the highway department or join the National Guard. He chose the National Guard. Anthony also expressed great gratitude to his extended family with the Air National Guard and embraced his senior leadership role, where he gets to work with junior enlisted members and helps them develop their leadership skills.

*Collin, Participant 10* — is a member of the Marine Corps Reserve, and before joining the military, he worked construction. Collin served on active duty for 4 years and was discharged, but he realized he missed being a member of the Marine Corps, so he joined the Reserves. According to Collin,

I did not have any of those skills before the Marine Corps. I did not know what I wanted to do in my life. I kind of just did certain things. In fact, I joined the military because all of my other friends were doing it. I did not have an ounce of leadership in me or discipline. I messed up a bunch of jobs before, just because of attendance and stuff before, and I was 21 years old when I joined, and I realized that I did not want to stay on that same path.

Collin has been with the Marine Corps Reserve for 10 years and has no intention of getting out of the Marine Corps Reserve anytime soon. He credits his discipline and work ethic to his Marine Corps training.

*Sharon, Participant 11* — joined the military upon graduating from high school and needed money for college. She said, “I studied abroad for a year and missed that college application time, and did not want to take a gap year, so I joined the military.” Sharon served on active duty before being discharged and joined the Navy Reserve. She has achieved the rank of E-5 and is using her military benefits to work part time and completing her college degree.

*Susan, Participant 12* — is an officer with the Navy Reserve, where she received her commission through Milwaukee School of Engineering with a degree in biomedical engineering. She resigned her active duty commission after 12 years of active duty service, moved back to her hometown, and joined the Navy Reserve. Susan will continue serving as a citizen-soldier but does not know how her active duty skill sets will apply to her civilian career.

*Kevin, Participant 13* — graduated from high school and started his first semester of college, but did not feel it was the right time to continue his higher education, so he decided to join the Air National Guard. Kevin stated, “I was not necessarily going down a bad path, but I definitely was not on the right track, and I think joining the military helped me sort it out and revert back to the right track.” Kevin is in his 12<sup>th</sup> year with the Air National Guard, and his career goal is to remain serving until his retirement.

*Leo, Participant 14* — informed his parents he wanted to attend college, but he knew neither they nor he had the financial means to pay for it. Leo stated,

I had no interest in going \$40-50,000 dollars in debt, and I began exploring the military. I met with a recruiter who heavily sold field artillery and the Army Guard, and at the end of the day, he promised me that before we were activated, they would be bringing back the draft and that if we ever were deployed, he would be right there with me. I was going to receive education benefits and commit to one weekend a month, two weeks in the summer, of training, and I said yeah and signed up. The first week of boot camp happened, and that is when 9/11 took place.

Leo used his education benefits earned while serving as a member of the Army National Guard and continued his higher education, earning a doctorate from the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee.

*Gina, Participant 15* — joined the Air National Guard right out of high school. Gina was prior enlisted and joined the military to earn money for college. She said,

My dad was prior military, so I followed along in his footsteps. I had attained the rank of master sergeant before I was commissioned. I did not know what I was

getting myself into when I initially joined. It is obviously evolved into something much greater than what I anticipated when I first came in. I never dreamed in a million years that I would have found myself in some of the places that I did. I was a young kid, I joined, and here I am 19 years later.

Gina currently holds the rank of Major and has served with the Air National Guard her entire military career while also working as a full-time law enforcement officer.

*Roger, Participant 16* — joined the military when he was 17 years old, and a senior in high school and trying to decide what to do upon graduation. A friend of the family was a pilot with the U.S. Air Force, so Roger talked to his dad about considering the Air National Guard. Roger learned, “You can do a little bit of both, go off to basic training and tech school, and then later on if you want to go to college, they will pay for that as well.” Roger joined the Air National Guard, commenting that it was the best opportunity for him. Roger served his first 6 years as enlisted and received his commission as a second lieutenant in 2005. He remains with the Air National Guard after 18 years of military service.

*John, Participant 17* — joined the military when he was 19 years old. He attended a college prep high school and went to college for one year. John stated,

I discovered college was really expensive. I did not want to be in school anymore at the time; I wanted to go out and get into the workforce, realized that I did not have any direction at all, and thought that the military might be a good fit to help solve that directionless feeling that I was having.

John graduated from basic military training 22 years ago; returned home to his Air Force unit and served in the Air Force Reserve; he now serves with the Air National Guard.

*Robert, Participant 18* — is a member of the Air National Guard, and he said, I was 17 and I remember it was the 4th of July, I was at some friend's house and we were watching the fireworks from New York and I saw all of the Navy guys come out in their uniforms and holding the flags and I was like wow, I got chills up and down my arm, I am like that is really cool. So that is why it first came into my mind. I went and talked to a recruiter, next thing you know, I joined the United States Air Force.

Robert completed his initial commitment and was out of the military for 10 years, and then the tragedies of September 11, 2001, happened. After watching the atrocities unfold on television, Robert contacted a recruiter and two weeks later he was back serving as an Air Force reservist.

*Kathy, Participant 19* — attended one semester of college, and did not like it, so she found joining the Air National Guard to be a viable alternative. Her father had served with the Air National Guard for 32 years and had a strong influence on her decision to join. Upon graduating from high school, she did not know what to do with her life, and joining the Air National Guard gave her a sense of purpose and belonging to something bigger than what she could have imagined. Kathy said,

The Air National Guard gave me not only financial stability but a chance to travel, expand my mind a little bit, and meet people from all walks of life. I learned a job that I never ever would have touched if I just remained a civilian.

As a traditional Guard member, Kathy has served her initial commitment of 6 years, and is looking to continue her commitment for another 6 years.

*Michael, Participant 20* — joined the military while he was still in high school at the age of 17 under the Deferred Entry Training program. His main reason for joining was to move from

his hometown and travel. Michael has been in the military for 7 years, and plans on serving with the Navy Reserve for years to come.

*Thomas, Participant 21* — is a lieutenant colonel with the Marine Corps Reserve. He joined the Marine Corps while he was a full-time law school student. He attended Officer Training School (OTS) in Quantico, VA, and commissioned as a Marine Corps Reserve officer. Thomas served as defense counsel for the Marine Corps while working for the FBI as a civilian. Thomas was shot in the head during his tour in Iraq and recently received a medical discharge after 18 years of military service with the Marine Corps Reserve. Today, he works as a motivational speaker teaching others how to overcome life's unexpected challenges.

*James, Participant 22* — was commissioned through the Army ROTC program while on a 3-year scholarship at Purdue University as an engineering student. Upon graduating, James joined the Army Reserve and continued his military service, where he holds the rank of Colonel after 33 years of military service.

*Chris, Participant 23* — is a captain with the Army National Guard and joined the military because he felt it was something he always wanted to do. Chris stated,

I thought there was also a certain amount of honor for serving. I believe that it is good for everybody to do some sort of service, but I figured that mine would be military related. I joined before my senior year of high school. My parents signed off on it because they saw how strongly I felt about it.

Chris appreciated the college benefits he earned from being in the military, but was not the sole purpose for joining. Chris has been with the Army National Guard for 25 years and is planning on resigning his commission in the next few years.

*Joseph, Participant 24* — graduated from a 4-year university and commissioned as a Marine Corps officer at Quantico, VA. After 12 years of military service, Joseph is now in command of a battalion and continues to work as a civilian while maintaining his status as a traditional reservist. His goal is to apply to law school with the additional educational benefits gained by completing an overseas tour in a combat zone and maintaining his commanding officer position with the Marine Corps Reserve.

*Marvin, Participant 25* — joined the Marine Corps right out of high school as an infantry specialist on active duty. After his 4-year commitment, Marvin joined the Marine Corps Reserve, where he has continued to serve as a traditional reservist for the past 10 years. Marvin works full time in his professional career as a Director of emergency planning for a major international airport while serving in the Marine Corps Reserve. He is also taking advantage of the educational benefits he earned by completing his doctorate.

Establishing credibility among my participants when meeting for the first time was important, and it resulted in my participants opening up and sharing detailed responses to my structured interview questions. Six themes emerged from my analysis of these interviews: (1) Getting to the core of what matters most and what is valued, (2) Adjusting to the civilian workplace, (3) United in education: insider perspectives on Department of Defense workshops, (4) To have, or not to have, transition support, (5) Wrestling with a new normal, and (6) Transferring military skills to the civilian workplace: hiring our heroes. Each is discussed in this chapter. As you will see, despite differences among these National Guard members and reservists from the Air Force, Navy, Army, and Marine Corps, there were common experiences grounded across the air, sea, and land.

The first theme focuses on the military core values each branch of service identifies with, and embraces. Each participant shares how they used these military core values as a moral compass in both their military and civilian lives.

**Theme 1: Getting to the core of what matters most and what is valued.**

*I did not feel there was value in my civilian job. I was like you guys are missing this Esprit de corps that we have in the military, and I do not know if it is attainable, because I think part of the Esprit de corps is knowing that you can go to battle with somebody and you have taken an oath to put your life on the line, and you have taken an oath to defend what we hold so sacred as our flag and our country. That is something that you just cannot connect with in the civilian world.*  
Major, Air National Guard

The expression of values and ideals by each of the branches of service is something military members gain when joining the service. Each branch of service has its separate mission, motto, and core values. Following is a breakdown of these core values by branch of service.

The military offers its members a rich and distinct culture, consistent with a unique set of values, symbols, jargon, and shared history. Within the military culture is a sub-culture that differentiates each branch of service based on its mission, motto, and core values outlined in Table 4.2. As in other cultural contexts, military service has a significant influence on a military member's values, beliefs, expectations, and behaviors. While National Guard members and reservists share the unique position of serving in both the military and the civilian workplace simultaneously, their individual military deployment experiences coupled with their core values may have an impact on being able to make a smooth transition from military service to the civilian workplace.

Table 4.2 Armed Forces Core Values.

| Branch of Service                           | Mission  | Motto                              | Core Values  |
|---|--|------------------------------------|--|
| <b>U.S. Army</b>                            | To fight and win our Nation's wars by providing prompt, sustained land dominance across the full range of military operations and spectrum of conflict in support of combatant commanders.   | This We'll Defend                  | Loyalty, Duty, Respect, Selfless Service, Honor, Integrity, Personal Courage |
| <b>U.S. Air Force</b>                       | Fly, fight and win . . . in air, space, and cyberspace.  | Aim High . . . Fly-Fight-Win       | Integrity First, Service Before Self, Excellence in all We Do                |
| <b>U.S. Marine Corps</b>                    | The seizure or defense of advanced naval bases and other land operations to support naval campaigns. The development of tactics, techniques, and equipment used by amphibious landing forces. Such other duties as the President may direct. | Semper Fidelis, "Always Faithful." | Honor, Courage, Commitment   |
| <b>U.S. Navy</b>                            | To maintain, train and equip combat-ready Naval forces capable of winning wars, deterring aggression and maintaining freedom of the seas.  | Semper Fortis, "Always Courageous" | Honor, Courage, Commitment   |
| Source: U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs |  |                                    |  |

Joseph, a Marine Corps officer, described the challenges of transitioning from wearing the uniform and conforming to the customs and courtesies of a military culture one day and returning to the civilian workplace the next day. He explained,

Some guys can carry that over very well, sometimes even too much, especially when you have a Marine who used to be active duty transitioning into the civilian world, as opposed to the Marine who has been a reservist his entire career. That is

where I have had some of my issues as well, is the type of discipline, the kind of commitment, the sort of attitude that you thirst for in the military. It is not entirely absent in the civilian sector, but much of it is. For example, when you listen to people complain about silly things, you just want to tear your hair out, and wish you could say to them what you could say to one of your Marines here if they complain about something. First, they would never complain about something like that. You try to maintain your composure the best you can. You also have Marines who can just turn it on and turn it off, like a flip of a light switch, just because that is what their makeup is. It depends on the individual.

Making the transition from a post-9/11 deployment to the civilian workplace can be vastly different for each military member depending on what matters most to them, and what each individual values. For instance, transitioning from the structured environment where military members are trained to develop responses and take the initiative to accomplish a mission may present challenges for some military members returning to the civilian workplace. Joseph describes these challenges:

I think no matter how much you can compartmentalize it, I believe there is always going to be a bleed-over from one into the other, and it goes both ways. Sometimes when you come off a long reserve weekend, the first few hours on Monday morning, you might still be in Marine mode. On Friday evening or Thursday evening, moving into Saturday morning, Friday morning or whatever the day might be. You still might be in civilian mode, and someone might have to snap you out of it, like, 'hey, put on your uniform, get your game face on, you are no longer in civilian mode, we were in Marine mode, it is time to focus'.

Kevin, a member of the Air National Guard, added another perspective to this notion of maintaining a dual role as a member of the military and as a civilian employee. He shared,

I looked at myself in the very traditional role of a Guardsman, the one weekend a month, two weeks in the summer, mainly a civilian. But as a civilian and a Guardsman, you still have to hold yourself, I think, to a bit of a higher standard, and I think people may see that and they may not actually pick up on it until they know that you are also in the military.

Although each branch of service has its unique set of core values (e.g., loyalty, honor, integrity first, etc.) all branches of the military subscribe to a set of expectations of what it means to be a member of the armed forces. George described what it is like being a member of the Air National Guard. He stated, “For many years, we were looked down upon as being a Guardsman; you are just a Guardsman or just a reservist, and you are a part- timer.” For example, he took offense when his elderly neighbor, a man who served during World War II had a negative perception about members of the National Guard. George paraphrased his neighbor’s comment this way:

When he heard that I was in the Guard, he laughed at me a little bit; he said “Awe, I know about you Guard guys.” I took serious offense to it. I was like, what do you mean you know about us Guard guys? He joked about how you guys are just out there and smoking and drinking and having a good time, and I was like, you’ve got a wrong perception of who we are and what we do, having deployed and having worked alongside my active duty counterparts.

This negative perception of the work National Guard members are doing did not sit well with George. When I asked why, he explained the importance of ensuring that those he is charged

with commanding and training consistently meets and exceeds the expectations of their active duty counterparts at all times.

So it is even more important to me now that when I send airmen down range, not only do they perform at the same level that the active duty performs at, that they have a one up on them. The beautiful thing about being in the Guard and Reserve is that we have usually more than one skill set. As Guardsmen, we go back to our civilian jobs and we can be so many different occupations, and then we come to the Guard and we have our Air Force Specialty Code (AFSC). Because that is how it would happen on active duty, and our role today in the Guard and Reserve, as far as I am concerned, is probably a more critical role than active duty because our airmen are coming and going. We have people deployed all of the time.

We've got to be on our A game.

According to George, a unifying aspect of military culture is the mindset and group of core values that U.S. armed forces aim to instill in their members throughout their military careers. The emphasis, across the military, is to consistently place the mission above all else, not accepting defeat, and never quitting or ever leaving behind another American. Instilling this mindset in all military members and empowering individuals to think and behave in ways that are reflective of their respective branches set of core values is crucial for maintaining a highly competent and committed group of military personnel. He reiterated the importance of the U.S. Air Force core values by stating,

When you come out here and you are a military member, there is an expectation of our core values, your service before self, integrity, and our airmen have to carry that brand with them when they leave here, because you take the uniform

off, those core values do not go away. I think it is those things and your demeanor, the way you carry yourself, the professionalism that you have, because in many instances where I have got young airmen that come in the military and they get indoctrinated with basic training and tech school, and then all of a sudden they are done. They go back in the civilian world, and sometimes they can pick up some of those old habits. It is important for us that we remind them that you now joined the most elite Air Force in the world, and there is an expectation of you that those core values that you learned and that we reinforced to you when you came in here are with you all of the time now. You live these core values.

In addition to core values, having a strong work ethic was another significant trait discussed among participants. Anthony, a member of the Air National Guard, explained how difficult his transition was coming off an active duty deployment because his work ethic had changed. He noted,

It is very tough coming back, because you find yourself again; your work ethic has changed. You are over there, and you are expected to work. That famous saying, there is no calling in sick. If you call in sick, you have to be approved to be sick, so coming back here and dealing with the civilian part of it, I just lacked tolerance toward that. I got back, and it was go, go, go. If there was something to do, I wanted it done. I worked until it was done.

My supervisors always commented, throttle back a little bit, throttle back, but I am like, if it has to be done, let's just get it done. The more we procrastinate, the more we wait around and sit around, it is not going to get done. So with me, there are always people in certain jobs and no matter where you are at, are going to be

the ones that you figure is the slacker, the one that does not want to do a lot, and you tend to have issues with that, and I did.

He elaborated, describing the importance of having a strong work ethic, both as a military member and as a civilian. He explained the challenges he faced when he returned to working with his civilian employer.

I could not deal with the work ethic; I could not deal with it. I found myself getting angry. I am like, wow, people, they are not asking us to do much, they are just asking us to do our job. They are not trying to be difficult, we were getting paid a good salary, let's get it done, and when it wouldn't get done, I was very overwhelmed.

The core values uniquely defined by each branch of service guide military members in everything they do on and off duty; at home, at their civilian jobs, and on the battlefield. According to Marie, "core values are a matter of life and death in the military." Each participant described a clear adherence to their respective branches core values, which is inherent in combat veterans. Chris added, "When I got back to my civilian job, I was, like, what is this place, what am I doing here?" Participants shared the struggles they experienced adjusting from working in a fast-paced, stressful, and sometimes threatening work environment back to their civilian careers.

## **Theme 2: Adjusting to the civilian workplace.**

*I do not like telling stories after a deployment. I want to decompress and get back to normal, and when you get back to your civilian career, it is "hey, what did you go through; tell me about where you were; you got pictures," tons and tons of questions, which is normal for human interaction, but at the same time it is not helpful for the healing process.*  
Staff Sergeant, Army Reserve

The second theme that emerged addressed the adjustments National Guard members and reservists experienced when transitioning from serving on an active duty post-9/11 deployment

and returning to their civilian jobs. Chris, a member of the Army National Guard, returned to his civilian job after spending 18 months deployed to Afghanistan working as an artillery specialist.

Here he describes his transition experience:

You kind of live your life on adrenaline, pins, and needles, and sometimes it is really chilled and relaxed over there, as it could be, and other times things get hairy. I had not been in situations of a knife in my teeth charging up a hill or anything like that, but it was like, that could have gone sour pretty quick.

When I was back at my civilian job, I thought whatever I was doing, I was bored and I did not feel like there was any impact from what I was doing. So I had requested some paperwork to go back, and they happily sent it to me. When I looked at them, it was simple paperwork to request to get mobilized again.

He described the challenges he had adjusting to his civilian job by mentioning how a civilian co-worker who had no military background reacted to his return. He described it this way:

I remember one of my first days, a buddy of mine was a reservist with me, and I was chatting over the cubicle wall with him, and this new person was in between she and us was hearing back and forth, and she goes, “Oh, you are in the military?” I said yeah. She said, “Did you go to Iraq?” Yeah. She probably asked what I did there, and she goes, so you are going to show up one day all crazy and kill us all? I am like, what? Is this what you regard me as? I just did not know what to react to that. I think I was just like well, no. I was so confused that someone would even say that to me.

The massive call-up of National Guard members and reservists in response to the tragedies of September 11, 2001, triggered the use of a law governing the employment and

reemployment rights of employees called to active duty. Chris explained how the Uniformed Services Employment and Reemployment Rights Act of 1994 (USERRA), was something he should have brought to the attention of his employer, because it extends basic protections to employees with military service obligations. Under (USERRA), the federal law prohibits discrimination in hiring, retention, promotion, or provision of any other benefit of employment (Klein & Pappas, 2002). In Chris's case, he served for 18 months in Afghanistan. When he returned to work for a Fortune 500 company, he discovered the employee who replaced him during his absence was promoted shortly after he returned to his civilian job. Chris was held back from receiving the same promotion. He explained how he should have mentioned USERRA but did not.

I come into work, and it was different because I was in team lead role, and someone had filled in for me, and shortly after me coming back, they promoted my replacement when the promotion should have been offered to me. They were like, you are still part of this team; we'll still have you do these projects. I felt disenfranchised and bumbling along.

Shortly thereafter, he decided to leave his position with the Fortune 500 Company where he had worked for over 10 years, and move his family to Phoenix, AZ, where he accepted a managerial position with an international company. After one year in his new job, Chris found himself searching for another new career. According to him, his work life seemed empty. He shared,

In my last role here in Phoenix, there was no sense of the importance of the things that I did. After I had got back from Afghanistan, I worked a lot. I worked at least 12 hours every day, no time off, and I was really dialed into my job in Afghanistan. I really loved it, because I just felt the burden of it, and I had to

perform at a peak level all of the time, and I loved that. I came back home, and that was gone.

After our interview, Chris told me he accepted a new position as a government contractor for a civilian company, and would be returning to Afghanistan for six months beginning at the end of 2016. He said he needed to get back to where he felt like he was making a difference. He felt his military training prepared him to make a positive contribution, and he loved being engaged in an important mission, even if that meant leaving his civilian job, expectant wife, and two young girls while he returned working overseas. Chris explained he would be granted a three-month leave stateside for every six months he worked overseas.

Many of the participants talked about workplace adjustments they experienced in transition from their military role back to their civilian career. One of the challenges these participants faced was the ability to find worth and genuine meaning in their day-to-day tasks as a civilian compared to the high operations tempo and the focus on teamwork required during a military deployment. Six of the 25 participants (36%) shared their desire to return to a civilian career similar to the work they did while deployed. In fact, all six participants changed jobs within the first two years of their transition back from a post-9/11 deployment to one that more closely resembled the work they did while deployed. George, a member of the Air National Guard, described his challenge in making the adjustment to the civilian workplace. He stated:

I returned to the civilian workforce after serving as a traditional National Guard member, and wearing my uniform daily for 18 months, I had a hard time adjusting. I put my civilian work clothes on, and I worked along with my civilian co-workers who did not seem to care about their job. I also saw the way our civilian employer treated us, the employees, as if we were just a human

commodity. My civilian co-workers were not working as part of a team, and I missed that aspect of the military. Something was missing.

Participants throughout this study described the feeling as if something was missing from their lives, but they could not put it into exact words. Gina summed up her feeling of emptiness by stating, “It is the loss of camaraderie that I had with the people I worked with in the military overseas, and shared experiences with, that is missing. I returned to my civilian job and that was all gone.” As part of the transition experience, the Department of Defense provides federal funding for facilitator led workshops to help ease the transition from active duty service to the civilian workplace.

**Theme 3: United in Education — Insider perspectives on DoD workshops.**

*I’m confident that the presenters who are going in and doing these workshops are operating off of PowerPoint presentations that they may or may not have designed themselves. They are not putting themselves in the shoes of those in the room, and they are not striving to make it a really impactful and engaging workshop.*

*Lt. Col, Marine Corps Reserve*

Depending on the branch of service and whether or not the service members belonged to active duty, National Guard or Reserves, the level of participation in a transition workshop among service members varied. For active duty personnel, transition workshops are a mandated pre-separation requirement; they include counseling services and optional sessions on employment preparation. However, Department of Defense (DOD) transition workshops offered to service members in the National Guard and Reserves may be non-existent; if made available, they are a shortened version of the active duty mandated curriculum (GAO, 2005a).

In 2012, President Obama announced the newly-designed Transition Assistance Program, titled, “Transition Goals, Plans, Success” or Transition GPS, which was implemented in a two-part phase in 2013 and 2014. Based on prior research about service members, the newly designed

Transition GPS was much more comprehensive and included mandatory and optional adult learning opportunities to contain the following curriculum (Kelly, 2012):

1. Pre-separation counseling (completion of a checklist not less than 90 days before separating or retiring from military service).
2. Core curriculum included: financial planning, military occupational code crosswalk (translating military skills to civilian jobs), and Veterans Administration briefings regarding benefits and entitlements.
3. Optional workshops: Educational counseling (service members interested in post-secondary education at a two-year or four-year college or university), or an entrepreneurship track (service members interested in pursuing self-employment).
4. Capstone (this was a singular event measuring the potential success, or career readiness standards, to prepare each service member for post-military success).

All 25 participants were familiar with the Department of Defense transition workshops. These workshops were offered to both active duty and reservists. Participants, who served with the National Guard, were invited to attend a retreat known as the Yellow Ribbon Reintegration Program (YRRP) shortly after they returned home from their overseas deployment. Participants either participated in a transition workshop; did not receive information regarding the transition workshop, or elected not to participate. Leo, a member of the Army National Guard, commented,

We had a week of, I guess, debriefing, helping you transition out of active duty, but I believe most of us were just focused on let me get home, and let me get out of this uniform. Let me get back to living my life. I think it would probably be beneficial to spend more time just with a little more socializing and re-acclimating

yourself to the real world as opposed to walking around with a gun 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. No matter where you are, constantly being on that heightened state of awareness of everything that is going on around you.

For some participants, the timing of the transition workshop played a significant role as to how beneficial the information was and the attendees' level of interest. According to Leo, his interest in the workshop was minimal because all he wanted to do was to return home. He stated,

You are going to sit through a ton of briefs. Now we were going to get you home as fast as possible, and I do not think most people who sit in those briefs are really paying attention. I remember directly seated in these briefings, these sessions where we were being told about how to develop a resume, things like that, but we were all so checked out, we all just wanted to get home, that it was not beneficial.

Other participants attending transition workshops relayed their experiences with the program's delivery. Patricia, an Army reservist, described her experience as follows:

When we got back to Fort Hood, they put us in a classroom, and it was very much PowerPoint-heavy. In the military, we like to say "death by PowerPoint." And it was a very rushed: here's your packet, here's your book of information on your benefits. They made us all register at the VA. There were two sergeants in the classroom with a bunch of PowerPoints with a bunch of tired soldiers that did not want to pay attention, and after learning what our benefits could be or would be if you needed a disability rating, then we were just sent home.

Mark, an Army reservist, explained how he navigated his way through the system to transition from serving on active duty in a post-9/11 deployment to his reserve unit. He noted,

So you go to a class, and the instructors gloss over what you need to do, like

resume writing, and they did a day where you came in a suit and did a mock interview. It was just a small part of the larger piece of getting out because you had to sign out of five different departments; so it was a bit of a cluster, because no one really tells you how to get out, you have to just figure it out on your own and follow other people.

David, an Army reservist who served for 33 years, suggested the transition support could have been designed differently by grouping participants based on their various levels of work experiences and rank. He concluded,

It is poorly designed, and with my Human Resources certification background, it appears they did not bother enlisting professionals in transitioning programs who know how to do this for a living. They contracted people out to do it, who had, in my opinion, minimal training and they certainly were not certified professionals like a SAP or PHP. They did not have the right tools to support everybody who was making the transition from an active duty assignment back to the civilian world.

David served as a colonel in the Army Reserve with years of civilian Human Resource work experience prior to attending the mandatory transition workshop. He added,

If you are Reserve or National Guard, you'll go to a military base that has it; for me it is Fort Sam Houston in San Antonio, TX, and it was a 1-week program at Fort Sam Houston. You learn how to write resumes, you learn how to do job searches on the Internet, some very, very basics on Linked-In, and then try to do some type of questionnaires on trying to find what field best suits you. It is very amateurish.

As a seasoned professional in the civilian workplace, David thought the transition workshop was designed for a younger demographic. He noted,

There are two different Yellow Ribbon Programs. One is your reintegration post-deployment; it starts with pre-deployment and includes family. That is more to readjust back into; hey welcome back from your deployment and things may have changed while you were gone. Then there is a Yellow Ribbon Program which is dealing with job searches. I looked at it, and again, it was tailored towards your junior enlisted first termers looking for initial entry blue collar jobs.

Collin, on the other hand, was new to the civilian employment scene. As a Marine Corps reservist, he found the session regarding resume writing to be beneficial. He noted,

As far as transitioning to civilian life and civilian jobs and stuff, about the only thing they helped us do was develop resumes. That was probably the biggest thing I took out of TAP was developing resumes, and it is just because most people, especially in the Marine Corp infantry, believe that the stuff that they did does not equate to anything out in the civilian life. So they took key words of things that they did in the Marine Corps that you would never have thought could transition to something in the civilian life, and I believe there was a website that we could go to and type in like “machine gunner,” and it would tell you something that it related to in the civilian workplace. That was the biggest takeaway I got from doing that workshop.

Much of the feedback about attending the Department of Defense (DOD) workshops focused on the delivery and content. Thomas, a Marine Corps reservist, stated,

I am confident that the presenters who are going in and doing this are operating

off of PowerPoint presentations that they may or may not have designed themselves. They are not putting themselves in the shoes of those in the room, and they are not striving to make it a really impactful and engaging workshop.

Thomas served as a lieutenant colonel and also as an attorney for the CIA. He concluded, Maybe it is just the way the legislation is written, or there are regulations where everyone has to go through the exact same thing. It does not make sense because nothing in life is really like that. So I do not know what the solution is except make it not so boring and try to customize it for the people. If you have a colonel in the room or a lieutenant colonel, he's going to have a whole different experience than a corporal.

I just do not think that much time or effort is paid to the quality of instruction during that 1-week process, which is unfortunate. These workshops only work in a government environment where people have to sit in a chair and have to listen to that, and there are no repercussions for that person facilitating the workshop.

It did not appear to make a difference which branch of service the participant served with respect to their experience attending the Department of Defense transition workshops, because the curriculum is designed for all military veterans.

The differentiating factor between the branches of services was the amount of support each participant received from their home unit or the amount of information regarding the workshops was shared. Whether or not the workshop was mandatory also was not influenced by the branch of service, but by the unit commander, who ordered his or her members to attend. For instance, Joseph, a Marine Corps officer, described his involvement in the transition workshop by stating,

It was about a week, so you had the mental health and the physical health assessments. You also have, regardless if you were already employed; you have to sit through a week's worth of classes that are divided into three sections: going to school, going to find work and entrepreneurship.

He also observed that the transition workshops were an inclusive environment consisting of active duty military, National Guard members, and reservists transitioning either out of the military for good, or military members transitioning back to their respective National Guard or Reserve units. He added,

Another issue is that, especially when you group us in with the active duty Marines who were transitioning out, a number of them were your troublemakers, guys who tested positive for drug abuse or were getting kicked out because of one too many DUIs or this reason, that reason. So they were very disruptive. Your instructor is civilian, and you have a bunch of young Marines who are getting out, and their interest as far as maintaining order, maintaining discipline has diminished, so they were there just to have a good time. They were there to joke around; they were there not to really listen to what's going on, and the information that was being delivered.

The newly designed Transition Goals, Plans, Success (GPS) workshops are provided by military services and partnering agencies or third-party vendors, who have been vetted and approved by the Department of Defense, to facilitate specific content as part of the curriculum. Joseph found the content useful but struggled with delivery. Joseph noted,

When you have a civilian who is the wife, and what I kept hearing is "I am the wife of this Marine, or I am the wife of that Marine," and you hear the Marines

just go “Oh, you are one of those.” But you are a spouse who thinks they know everything about what it is like to be a Marine, so there is an immediate wall that is just slammed up. It is completely brick and mortar between the instructor and the group, because it is either these individual issues or a mix of them that they do not want to be there. They are dreaming about what it is like to finally get out, if you are active duty, even if you are reservist, you just came back from deployment or you are finally leaving active duty and the only thing you can think about is what it is like to get home, and not have to wake up at 0600 every morning or 0530.

You have PT, you get yelled at or be out in the desert in 110 degrees with flies the size of softballs coming at you, having to go to the bathroom in front of people, having to deal with the local populace over there, maybe getting shot at, maybe not, trying to avoid getting blown up. The last thing you want to do is be stuck in a classroom with 35 people having a civilian instruct you on stuff. It is very valuable information. I do not question the information that is being given. It is the delivery.

The majority of the participants in this dissertation study recognized the knowledge gap between civilians and military veterans. In an article titled, *Americans and Their Military, Drifting Part*, Eikenberry (2013) wrote, “Less than 0.5 percent of the population serves in the armed forces, compared with more than 12 percent during World War II” (p. 17). So finding instructors to facilitate military transition assistance workshops presents its own set of challenges. However, these same professionals with no military experience offer important perspectives on reintegrating to the civilian workplace that cannot be dismissed. Based on the

participants' responses, it was not the level of expertise that created a roadblock to their learning. Rather, the challenges came from attempting to relate to military veterans' experiences based on being married to a military veteran. For instance, Joseph observed,

I think it should be a service member who could better communicate to the group to which they are speaking, as opposed to a civilian who will say, When my husband or my wife came back from Afghanistan or Iraq . . . , You can just see the eyes just go up to the ceiling and the bodies just slouch and the groans just coming out. So in the first 10 seconds of the class, they've lost the group.

Today, the newly designed transition workshops offer service members a choice, which was not done prior to 2012. According to Wilcox (2012) in her review of a Department of Defense press release notes, one of our fundamental responsibilities as a government is to prepare and support those serving in our military properly so they are career ready as they transition back into civilian life. With this new initiative, we can better ensure veterans receive the care, benefits and employment services they have earned, said Secretary of Veterans Affairs Eric Shinseki (August, 2012). Wilcox believes, this collaborative effort will have an impact well beyond this current generation of individuals returning from combat (Wilcox, 2012).

In the past, the Transition Assistance Program (TAP) was really designed to support retention and retirees entering employment, but it did not reflect the fact that the vast majority do not spend 20 years in the military. Indeed, 80 percent now depart with less than 20 years of service. The one-size-fits-all was helpful in the early '90s but did not reflect current day realities, (Clark, 2014).

Efforts to revamp the Transition Assistance Program (TAP) have gained momentum during the past decade since the U.S. has been at war post-September 11, 2001.

The newly designed Transition Goals, Plans, Success (Transition GPS) was implemented in a two-part phase in 2013 and 2014. Some participants in this dissertation study believe the transition workshops are helpful, but still do not meet the needs of experienced National Guard members and reservists, who already have established civilian careers. For others, learning how to write a resume was helpful to those making the transition to new careers upon being discharged from a long active duty assignment. Sharon, a Navy reservist, shared her experience by stating,

I took Transition GPS, which was mandated, and it was helpful a little bit. I did set up an extra appointment to write a resume with one of the counselors, and then I took an additional class on the post-9/11 Montgomery GI Bill; it was a one-on-one class.

Another participant in this dissertation study did not agree with requiring everyone transitioning from active duty to attend the same transition workshop. Susan, an officer with the Navy Reserve, found the mandated transition workshop should have been divided between members leaving the military and those transitioning from an active duty deployment back to their Reserve unit. She commented,

Most of the people in the class, it seemed to me, were getting out, not on their own decision. It sounded like they were getting kicked out, so I felt as though the speakers were a little bit condescending, just in the sense of assuming that most people in the room did not have an education or that they did not know how to find jobs or how to interview or how to dress. They seemed like nice enough people, but I just kind of sat there like, all right, well I guess you've got to talk to your audience.

Susan also felt her experience could have been different if the workshop had been tailored to those seeking higher education versus attendees who were college graduates. Susan concluded, by adding:

For me, coming from my background with Milwaukee School of Engineering (MSOE) and Marquette University and stuff, I was hoping to get a little bit more out of it. There were some basic things I probably could have just found on Pinterest, like how to dress for an interview. They were just very basic to me, and they were probably as generic as you could find, which was thoughtful, but maybe it could have been a little bit better. I am trying to think of each person, but I do not know, one of the ladies, she had people come up to the front of the class and model their outfits, and then she would critique them in front of the class. So if you wore black pants with no black shoes, that was a problem.

National Guard members receive an invitation to attend a 1-week retreat known as the Yellow Ribbon Reintegration Program (YRRP). The federal government funds the 5-day workshop and, according to some of the participants in this dissertation study, it was mandatory. That said, some did not receive information on how to attend. John, a member of the Air National Guard explained,

There is a series of classes and informational events that are put together so that everybody coming back from deployment has the opportunity to know what their entitlements are on one side and what the opportunities are, get you some direction maybe in certain areas that you are struggling with. Maybe you are looking for a job. Maybe you are looking to get a loan for business. Maybe you are looking for educational benefits. The first couple of times there was a lot more

emphasis on bad behaviors to avoid, especially drinking and driving was a big one. People come back from deployment feeling kind of bulletproof, and especially when you are young and bulletproof, that can be a dangerous situation, so they want to regroup and kind of settle you back down.

The Yellow Ribbon Reintegration Program (YRRP) created in 2008, is designed to prepare National Guard members and their families for deployment; help National Guard members communicate with family members during the deployment; and assist military veterans transitioning back with their families, communities, and employers after deployment. The YRRP is a legislatively mandated program that encompasses a supportive network of veteran service organizations at both the federal and state levels. Its goal is to provide information and resources and to remain proactive throughout the deployment cycle. Since National Guard members and reservists are often geographically scattered throughout the United States, numerous events are scheduled where they also invite members of the Reserves to attend assuming permission from their respective Reserve commander.

For two National Guard members, their experiences with the YRRP varied between not being beneficial to being very helpful. Kathy, a member of the Air National Guard, noted,

There is Yellow Ribbon. It is terrible. It is cool that we get to hang out and get paid, but it literally does nothing for me. It was a bunch of things saying that you shouldn't kill yourself, essentially. The financial thing was cool about it. Since you have this chunk of money, a lot of people have that when they come back from a deployment, so how to invest it or pay off your debts. It was cool learning about that, but I do not really have any of those problems.

Mary, another member of the Air National Guard returning from a post-9/11 deployment, was

aware of the Yellow Ribbon Reintegration Program but did not attend until months after returning home. According to her,

We came back and I remember that we had to do the Yellow Ribbon Program, but there was not a good awareness of when we had to do it. So we came home and we were like awesome, we were home. There is a lot focused on resume building and job searching in case you do not have a job. I think that is meant to be transition back to the civilian workplace, but I think the focus is more heavily on those who do not have something to transition to or are searching for something to transition to than those who are already pretty established.

Once she did attend, she found it to be beneficial. But, she also mentioned that it takes a certain level of maturity to appreciate all of the benefits and assistance the government is providing without any additional cost to the military member or unit. Mary expanded,

Yellow Ribbon I would say is probably one of our only formal support systems, something that is formalized, required, and it is mandated. You will go or other things will not fall in line because it is commander dictated, and I understand why it is, and a lot of people really complain about it, because it is your time, it is your weekend. But, I guess maybe as you mature a little bit, you start to realize that they are trying to offer you good things and they are trying to be helpful to you.

One of the vendors retained to facilitate the transition workshops for the Department of Defense is the American Red Cross. Mary found the volunteers helped her with the transition experience because the discussions provided her with additional resources. She described her experience by stating,

They had volunteers from the Red Cross come in and teach an anger management

class, and there are these breakout sections, and you could sign up for the ones you wanted to go to, so there were several we wanted to go to, but we all wanted to go to that one from my group. It was good because we talked about the fact that we were very quick to anger and that anger was actually something that motivated us and that kept us going and that kept us able to function at a high pace of what we were required to do and to continue to function at that pace.

She added that even though the volunteers did not offer solutions, they were able to provide sound, helpful recommendations. She concluded,

Even though they did not necessarily have cures for us, they had recommendations, and the fact that we were sitting in a room and recognizing amongst each other that we had similar feelings or emotions that we weren't talking about because we did not realize that anybody else had that going on with them, that was helpful.

While active duty members receive a full range of transition services, members of the National Guard and Reserves participate in an abbreviated version of Transition GPS because they are often released from active duty within days after they return from overseas. With the increased role of National Guard members and reservists in military operations around the world, resources are becoming available to help them successfully transition from the military back to civilian life. The fourth theme in this study emphasizes the need to provide additional government funded resources for members of the National Guard and Reserves to help ease their transition.

#### **Theme 4: To have, or not to have, transition support.**

*The leadership is very involved in that transition out from a deployment back into the Reserve component, back into the civilian sector. Your leadership is a very integral part of that transition, because they know things about you, more than any health care provider knows sitting across from you, that person does not know you the way your leadership knows you.*  
Captain, Marine Corps Reserve

According to Robertson (2013) and Schlossberg et al. (1995) the transition process is a defined, multi-faceted experience. They outline three facets of the human adaption to the transition process: (a) the individual perception of the transition, (b) the environment and its unique characteristics, and (c) the individual's characteristics. Each of the three facets includes another layer to consider. For example, the perception of the person includes the timing, onset, and duration of the transition. The environmental characteristics include support from the organization, family, and friends, and the physical setting the transition is taking place. Finally, adapting to the transition process includes the individual's ability to weigh both the advantages and disadvantage during the transition process.

The lived experiences of National Guard members and reservists serving with the U.S. Army and Marine Corps during the transition phase of their deployments provided insights on not only the resources made available to them during their transition, but also the lack of resources compared to the more structured workshops offered to their active duty counterparts. Chris, a member of the Army National Guard, offers this comparison:

We went through McCoy, the ACAP program that the Army has, it was not around. They are talking about you are now considered a wartime veteran; here's what this means for you as far as benefits, and they mainly focused on benefits, not getting re-employed. PTSD was not a big thing that people were talking about at the time. They were just like hey you are home, welcome back; you are going

to be here for a couple of weeks and you have 90 days to go back to work. It was really unstructured compared to what we have right now. Nobody knew any better.

For other members of the Army Reserve, the transition assistance offered focused on mental health resources to ease the transition from serving in a combat zone. Janelle, an Army reservist, said the workshop facilitators focused on making sure she did not have any underlying psychological concerns. According to her, she was focused on returning home, not completing a psychological review. She noted,

I wouldn't say too much. They always offer the psychological review, and if you have any concerns, to ask, but a lot of people just want to get home to their families, so you do not stay around to get that additional assistance. Then afterward, it is more like you get off deployment, you just go back to reserve life, so there is not really a good transition or any follow up after a deployment.

After reflecting on her transition experience, Janelle thought she suffered from depression, but she did not want to disclose it at the time of her psychological review. She elaborated on her experience by sharing,

When you transition off of active duty, you go through the medical phase to make sure that you are stable enough to go back to the civilian world. Through the interaction and counseling that I had with my friend on that deployment, it kind of led me to think that it would be okay to talk about that I have depression, or that I was going through something that might need more assistance.

Many participants in this study shared some of their opinions on how the transition assistance could have been handled better to ease the experience. Grant, an Army reservist, concluded,

A lot of it was incumbent on us, and basically we tried to get through it as fast as possible. So I was thinking that maybe it could have been done differently. There really was not a need to do a lot of that stuff there.

Part of the transition assistance offered during the workshops focused on resume writing and how to find civilian employment. The majority of National Guard members and reservists are already working in full time civilian careers while serving in the military. The courses on resume writing did not offer additional assistance. According to Grant, he felt updating his resume could have been completed prior to returning home. He offered the following suggestion:

As far as for work and education, those are things that can be done during the deployment, and throughout deployment. Like a resume. Why are you waiting until the last minute to build it? And a lot of it is on the soldier and stuff like that, but we as leadership could be building in mechanisms, benchmarks as you are going through deployment — so that way at the end of deployment, you are not like a week trying to work with contractors and stuff like that when you do not really care at that point and it is, like, I want to go home.

Much of the emphasis shared by participants was focused on wanting to return home to their families after their long deployment. They did not want to sit in a transition assistance workshop updating their civilian resumes. Grant elaborated,

I want to go back to work, I want to go back to my family, I want to go to whatever. I did my time, I do not want to put any more time in, now you are forcing me to do stuff, and some of it is cheesy, some of whatever, they do not really want to be there. I think they can get a better bang for the buck if they were to try and work the education and the employment, re-employment, new

employment throughout the deployment.

Other participants felt a lack of transition assistance based on being a member of the reserve components of the military. James, an Army reservist, stated, “I fell through the cracks, and my unit back in Vicksburg knew how to deal with active duty stuff, but they did not know how to deal with a reservist.” Because he was in a transition period that lacked transition assistance from a unit his experience made him feel he was on his own throughout the process. He concluded,

I was basically a soldier without a unit. My active duty unit, when I came back, was also getting disestablished, my Reserve unit was disestablished, and I was in the Inactive Ready Reserve (IRR), which takes no responsibility for anybody, you are just in a black hole.

Those feelings left him disgruntled, particularly since he was wounded while serving on active duty. Even though he was a colonel in the U.S. Army, he felt there was an absence of resources available to him because he was a reservist. He shared his experience transitioning as not only a member of the Reserves but also carrying the status of a wounded warrior. He noted,

So if you are wounded, a reservist and at the end of your time, I was one of those lost guys going through the system. I was bitter and still am kind of bitter the way I just got kicked out the door. I have talked to a few reservists, and the ones that are in the senior ranks the same as I am, they basically got kicked out the door with no support. And a lot of the reservists would get cross-leveled into other units, so you were basically an orphan into that unit. They did not know you and so forth, and then when you came back, you either went back to your unit, but if you are injured, you lost your support system of the old unit and the deployed

unit, and they got treated like crap.

Not all members of the National Guard and Reserves are attached to active duty bases, where resources and assistance are readily available. Many of the National Guard and Reserve units are smaller units located throughout the United States where National Guard members and reservists drill on the weekends. As a result, many of the resources and transition assistance is either non-existent or located a great distance from a National Guard member's or reservist's home. James suggested,

I have had some of my Reserve folks, in fact, last month one of them committed suicide. The support system fails for PTSD, especially when there are folks that are . . . if you are in a big city or near a military base, you can get there, but if you are out in the middle of like Wisconsin, it is not there. And the VA can't reach out to them. It is too hard for the VA to provide. They can come up with all of the great statistics they can, but it is the ones that really, really need the help, and they can't get to it, it is too much trouble.

For other participants, the lack of access to resources was the same. Patricia of the Army Reserve found her geographical location of her Reserve unit permitted her from gaining the same transition assistance compared to those serving on active duty. She explained,

I also feel because maybe we do not have those sorts of resources locally to us as opposed to being on a base. That is why that might be the case, because you never really truly can close it if you do not have someone to call. Hey, I need help with this. I need help with that. If any of us need VA assistance, it is not readily available to us, as it would be to active duty.

Patricia described her experience as not having any support through the transition, regardless of

whether she needed it or not. Patricia explained,

Coming back and transitioning back, I want to say that everything I have seen in every reserve soldier who is a friend of mine, once we got back, once we got on the plane in New York to go to our respective cities, that was it. You did not want to deal with it anymore? I just felt like we did not have any support after that. It is not that you shut down; you just did not have anybody there supporting you. Whether you needed it or not, it was not offered. If you had gone to the unit, it just did not seem like it was there.

As a member of the Army Reserve, Patricia recollected her transition experience from completing the necessary paperwork upon being discharged from active duty to what she experienced weeks after returning home as a civilian. Here she revealed,

Once you do the paperwork, you got your DD-214; they got you out of there at Fort Hood. The people responsible for the transition process, where you go through all of your stations, once you were done, they got you in there and out of there as fast as humanly possible, and then got you on the plane to go home. Once you got home, your only support, whether anything or any kind of help, would have been whatever your unit could offer to you, if they could offer anything. You weren't followed up with, you weren't, Hey, how is everything going? Hey, do you have a job? Is everything okay in your job? I did not feel like the support was there from the Army itself in terms of programs that they had set up to do any extended . . . not even extending it a month after or so.

Another Army reservist experienced a level of confusion as he transitioned from serving in a post-9/11 deployment. Mark was given a packet of information and informed he had to have

certain individuals sign off his checklist. In fact, much of the transition assistance came from finding other reservists who had experienced the same thing. He explained,

It is very confusing. You are like, Oh, I am getting out, so what do I have to do, and then eventually you'll find someone who is going through the same thing. Oh, you need to call these people and set up an appointment to get your paperwork started, and you are like, Oh, I wish I would have known that. So you do that. Then they just give you a huge packet of things that you need to sign out of, and you go to these places and then they are like, Oh no, you have to go here first before you can even sign out of this place. So you have to go all of the way across post to try and sign out of there, and then they are like, Oh no, you have to go here first and do this. It is very confusing.

Marvin, a Marine Corps reservist, found transition assistance within his own unit and was not offered any formal assistance. He explained,

To be honest, the formal programs were pretty meager. A lot of the transition programs that were available to me or the units I was in were internal, so we did have outside representatives from different agencies or organizations that came in and talked about returning back to normal life, but the programs themselves were, you come back immediately and you can't go on leave right away because they want you all together and to kind of adjust together on the base. Other than that, the formal programs were really only if you sought them.

Collin, a Marine Corps reservist, described his experience attending a formal transition workshop. He said, "Most of it was geared towards how to blend in with your family or how to rejoin your family to steer clear of domestic violence issues." For other Marine Corps reservists,

the transition experience was not that smooth. For instance, Thomas, a Marine Corps reservist, transitioned to a regional medical facility after being shot in the head while serving in a post-9/11 deployment. After numerous surgeries, he was cleared to return working as an FBI agent and looked forward to reporting back to his Reserve unit. For Thomas, the transition out of the Reserves came as a surprise. Thomas explained,

I contacted my boss at my Reserve unit in October about something about an upcoming drill, and he said, “Oh, by the way, did you know that you were retired?” And so I was never notified it had gone through. It was pretty lame as far as I was concerned; that is how it happened. I would have taken advantage of the Transition GPS. I went through that program when I first left active duty, but it was not as a wounded warrior. I really was not on the same radar as everyone else. I do not know why, though, because as a reservist, I should have been on people’s radars and my retirement date coming up.

Thomas was very familiar with the transition assistance process because he served as an attorney for the Marine Corps Reserve. He explained that no transition assistance was offered to him. Instead he received an unexpected notification from his Marine Corps unit that he was honorably discharged and no longer a Marine Corps reservist. He concluded,

There was no transition. Granted, I was a reservist; I was working full time for the FBI at the time. But there was no notification or preparation at all. So it was a really bothersome situation, and it was part of the transition because I was now out. I was working full time and getting care, I certainly was not the only one in this situation.

He had access to a lot of resources because of his rank as a lieutenant colonel and the fact he was

an attorney for the Marine Corps Reserve. Thomas expressed his concern for other National Guard members and reservists who did not have access to the same resources as he did.

There are 50,000 of us who have grievous injuries and survived like I did, so it was a very disappointing part of the recovery, and no one who I talked to at DOD could seem to help with that. I was on my own. Fortunately, because I met some of the right people, I was able to transition into a job there. I do not know what would have happened if I was in middle America or did not have the connections I did, because when I was recovering from my injury, there was no instruction with anyone about getting prepared to go back to work and counseling for that or what life would be like.

The experience shared by Thomas transitioning from a post-9/11 deployment also included being medically discharged due to the severity of his head injuries. This resulted in him having to navigate through various governmental agencies on his own. As he explained, even when he contacted the Marine Corps help line, he was unable to access the assistance he felt he needed to ease his transition. Thomas remarked,

There was not someone I could call and say, help with this. Yes, the Marine Corps may have had a number of their call center, but whenever I raised this issue, they had no idea what I was talking about and were of no help, so I was purely on my own and calling person after person.

Having access to transition assistance and transition resources remains an important piece of this study. Thomas was able to navigate his way through the system by attending high-profile events where he had personal access to people he knew could be of assistance to him. However, he also acknowledged that his position with the FBI, and being an attorney, had its privileges,

and this is something he knows the majority of National Guard members and reservists making the same transition do not have. He concluded,

The vast majority do not. Like on Capitol Hill, I went to some event and Tricare was a sponsor, so I found the highest person there and told them about my problem, and they put me in touch with the right person. Most people are not bumping into people like that. I am competent, but there are many others who had significant problems who weren't in DC with the contacts I had.

For Joseph, the transition experience as Marine Corps reservist was simplified to answering a few yes or no questions and asking whether or not he felt like harming another person. He observed,

There are a lot more nuances that are in the deployment transition as opposed to just coming off of leaving active duty. There is a lot of mental health and physical health review. You do a number of tests. You have a quick questionnaire where you sit down with somebody, and they ask you a number of questions and you answer, typically yes/no. Those questions are along the lines of: do you have headaches? Do you feel like harming somebody for no particular reason? But again, it is more of a checking-the-box dynamic than it is getting into the weeds, which I do not necessarily put on the ownership of the program.

In contrast to other participants who struggled through the transition process, Joseph found his transition to be very positive. He not only received support from his Marine Corps unit but also from the leadership within his unit. He discussed the importance of having his leadership team help with his transition:

The leadership is very involved in that transition out when you transition out from

a deployment back into the reserve component, back into the civilian sector. Your leadership is a very integral part of that transition, because they know things about you that whatever the health provider is sitting across from you, that person does not know you the way your leadership knows you. They did not just serve the last 7 months or year or however long it was that your leadership did. So leadership might be aware that you had some family issues going on back home when you left, so he or she may be a little bit more dialed into what's going on, whereas the person sitting across from you, if you do not volunteer that information, he or she is not going to be any wiser onto those issues.

Susan, an officer with the Navy Reserve, discovered she was her own best asset during the transition phase; a role that suits her because she described herself as being someone who enjoys being independent. This is how she described her transition experience:

The best way I can kind of describe all of the transition stuff I did was a lot of hand-holding, and I am not that type of person. I do not like when people hold my hand through things, I just go and do it. It is too slow for me. I feel like I get things more efficiently when I do it myself, and then some people just baby you through it.

For Gina, member of the Air National Guard, she found talking with other military members with like experiences eased her transition process. These conversations became an informal resource for adjusting to her return. She reported,

It was very helpful because when you come back from a situation like that, you try to talk to somebody that does not understand what you went through. They look at you like you are just insane, like you are making stories up.

Gina explained that she felt she could only consult with other female military members who shared similar experiences. She acknowledged her civilian training as a sheriff helped her have a sense of heightened awareness, but she was not prepared to deal with the adjustments she experienced upon her return. Gina described how she used other military officers as a resource to ease her transition:

One of the other officers was my friend that had been in Saudi Arabia. So she understood even more so what I had been through. I had another friend that was deployed, she was at Guantanamo Bay, so again, that is a little bit closer, but still, it is still not an easy situation being down there either. So I was able to connect with them more so than anyone else because there are other guys that I work with at the sheriff's office that had been deployed, but it is a little different when you are a female coming back. You can relate to your man counterparts for the most part, but there is a different dynamic when you are talking with another female officer that has been in the same situation as you and has felt the same things. It is just a different dynamic. I do not even know how to explain it; it is just different.

Initially, Gina did not seek counseling because she felt using her contacts were a way for her to adjust to civilian life. Rather quickly, though, she discovered she needed additional assistance.

She shared,

When I came back from deployment, I did not see a counselor when I came back from when I was in Iraq because I felt like I did not need to this time, but I actually did. I started talking to somebody just to try to help me with this transition, but also with my husband, because I had a very, very, very difficult time with my family, to the point where we were considering divorcing. I did not

know what to do to help him, he did not know what to do to help me, so I am like, oh my gosh, I have to go talk to somebody. So I ended up seeing a counselor, and I still go just to kind of keep up with it, but I have been seeing him since I got back, and that has helped tremendously.

Some of the participants had access to a full-time mental health professional at their base to assist with their post-9/11 transition. Mary noted,

Here on base, we have our director of psychological health, and she's right in our building, located on our Guard base. She works very hard to reach out to us, and I guess part of her personality is different than the previous ones we've had, and I think her personality meshes a little bit better with the unit. I think awareness is growing of her and of her as a viable resource, and then we have Military One Source which is very valuable because they do not report to your chain of command. So people who are nervous about that, and I understand, I get it, you do not want people to think you are crazy, even though we were all a little crazy, so what does it matter? That is there, and they will not report. The only thing they are bound to report is if you are telling them straight out that you are suicidal.

Transitioning from a regimented military job to a civilian career was challenging for many of the participants in this study. After returning, National Guard members and reservists found it difficult adjusting to a barrage of changes all at once: new careers, friends and relatives who did not understand their experiences, and some with military-related health concerns. A fifth theme that emerged in this study is returning home to what some referred to as their new normal.

### **Theme 5: Wrestling with a new normal.**

*I know I will never be the Marine I once was. My career as a trial lawyer is over.  
I know that I will now, and for the rest of my life, have problems eating, drinking, speaking,  
and remembering things. I deal with those obstacles every day,  
but I still consider myself one of the luckiest people alive.  
Justin Constantine, Lt Col (Ret.), U.S. Marine Corps Reserve*

National Guard members and reservists described their level of responsibility coupled with their level of authority dropped significantly compared to what they experienced working in the military when they were discharged. Not only had their type of work changed in their absence, but the civilian world as they knew it before being activated had gone on without them. This is the fifth theme what some National Guard members and reservists described as adjusting to a “new normal” way of life. Leo, a member of the Army National Guard, described his transition experience and his struggle to find “normal”. He stated,

I do not know that I ever spent a whole lot of time processing the difference. I think a lot of it was just trying to get back to normal. That feeling of normal. I did not look forward to spending, there were guys that I deployed with that were out of work for 6 months not working, just kind of living it up, living off the money that they made in Iraq and enjoying life again, and I could not imagine doing something like that, just sitting around not doing anything. I think it was just important for me to get back to doing what was comfortable, what was normal before deployment.

Transitioning home after serving in a post-9/11 deployment can be just as challenging as it was serving in a combat zone. National Guard members and reservists may also find their civilian jobs have changed; they have new co-workers and different assignments. The feelings of being anxious, and constantly focusing on potential dangers and feeling irritable and impatient

are some of the experiences shared by participants in this study.

The participants in this study described the feeling upon returning home as being “different”. Some National Guard members and reservists described being “different” as nothing appeared to be important for a while. Others struggled to reconnect with family and friends. Some participants felt that people in their civilian workplace did not appreciate or understand what they have been through, but mentioned it was difficult making the adjustment to reintegrating into their civilian world. For Leo, serving in a combat zone meant being on high alert all of the time. In transitioning home, Leo shared how he experienced making the adjustment; an adjustment he referred to a new sense of normalcy. He explained,

I am constantly aware of what is going on around me. I am constantly sitting in the corner chair, keeping an eye on the room and what’s going on around me. I wouldn’t say it is necessarily preparing for combat in every single meeting I go to, but it is just kind of instilled in me to know what’s going on around me, keep awareness of where I am located in the room, prepared for whatever could happen. So yeah, when I went back to work, I definitely recognized that my head was always on a swivel; I am always looking out, what’s going on around me, where the potential risks and dangers are, and what can be done to alleviate those dangers.

Leo shared the strategies he used to adjust to what he described as being his new normal. He said,

I think my strategies were really just trying to get back to a sense of normalcy, getting back to work right away, going out, having fun, spending time with old friends and spending time with guys from my unit. Definitely spent time Up

North by my parents' cabin just decompressing. I do not know that there was an intentional set of things that I was doing to help with that transition. I think it was more subconscious, just get back to what I know.

Other participants transitioning back to their civilian job learned the importance of remaining patient with other people, and giving others a chance to adjust having them back at work. Chris, a member of the Army National Guard, mentioned he did not want to share what he experienced while deployed with his civilian co-workers. He recollected,

I remember just not fitting in very well with people around me. I preferred not to mention about my military experience, because nobody could relate because you get stupid questions, like how many people did you kill, what is it really like over there? I am, like, I do not know man. I remember one thing they did tell us at McCoy when we got back is like do not watch TV right away, because what you see on TV is not what you know. That was right because it is so sensationalized. Even now, you can kind of read through the lines in the news and say I really do not think it is like that. I really do not think that things are happening just quite that way.

He expanded on the challenges he faced with adjusting to a new way of life with his old friends, returning to his family, and the influence the news media had on him while making the transition to being home after a 1-year deployment overseas. Chris described his experience as follows:

The news kind of flavors things that they want people to think, and I think there is a lot of shock and sensationalism in news to get people to watch. So I just stopped paying attention to the news. Relationships, I had some good friends, they'd say oh, it stinks you've got to go over there man, we'll stay in touch, we'll write.

Nothing. When I came home, it was almost like making new friends again, because I kind of take some affront to that, because hey, man, you are a friend of mine, it is a friend when I am not there, and when I get back, do not just expect me to go and show up and be like nothing happened in the past year or so.

Taking time to make the adjustment to being back to the civilian workforce is something described in great detail by participants in this dissertation study. For instance, some participants acknowledged that they were involved with some extraordinary missions, and the feeling of returning home did not offer the same level of achievement. Making the adjustment and figuring out how to move forward as a civilian again — without losing the importance of the military mission accomplished — was a significant adjustment for many of the participants. Every participant's story was unique, and offered insight to some of the challenges they faced. For example, Chris shared how his family acknowledged a change in his behavior when he returned. He commented,

My family gave me a hard time because that leaves a mark on you, and I would hear, “We want the old you back, when is the old you coming?”, and I am like, this is just me. So the transition with work was a challenge because I thought I was so bored and I just wanted to be doing what I was doing. Then with friends, the friends that I had before just did not seem that close to me anymore, and trying to find new friends or just know more people, meet more people, I just did not want to bring up all of this stuff about the worst of it. I did not want to come off as damaged goods.

When Chris returned to his civilian employer, his boss also noticed a change in his behavior. She suggested Chris may want to seek professional counseling to help him adjust to being back

home. Chris said, “I came back to work and my boss picked up on things, and she goes, you know, we have this resource for you for counseling and things like that, and I am like, I do not need counseling.” Instead he took time to decompress by isolating himself from others and only talked with other Army soldiers who shared his same experiences while serving in a post-9/11 deployment.

James, an Army reservist, described his transition experience by stating,

It is like running a hundred miles an hour and all of a sudden you are going zero and your time is just so focused and you are going, going and going and then you are just absolutely bored out of your mind, and there are no resources there.

Once home, he also described that he was anxious due to what he witnessed serving as a colonel responsible for standing guard each time another military veteran made the ultimate sacrifice. He commented, “There was some anxiety, having to deal with death. I survived 111 rocket attacks, and then I went to quite a few “ramp ceremonies,” almost every other night, there was 1 or more.” A ramp ceremony, as James shared, involved saluting the casket of a fallen veteran as he or she was loaded onto a transport plane back to the United States.

Patricia, an Army reservist, worked as an interrogator in Afghanistan for 18 months. She described what life was like adjusting upon returning home. In her words, she was not prepared to deal with the impact of working as a trained interrogator on her civilian career. She stated,

I wish I would have understood what a toll doing our job does. When you are an interrogator, you are taught you have to play this role. I wish I understood the gravity of what, when you are not practicing anymore, how hard it is and how much you actually have to change. I wish I had known it was going to be that impact. It took me over a year after getting back before I realized it, that you

literally have to sit and look at somebody that has done terrible things, you have to be, as a female, you have to be their best friend. I had to sit there, you hold their hand, you bring them food, you joke, you laugh, you touch them, and you know in your head that it is a game, but then when you take a step back and realize, I was just sitting in front of this person, I was just pretending to be their best friend, it is different.

She elaborated, “When I actually came back, I remember being less emotional and less caring when I left than when I came back. Like you look at sad things and I have more empathy and sympathy now than when I left.” In retrospect, she said,

I look at it now, and I am like, wow, that is real deep psychological manipulation that I not only had to do to someone, that literally I had to place upon myself. We joke that, it is mind screwing that person to get what you need, but to do it well and to get everything you need, you have to do it to yourself, because if you do not do it to yourself, you can’t get in that role to be able to get it from that. I wish I understood the gravity and how much that was going to require changing before I left.

For other National Guard members and reservists their adjustment to a new normal involved working at a much slower pace at a civilian job compared to what life was like on active duty. Mark, an Army reservist, explained,

It was definitely different. I would probably say a lot calmer. There is not a lot of yelling, which I was used to. I am used to people going 100 miles an hour all of the time, and this was a quarter the speed. I was working on a flow team, so the truck would come in, I would help unpack a truck, separate everything, and then

put it all on the floor before the store opened. It just kind of seemed really slow-paced, at least from my standpoint. Everybody else was kind of moving really fast, but it just seemed really slow.

Mark described how he had to learn to breath normally again as part of his adjustment to being back to his civilian job. He went from running on high octane every day while serving in the military to returning home and being able to relax and reflect on what he experienced working as an artillery soldier for the U.S. Army. He said,

I would say you are just so high stressed all of the time that your brain is always going, and you finally have a chance to just sit down on the couch and vegetate for a little while, and you can just take a few deep breaths and be able to just process stuff. That is the best way. I can just sit down and finally breathe. It kind of feels once you are doing that, you do not breathe at all.

During Mark's transition home, he also found that taking too much down time in order to adjust to his new normal drove him to recharge and become engaged again. He concluded,

I started kind of getting bored, and then I wouldn't say my funds were running out, but I just was kind of spending a little bit more money than what I budgeted, and I just was kind of getting real sick of being at home, and I was getting a little bit more frustrated, and I needed a change, I needed to do something, otherwise I was going to go insane.

Collin, a Marine Corps reservist, found that his adjustment to a new normal way of life entailed surrounding himself with friends who also served in the Marine Corps. He explained,

All my friends now, I got rid of all my civilian friends from before the Marine Corps just because the Marines are like on a different level; military members as a

whole are on a different level of friends. They are more dependable, through tough times or good times; I feel like they are just more trustworthy to be around, and for me I guess the biggest one was I had friends that had not really been through any challenging experiences in life, which is not their fault, but I guess I just got tired of people complaining, like, oh, I worked 5 days this week or I worked all 40 hours, and they do not really know, like that life's easy. It is not really something to complain about. You maybe had to work an extra hour overtime. That is what's kind of cool about hanging out with other Marines and military members.

Collin also commented that he no longer kept in contact with his civilian friends. He mentioned that if he needed to talk with someone about what he experienced, he only reached out to other Marines. He remarked,

I do not talk to anybody about it in the civilian sector. When I have issues in life, big or small or whatever, I just go to other Marines. I feel like I just always trust their opinion more than others. I do not know what it is, even over my family; I still just go to them. Most of the time, so far, all of my issues have been encountered by some other Marine, and they always have some valuable insight into how to get through it.

Thomas, a Marine Corps officer and attorney, adjusted to his civilian career after being shot behind the ear while serving in Iraq. The damage from the bullet shattered his entire jaw, and he lost sight in one eye. He described how fortunate he was to be able to maintain a civilian job, even as the severity of his head injuries required ongoing surgeries and medical treatment. He described his experience as follows:

That was challenging for me, because I was lucky enough through some personal connections to get a really good job at the Department of Justice, but I did not have any teeth at the time, or maybe a few teeth, so I drooled all the time, talk was very difficult, that was a job where I was doing appellate level of work with immigration, so it was mostly reading and writing. So that job worked out very well for me, but there was not a whole lot else in place.

When Kevin, a member of the Air National Guard, transitioned to his civilian career, he compared and contrasted his military versus his civilian job. He reported,

When I returned, I think that my role as a military person sort of took over a little more. I think when you deploy, when you are actually in that austere environment, you have a much greater appreciation for what you have back home. People do not understand what long days are until they've been through that. They do not understand how good we actually have it. The general person, the blue collar worker, the people who make minimum wage, they do not understand how good they really have it until they've seen an environment like that. Not speaking specifically to my environment, but just the environment that your general OEF, OIF deployment will take you to.

In transitioning to his civilian job, he found his perspective on life had been altered. He explained,

When I returned, I think I had a much greater appreciation, and you tend to see and pick out things, first world problems that people have, you tend to see those and be a little more skeptical of people and their complaints. I catch myself, I have to remind myself when I do that, because you try to enlighten people about

those situations, but they do not always understand because you do have to put yourself into that situation.

Gina, a member of the Air National Guard, said she did not face any significant challenges during the transition to her civilian job. Gina observed, “When I came back, I honestly was okay. I felt like I was okay. I had never in my life been in that stressful of a situation before.” Gina stated she felt okay initially until she returned to her civilian career as a sheriff in her hometown. Gina described the challenges she faced trying to relate to her co-workers upon transitioning to her civilian job. She said,

You wouldn’t have anybody to really relate to. You are going from a combat zone, and maybe your civilian job is working behind a desk or whatever it may be, and you go back to okay, well, I was just in the middle of hell and now I am sitting in front of a computer and people are talking to me about stuff to me that is irrelevant. I literally just got done with trying to survive, and they are talking to me about such and such, and to me, I do not care. I do not relate to that, I do not care; I do not care if you are upset about somebody talking about you because I literally just got back from being mortared every day. So that to me was a difficult experience to try to relate to somebody that has not been in that situation, and then you have to work with them on top of that.

As a trained law enforcement officer she was well versed in situational awareness, but she also acknowledged that this new heightened sense of awareness was magnified compared to before when she left. She explained, “As far as my situational awareness is concerned now, I have a heightened sense because I am a deputy, but it can become very, very heightened depending on where I am.” As for Gina’s new sense of normalcy she said, “After a while, you kind of just

settle back into reality, whatever that may be.”

Many of the participants in this dissertation study shared how difficult it was transitioning from a very stressful working environment to a civilian job that did not require the same level of stress. Roger, a member of the Air National Guard, did not realize the level of stress he was under until he adjusted to being back in his civilian workplace. He described his experience as follows:

I think for me a lot of it was just coming down and kind of processing in my head everything that happened for the last 7 months, because it is kind of a whirlwind and you do not realize the stress that you are under until all of a sudden you come back and you are like, wow, I really was stressed out, and you do not notice the effect that it is having on you physically until all of a sudden you do not have it any more.

John, a member of the Air National Guard, shared the adjustments he made during his transition by stating,

It probably did not really settle in until I got back home and started kind of navigating; okay, what do I do from here? So when we were gone, we were deployed out for a year, I left kind of one set of life circumstances, deployed and came back. When I came back, I was looking at a new career. I want to go a different direction for my civilian employment. So that was probably the biggest adjustment, okay, now where am I going? What am I doing? How do I sort this out?

John explained what it was like working in a fast-paced environment to adjusting to a much slower pace in his civilian job — his new normal. For him:

It is hard to go back from being focused, nothing else is in your way, to the normal. It is hard to put 100% into anything because you are always moving between here and there. So you are always going between point A and point B, and you've got a thousand different things that are pulling you different directions, whereas deployment, you've got one thing. That is the thing. So that is a little bit of a challenge.

John expressed how he felt his personality was altered upon returning from his deployment by revealing that he was much more relaxed working in his civilian job. He stated,

So I have gotten more patient, and on the plus side, you just do not worry about stuff. You realize I can handle it, or it is just not that big of a deal. So you can really come back with a much more, I guess, kind of a relaxed attitude, as long as you allow it to happen, where you can kind of sit back and look around and go: you know what, that thing's not on fire. If somebody else wants it to be on fire, that is fine. That is not my fire. Not my circuses, not my monkeys, do your thing.

That is kind of nice.

Robert, a member of the Air National Guard, also felt more relaxed upon transitioning from his post-9/11 deployment by elaborating on how he felt upon returning home. He related similar perspectives by stating,

It was a totally different perspective. Little things did not bother me as much, like traffic. Okay, so we were sitting in traffic, and I did not have a lot of patience for negative attitudes, and I just felt totally different. It was kind of a liberating feeling.

Upon adjusting to being around his family, Robert explained he felt "different" but could not

elaborate on why he felt different, it just was. He shared his experience upon returning home by revealing,

Everybody was welcoming and wanted to have parties. That was kind of overwhelming, because I come from a large family, the youngest of 10 kids, and they had a party for me to go, a party to come back, and I just wanted to kind of slip back in and just kind of all right, let me observe, and everything just seemed different. I do not know why, it was just different. Not good, not bad, just it is like you died and then you came back and life just went on without you. Eventually you get back into your patterns again and you get back into normalcy.

I did not have it nearly as bad as the other branches, or even some of our folks too that will see a lot of the combat. Whatever I could do, that is what made me feel good, to help those guys out, because that is what my job was supporting all of the four deployed locations with whatever equipment they needed, so anything they needed to fight the fight, that is what I sent out there. But the downside of my job was I saw all of that stuff come back too. I would see the blown-out Humvees with blood in them. The worst part of my job, the worst and yet the most rewarding, was working human remains (HR) missions coming back, the human remains and carrying the caskets. That was something you'll never forget, but those are the ones that gave the ultimate sacrifice.

A strategy Robert shared that helped him adjust to his new normalcy with both his family and with his civilian co-workers was summed up as follows:

This isn't just affecting your life, it affects the people around you —, your friends, your family if you are married, your kids, and it is a huge impact. You are not just

going to jump in and everything is going to be the way you remembered it was going to be. You have to step in and observe and do not just make snap decisions. You were alone for 6 months or a year, however long you were deployed, and then you come back, and now you've got your old life back, or what seemed like it was your old life back, so take your time. That would be, take your time, do not make any rash decisions. I would just balance; try to keep that balance always.

One aspect of adjusting to a new normal meant leaving behind friendships that were gained during the lengthy deployments. For some of the participants, not being able to work alongside these same military friends that they created close bonds with was extremely difficult to handle during the transition process. Kathy, a member of the Air National Guard, shared her struggles when she returned home. She revealed,

A lot of it was the relationships I developed with those people overseas, and being away from them, it was crazy. We were so tight knit, so attached, and I came back, and I never, ever had relationships like I had in the military. We are so close, and coming back was difficult. I cried a lot.

A strategy Kathy used to adjust was maintaining a strong bond with her sister. She explained,

I developed a deep relationship with my sister, so that was good because we moved in together. She tried to move out, so that really broke me down, and I was like, You are leaving me? You can't leave me. So I made her promise that we would stay together.

In comparison to her civilian career, Kathy acknowledged the long hours she worked with her military co-workers resulted in the strong relationships this created compared to what she experienced working in her civilian job. She expressed this by stating,

It is so completely different, because when you are over there, you are with each other all of the time. You work the 12-hour shifts 6 days a week, and then you have to get along with them. Then you come to your civilian job.

Returning to a new sense of normalcy also meant for Kathy accepting that it was going to take time to come around and resume activities as she knew it prior to her deployment. She shared an example of her experience by remarking how a fellow friend from the Air Force Reserve assisted her when she returned home. She explained,

He was briefing a group of friends, because he was in the Air Force and he was trying to prepare them that I won't exactly be the same when I come back right away; it'll be a little different, so he was trying to prepare them, and they are like, oh, okay. Then I went out and I went to a really crowded bar. The Wisconsin basketball game was going; so everyone was super loud, and I kind of freaked out a little bit because it was like the next day after I came back. So my Air Force friend was, like, just give her some space and let her act a little odd, and she will come around eventually kind of a thing, and I was like hey, thanks for saying that, because my other friends had no idea.

Other aspects of Kathy's adjustment were revealed when she acknowledged the need to accept she had a new perspective on life compared to what she knew before deploying. She shared that she relied heavily on her faith to make the adjustments she needed to reintegrate into her new sense of normalcy upon returning home. She concluded,

It was just so loud, and I had not consumed alcohol at all, all of this time. I was there for 7 months, so coming back and we were in Wisconsin and everybody drinks like crazy, so I came back and I was trying to slowly ease back into it, and

they were like shots and trying to force me to do all of this stuff, and I was, like, okay, I can't do this, you guys are insane, so I had to go stand outside for a while.

In addition to adjusting being around her friends again, Kathy also shared,

I had some nightmares. It was not really heightened, like the stories of a car crash and you freak out or like loud noises, not like that. It was like I had a panic attack. Coming back, I always felt like I was going crazy, and I was crying, and my sister is, like, you are insane, but she listened to me, and eventually I just got over it.

Making the adjustment from being very busy to adjusting to a much slower work pace is how some of the participants in this study described their new normal. Mary, a member of the Air National Guard, described her transition experience as going “cold turkey.” She said,

One thing for me, something I struggled with, was when you come home, the thing you want to be is not busy and you want to be with your family and you want to rest and sleep, but at the same time, it is really hard not to be busy because you are going cold turkey. It is like you stopped smoking or something. You go from being busy all of the time and with people all of the time, which is annoying, but when it is taken away, you realize that it is different and that maybe you want that.

Another perspective shared during the adjustment period to a new sense of what becomes normal for these participants was the void they experienced not having the same set of military friends they had when they were deployed overseas. Mary expressed her feelings by sharing,

I really missed my friends there. It becomes your pseudo-family. So everything that you've experienced for the last half a year, and for much longer with the other branches, they are gone now because we were Guard, so we just go all over

the nation. So it helped me to stay in contact with them and talk with them and be, like, how are you doing, because this sucks over here. Or I am having a great day over here, I got to do this and stuff. But I think a lot more people wrestled than we expected to wrestle with coming home.

Mary acknowledged the need to remain active, which she believed helped her make the necessary adjustments upon transitioning back. She explained,

So for me, I needed almost something to keep me busy. I almost think I would have done better coming back to work at the unit a little bit, because it would have helped me to transition from having such a rigid schedule to having nothing.

The sense of feeling “weird” was a difficult concept for Mary to explain, and she compared this feeling to how others she knew were making the adjustment as well. She added,

Some people come back and they are just, like, this is awesome, but other people, come back and they feel weird and they do not know how to explain the weird. Sometimes they reach out to other people and talk about it, and it helps them, and other times they just do not, and it is hard to want to re-inject yourself into the lives of your family and your friends at home because it is, like, that is going to be a lot of work, it is been six months, I just do not know if I am up for it right now, I just do not know if I want to jump back in with you. I have this other family. I just want to be with them.

She concluded with sharing how she found her support system during her transition by opening up to others around her. She reported,

I have learned some things, and what I have learned is talk to the other people who you are deployed with, regardless of what status they are in, communicate

what you are feeling with them or what you are going through with your family, with yourself, with your thoughts, because someone else is going through it too; you are not alone. Also to reach out to each other, because a lot of times people are going through stuff, but they do not know to reach out to you, so sometimes you just asking that question of how are you doing or how are things going or getting enough sleep, that kind of stuff, and also to follow up with people.

Reintegrating back to a new normal life presented additional challenges for participants such as Anthony, a member of the Air National Guard. He remarked how beneficial it was to access government resources. He explained,

Once I realized that I was having a problem with re-acclimating back to your normal life that you had before you left, the military . . . , it is not a perfect organization, no organization is, but I really came to understand how much they are and they do have for you in resources. Once I started to realize, and it was pointed out not just by my wife but by a lot of dear friends of mine, with the short temper and not a lot of tolerance for things, that was so difficult. I had to think. I had to step back and take a look at things as far as where I had to, for one, tell myself that something was wrong. It was not that I was in a hostile area, but it was the things, and I tend to get impacted by things, and I think it was the human remains that really affected me.

He described what it was like working with the human remains during his deployment, and how difficult it was adjusting to a new normal upon his return.

If you are an office person and you are doing clerical work, you are not going to be out there on the flight line bringing in caskets and things of that nature off an

airplane, so your mindset is going to be a lot different when you come home depending on what you are actually doing over there. Every job is important, so I do not want to make it seem like I am saying, well their jobs not important. But the mental part of it and the anguish and everything you experience is directly impacted by what you are doing over there, no doubt. But getting back to it, once I realized that I did have a problem and it was pointed out enough, I reached out to Military One Source.

The emotional toll deployment took on Anthony was expressed as follows:

For me, it is always about the emotional part of it. You are going to win with your emotions and you are going to lose with your emotions, and I think if you can keep an individual in a good place emotionally, they'll strive to get to a good place.

The civilian career participants had prior to being deployed appeared to reveal what type of impact adjusting to a new sense of normalcy had on them. For instance, Grant, an Army reservist, worked as a police officer for a large urban community. He explained,

Well, you also got to understand, where I work is a quasi-military organization. I work for the police department. So it is pretty much the same thing whether I am here or there. A lot of the mechanisms are the same. My skill sets transitioned into my civilian career. They were identical almost to what I was doing when I left to serve with my unit, so I already had the heightened sense awareness, and I already had the vigilance. I feel it's way more dangerous here working in law enforcement in a large urban community than overseas.

Mark, a member of the Army Reserve, explained how he made the adjustment by taking an

extended period of time off from work in order. He stated,

When I got out, it was more of kind of a relief. Just wanted to sit back and kind of just relax for a little while. I probably did that for about 5 months. It was just kind of nice being able to just not do anything for a little while. Because when you are there, it is always go, go, go, go, and it was nice to be able to sleep in and kind of live on my own, live on my own time. So I got my last paycheck, and then I saved up a lot of money, so I actually had funds to actually enjoy myself. Then around probably the fourth month, I started getting really bored, so I needed to do something. So I decided to go back to work.

As a member of the Marine Corps Reserve, Collin shared him and his fellow Marines were not allowed to leave base for the first 48 hours upon returning home. The adjustment to their new normal included being able to consume alcohol again. Collin described his experience by revealing,

For the first 48 hours you are not allowed to leave base, so in that time period, you are just hanging out with your friends that you just spent 7 months with over in Iraq or Afghanistan, where ever it is. To be quite honest with you, I do not know if it is like this for everybody, but in my case, everybody just kind of went wild with alcohol. They do not stop you from doing those kinds of things, they just make sure you are sheltered on base, and that way if an incident does happen, it is on base and can be overseen. But most people went wild with alcohol.

Roger, a member of the Air National Guard, returned to work immediately after being discharged from active duty post-9/11 deployment. Roger claimed,

So I think for me, just getting back to work and doing something is the critical

piece. I think for those that dwell too long on the downtime, I think that can be negative to a sense. Some downtime is good and you need it, but you have to stay busy and you have to stay occupied, otherwise I think it prolongs that transition that is necessary.

Kathy, a member of the Air National Guard, shared how she adjusted by stating,

Coming back, you just realize you need that time to adjust, do not think that you can just get back into regular routine. So I took that summer off for 3 months and kind of just got acclimated back into life.

Being able to reflect upon what the experience was like serving in a combat zone was important participants like Mary, a member of the Air National Guard, who expressed the importance of taking time to make the adjustment to a new normal. She claimed,

Take care of each other, and then also, I think give yourself some time and be patient with yourself, because you are going to come back and you are going to experience a lot of things, and people will ask you every single time you get home, how was it, and they expect you to say in three words, and then they need to move in with their day. That is totally fine, but you need to digest yourself and chew on what you've experienced.

Making the adjustment meant engaging in a lot of reflection, as Mary explained,

I would take time by myself when I would be driving in my car to really think through my experiences and figure out how I actually felt about them or what I gleaned from them or what I took away or how I felt about the entire experience. That will take you months, and you may have some feelings in there of, like, I am really lost with where to go right now. But you'll get there, but it does take time,

so be patient with yourself, because you need to give yourself that time. Do not go right back to work.

Working out how to deal with different levels of stress and adjusting to a new work schedule is something Janelle shared while working as an Army reservist. She reported,

Just the stress of having to go-go-go and then coming home and not having that go-go-go, and it is, like, what am I supposed to do now once I am home? That was a lot of hard adjustment on that part, and I am not entirely sure, but I feel like being forced to work so much while you are deployed and in that stressful environment and then coming home to not having that same level of stress in your civilian job.

Another challenge was adjusting to not being with the friends you made when working overseas. Janelle said, “You would walk around a corner and you would expect to see the people that you had been with the entire year, and they were not there.” Whereas, making the transition and adjusting to a new normal was easy for Grant, who worked in law enforcement in his civilian job and also as an interrogator in the military. He claimed, “I thought it was an easy transition, just like I went to a school and came back. It was just like another day at work. I never really felt differently.”

For others, laying low and discovering how to adjust was more complicated for participants such as Patricia, who found herself keeping it low key during her transition period. She revealed,

I was kind of like a hermit. I did not go out and do anything because such a big thing was ending, I just wanted my decompression time and I just kind of kept it low key, saw a few people, and then when I went back to my job, I started

something new. Even though it was an old job that I had for a little over a year before I left, everything was new again.

According to Mark, an Army reservist,

I kind of just went into an autopilot-type thing. I really did not think of what was ahead of me. I just was enjoying just being out, being on my own . . . kind of looking for that new beginning, but at the same time, I was enjoying just being kind of by myself and just living my life.

Making the adjustment had its set of challenges for Gina, who discussed how emotional the transition for her was and adjusting to being back home. She expressed this by stating,

My issues were maybe a tiny bit PTSD, but a lot of my issues came back from being away from my husband and dealing with the whole nuances of being married and having my husband; it was more of a family-type situation. I actually had to take some time off from my civilian job. I was just going through a lot of emotions and when I was going through my counseling and that type of thing, they all assumed that I had PTSD, and I did not. I actually went to go see somebody to see if I did, because everyone else thought I did. I never was diagnosed with PTSD, it was more of a personal transition-type of issue that I was going through as opposed to PTSD.

Adjusting to a new sense of normalcy for members of the National Guard and Reserves is documented by the participants in this study. As many of the participants shared, reintegrating at home and leaving behind their active duty counterparts can also trigger additional stressors they may not have been prepared to deal with during the transition experience. However, many of the advantages of serving in a post-9/11 deployment were the additional training and skill sets

obtained while serving on active duty in a highly stressful, fast-paced, and demanding work environment. The final theme that emerged in this dissertation study was the various skills acquired that translated well to the participants' civilian careers.

**Theme 6: Transferring military skills to the civilian workplace: hiring our heroes.**

*The "Hire a Hero" is a wonderful campaign. I think it's important for them to know and completely understand what it is. You are hiring an individual, but you are not. You are hiring a unique individual. This is not somebody that just graduated out of college.*

*This is an individual that served in some pretty unique circumstances.*

*Master Sergeant, Air National Guard*

Working as a civilian employee at the same time while serving in the military offers participants in this a unique opportunity to return to their civilian employers with enhanced skills obtained due to their experience serving in a post-9/11 military deployment. There are key strengths that emerged from the participants' military experience that bring value back to their civilian employers. For instance, the military inspires military members to encourage leadership capabilities in others, and motivates them to serve as a member of a team consistently. One definite characteristic of the military service is service members' ability to work under pressure and to meet deadlines. The transfer and translation of these skills are described by various participants in this study as they share how they benefited from serving in a post-9/11 deployment. Some of the participants acknowledged the easy transfer of their military skills to their civilian jobs, while others struggled with translating these skills.

Leo, a member of the Army National Guard, shared with confidence his belief that hiring military veterans is a win-win for both the employer and the employee based on the training and skills military veterans bring to the civilian workforce. He claimed,

Outside of the fact that it looks good for the employer and it brings good recognition for the employer, there is research to suggest veterans out perform

their civilian counter parts. This can be attributed to the fact that you've been in the service, you've been forced to follow discipline and learn the importance of showing up on time, the ability to be adaptable to change, to adjust on the fly when challenges occur.

Leo, a citizen-soldier working full-time as a civilian while serving with the Army National Guard, described his experience working with military veterans versus with civilian co-workers. He expressed his feelings by stating,

I have been pretty surprised how difficult it can be for some to hear that plans have to cancel or plans have to be changed, and how flustered they get and difficult it is to adjust like that. I do not think that is something that I have really seen out of veterans, that hey you know what, this fell apart, we've got to do it this way. Vets seem to do a pretty good job of okay, let's do it, as opposed to an hour breakdown, what happened, why this happening, why is and you need to know all of the answers. I haven't seen that from the vet.

Leo elaborated on how he believes the concept of leadership is instilled in military veterans and how that skills transfers to the civilian sector:

I think there is also the leadership and teamwork that vets show. They generally know how to work as a team. Whether they like who is on their team or not, there is a willingness to learn how to work as part of a team. I think that is something that the military strives for; I think that that is very intentional on the military's part, to make sure that soldiers know their subordinates' jobs as well as their leadership's positions, and then also empowering soldiers to lead in various situations. Whether it is leading a training exercise, PT, first aid, something like

that. Just putting all soldiers in charge of something so they can take ownership and really reflect on their own leadership abilities.

Chris, a member of the Army National Guard, noted the difficulties he faced translating what he did as a soldier to his civilian employer. He said,

Sometimes we have a hard time describing the things that we do, and you really need to understand how to put quantitative measures on what we do in the military but then drop the jargon, because I knew that I did a lot of stuff, I accomplished some great things with my team, but I knew I could not quite put it into words. If you are in a military mind, you'd be tracking, this is great stuff, good job. On the civilian job, the eyes dilate and gloss over, they do not know what you are talking about.

In order to ease the transfer of skills to the civilian sector, Chris elaborated by stating,

So really having good quantitative measures and then as much as you can civilianize your resume, that is the best for you. Really focus on leader attributes, because as I say this stuff, I was in a really bad environment with these people that were just so self-absorbed, but not everybody is like that. You start talking about what it means to be a leader and what it means to your organization. People like being treated like that, they like feeling like that, and you can win people over by this is what leadership means to me, and this is what we instill in each other in the military. Really drive on those leader habits.

David, a colonel with the Army Reserve, had a wealth of leadership experience over a 33-year military career but did not hold any particular certifications that applied to his civilian career. He described his experience as follows:

In my case, I was a commander from second lieutenant all of the way through colonel. Some of us have very broad leadership experience, and that is very difficult to translate into civilian terms. And as I found out in my transition, you know, what certifications do you have? Big blank. But I have lead units in hostile environments and responsible for security. But what kind of certifications do you have? You keep on going back to that. So even though I know I will be a better leader than most people out there, it was very difficult for me to translate.

Thomas, a Marine Corps officer, commented on the difficulties of translating the military jargon to meet the needs of a private employer. He said,

A lot of veterans write resumes, but they aren't written in a civilian language. I think the vast majority of those who go through the transition process do not pay enough attention to it, and the resumes are not written very well. Frankly, in the military we were not trained to brag about ourselves and advocate for ourselves the way our civilian counterparts are. So resumes do not necessarily reflect our skills and capabilities, and that is unfortunate because our folks bring so much to the table, but civilian employers aren't seeing it when they have 10 seconds to look at a resume.

In some instances, the training and skills military veterans obtain while serving do not have anything to do with their civilian job, and that is where soft skills (e.g., communication, leadership, critical thinking, etc.) are highlighted when translating military skills to the civilian workplace. For instance, Joseph, a Marine Corps reservist, pointed out,

Somebody who has been a logistics supply officer can very easily translate those skills into the civilian work, because there is a very alive and well element out

there: delivering mail, packages, whatever it might be, freight, or shipping. The technical skills in the infantry only translate, like I said, to law enforcement or security or private military. Your ability to put targets onto a person 500 yards away are going to really do you no service if you want to be a software engineer.

Joseph elaborated on the importance of recognizing certain skills a military veteran has to offer civilian employers by adding,

But where the infantry differs is a little bit more special; once you get into the operational level of infantry, or any type of MOS, that leadership role, that is where you really start to translate beyond the technical portion of the skills you gain in the infantry. If I can plan, design, develop and implement an operational plan, whatever the operation might be, a full-scale deployment, mobilization or something as small, such as just getting on a bus and going 2 hours north. If I can plan that, understand logistical requirements to do so, understand the administrative requirements to do so, understand how we need to get all of our stuff from point A to point B, all the maintenance issues that we have in order to resolve.

He concluded with an example:

My ability to launch a grenade 200 meters in whichever direction at whatever angle is not going to help me very much to be a mid-level manager, but my ability to plan the mission that involves launching rockets or grenades, that is what is going to help me to facilitate that.

For other participants in this study, finding a military-friendly employer was the first step they took when seeking employment in the civilian workforce. For example, Kevin, a member of

the Air National Guard, said, “I specifically sought those employers out because I feel like that appreciation for the military is the type of company that I would want to work for.” In Kevin’s opinion, he believes that civilian organizations seek to hire military veterans as part of the organization’s public relations mission. He mentioned,

I think companies that do that, they do it, one, because it makes them look good, and, two, because they do understand that people transitioning from the military are generally hard workers, probably not big complainers, because it really does not get you anywhere in the military.

I think they have an appreciation, and this is just my viewpoint, I think generally a military person coming off of a deployment or even just being in the military in general off of active duty, I think they have an appreciation for what a civilian job can offer you as opposed to what the military can offer you, maybe better work hours, more upward movement. I think in the military a lot of times people can get to a certain point and they just won’t be able to advance, either because they are in a saturated career field or they are just aren’t the positions available. So I think taking those skills, specifically, the first thing that comes to mind are trade skills. I think companies on the outside that are looking for those types of skills are going to benefit very well from a military person because again, they have that strong work ethic generally, and I would like to think they tend to be upstanding citizens.

Being a team player is a skill that Gina expanded on by comparing and contrasting a person who is focused on themselves in the workplace versus being a member of a team. Gina contributed to the conversation regarding the translation of military skills to the civilian

workplace by sharing her perspective after serving in a deployed situation. She noted,

Me, me, me, I, I, I, I am doing this, when in all reality, it is not just about you all of the time. It is about the team. It is about what can the team accomplish to do bigger and better things and not just what I am going to do for me and I do not care about what you are going to do, because I am going to better myself in this way. And it is a different perspective when you've been in situations, like a deployed situation where when you are in there, in the situation with everybody that is doing the same thing as you and we all have a common goal. When you are there, you have a common goal. I might have my job, the intel officer might have his job, but our common goal is to make sure that planes fly, people and cargo get to where they are going to go in a safe and timely manner and stay alive, essentially. So empathy, teamwork . . . because with my whole heightened sense of awareness comes my attention to detail with what is surrounding me, so I also bring that into my work.

Roger, a member of the Air National Guard, provided his perspective by observing the physical and mental demands required of military personnel. He reported,

I think civilians would be shocked with the level of detail and information that is expected of a military member. I do not think they have any understanding of how much is expected for them to do. Just to start off with, so physically you have to be in good shape to do the mission that they are asking us to do. Security forces especially —, you are wearing 60 pounds of gear with all of your stuff and you are going out and doing it in the 110-degree weather, so you have to find time to work out and you have to enjoy running and doing all of those things, so

physically you have to be ready.

He also commented on being mentally prepared:

Mentally, there is so much to learn as far as use of force, your weapons handling, the different threats that are out there. So how do you identify those threats, how do you target them appropriately, and then how do you make a decision with all of this information processing through your mind, how do you apply use of force correctly and do it in a way that is not going to get you in jail?

For Roger translating the military skills to the civilian workplace is exemplified by the following:

So the sense of responsibility and obligation that I have with a 19-year-old airman working out at that front gate, doing the search pit, the entry control point, there is a lot riding on that airman, a lot of responsibility, and I think until you have been placed in this position where you have been tasked with doing that job, I do not think a civilian person would understand what's really at stake and what we expect our military members to do.

Being a change agent is another skill set that military members bring to the civilian workplace according to Roger. He stated,

Being able to learn and relearn a new process, that is something that I think on the civilian side would be very difficult for some people be able to change. How do you deal with change and how do you transition? Whereas a military member, it is just expected. Our enemy constantly changes their techniques, tactics and procedures, so we need to change ours as well to adapt to what they've done, so there is just a constant evolution that takes place.

He acknowledged the most important skill a military member obtains while serving in the military that translates well to the civilian workplace is the ability to complete a task without having to be provided a great amount of detail.

I think the biggest thing that I could see is you take a military person, and I just have to tell them this is what I want done and then they are going to go figure out how to do it. So I do not need to be told, do this first and then do this, you just tell me what you want for the end results and I'll get together with the team and develop my courses of actions.

James, an Army reservist, noted that the emphasis on teambuilding skills. He said,

I think being a reservist or a guardsman, you have a sense of team membership and you have that sense that you are going to get that mission done, at all costs, and that is I think one of the key selling points that the military brings to any type of employer, and they are devoted people. Most of them know what they need to do, and they are going to find a way to get it done. They also bring some skills of being able to deal with stress and being able to work in a hostile environment.

Being an interrogator for the Army Reserve, Patricia commented she consistently applies what she learned from her military training and experiences to her civilian job. She reported,

I probably apply more to my civilian life than I do even in my military work, just because a lot of what our job consists of is analyzing situations and people: it is body language, it is understanding how to, for lack of better words, manipulate to understand. So I use a lot of my skill set here in my civilian world. It is taught me how to fully assess a complete situation, look at it from multiple angles, understand how to work with different personalities, understand how to

communicate with, say, difficult people in a way that you can get what you need without it being a hostile or less desirable situation.

Working as an infantryman for the Army Reserve, Mark shared how he uses his soft skills training from the military to enhance his civilian job by revealing,

As an infantryman, you have to be able to clearly communicate, because if it breaks down, then people aren't going to know what to do. You are the heart of the fight. If you can't communicate with your soldiers, it is just going to fall apart, and people are going to get hurt or killed. That is one huge thing. I guess resilience is another.

Mark pointed out how, as a young Army soldier, he was given a leadership role at a very early age when he was deployed overseas. He explained how his military training prepared him to step in and work as a team leader, in a combat zone, when his own team leader went on leave. He remarked,

For a while I was a team leader when I was deployed, so I had to take care of guys while actually doing missions and stuff like that. That was only for a short while, because my team leader was on leave, so I mean I played just a small part, but in a combat zone, being in charge of three other guys, I just turned 20, so it is a big responsibility for a young person like that. I think being in a place like that, you learn to be able to cope and, like I said, be resilient with mundane stuff that would stress other people out.

Some skills needed to perform certain duties in the military are equivalent to certain civilian careers, as mentioned by David, an Army reservist noted,

We were very well versed and trained on the planning process. Sure it might be

tailored toward some military specific, but the basic planning process is the same as project manager professional, which is the industry standard across the world for planners, for project managers. Regardless if you are trained to do it, we get it done. Disciplined, focus on a goal, work with other people to get it done. So that is on the soft skill side of the house. Very, very difficult I found to translate that to a recruiter on how I can fit in immediately.

National Guard members and reservists receive ongoing training throughout their military careers. Another critical skill obtained by military members, according to David, is discipline. He added,

I think the biggest one is going to be discipline. We were used to following orders, we are goal oriented, and we set midterm goals in order to accomplish the long-term goals. We assess along the way how things are going and the changes that are necessary. That is just inbred in us in the military to accomplish goals. Things go haywire, it happens quite often, whether it is military or corporate world, so we adapt because of our discipline.

David compared working as a military officer to his civilian job by stating,

When you tell us to do something, we do it. You ask us to do something, we do it; we do not make excuses. If we have a problem, we were normally very open about saying hey, I have got a problem, I do not understand, instead of being afraid to ask or being afraid to look silly or incompetent. I found military members are very open about okay, I am stuck, and what am I not getting right here? So I think you'll find the military is very on track.

Overall, David concluded by sharing he found "trustworthiness" to be the number one

differentiating factor between members in the military and civilian employees. He proposed,

Here's the biggest one, trustworthy. Military, I found with various exceptions, extremely trustworthy, they tend not to lie or cheat or steal. The biggest one is they tend not to lie. Their word is their word and you do not have to question it, because what they say is the truth. So trustworthiness, accountability and responsibility I think are the three big things that do not translate as well outside of military life.

As a leader with the Marine Corps Reserve, Collin found his military training is what prepared him to excel in his civilian job. Working as a housekeeper, he consistently took the initiative to maintain a clean and safe working environment, and this was recognized when he was promoted to be a supervisor early on in his civilian career. He credits his ability to lead based on the training he received serving with the Marine Corps Reserve. He explained,

I started off as a housekeeper. Most people are housekeeper for a number of years before they make supervisor. I think I was a housekeeper for 7 months, which is the fastest out of any other supervisors there. But most of it was just because of discipline to show up to work every day. When there were problems that arose, I guess our job is to clean up pipe breaks and stuff like that; instead of just being the guy that went and stood by and waited for someone else to say hey, this is how we have to clean this up, I took initiative every time, whatever the issue was.

Collin compared working in the Marine Corps Reserve to his civilian job at the Veteran's Administration. He found,

There are still some things that are kind of intimidating on the Marine Corps side, but as far as the civilian life, I look at everything as a piece of cake. I had a lot of

jobs in my life, and it is the first time I went into the interview and I really felt like I already had the job and not because I knew anybody or anything, but because I realized that it was so easy to do this job compared to the Marine Corps. It was so easy to lead other housekeepers and keep them organized and run a hospital, the cleanliness of it, compared to the Marine Corps.

He concluded by recognizing that the training and skills gained by all military members in all branches of service benefit civilian organizations because of their discipline. He remarked,

I feel like for any military member, no matter what branch you came from, there are certain skills that the military instills in any military member: discipline and honor, I know those things are written on walls and stuff like that, but it is true. I work beside veterans all day, here and at my civilian job, and I really learned that you really can't depend on anybody more than somebody who has been in the military, and that is to show up for a job and to make sure it is done right, not cut corners and things like that. So they are extremely dependable, and that is just by their nature now, they do not even have to push themselves or try extremely hard to do so, it is just a standard for them after being in the military.

An essential skill all military members are trained on is leadership according to Thomas, a Marine Corps reservist. He confirmed,

I would say that veterans are used to working as a member of teams but have also been encouraged to take initiative, so that is one. All of us have already received formal training on how to be a leader of people. Most civilians do not get that kind of training, and we were used to working until the job is done. Along with that, we believe in merit-based promotion. So these are all things that we take for

granted in the military but could make a big difference to civilian employers.

Joseph, a Marine Corps reservist, describes how today guardsmen and reservists have multiple skill sets gained from training with the military and working in a civilian career simultaneously. He explained how members of the National Guard and Reserves are able to transfer their skills when needed while deployed to a hostile environment. These same skills also transfer to their civilian jobs. He explained,

So instead of 10 years ago, 15 years ago, the mindset was okay a bunch of bad guys ran into that building, let's throw some lead in there and launch discontent and blow it to smithereens. Fantastic. We killed the bad guys, but by doing that, we also just blew up what happened to be a guy's shop. And in Iraq, that is his only source of livelihood; now he has nothing. So what we need to do, what the reservist has the capability to do, is that not only are we just infantry Marines, but we were also policemen, we were firefighters, we were teachers, we were doctors, we were engineers. Even though we have school-trained engineers from the Marine Corps, we actually have guys trained in the civilian sector to be engineers.

Members of the military who deploy as National Guard members and reservists have the ability to exercise their ancillary skills gained from their civilian careers while serving in their respective jobs in the military. Joseph described today's military reservist as follows:

So when you bring those ancillary skills into the battlefield, because now we were not just looking to destroy the enemy, we were also looking to take care of the population. So if the population has a problem with the infrastructure —, say the electrical grid is fried for whatever reason —, well, I have three or four Marines who happen to be excellent electricians. I have a guy here who has been a

foreman with his electric company for 5 years, 10 years, however long it is been. So he's a squad leader, and not only can he destroy the enemy and clear them out of the village, but he can also help this family.

According to Joseph, today's battlefield looks different compared to prior wars.

So that is the kind of new battlefield that we were looking at. We ourselves are becoming guerillas in the sense of blending in with the population, blending in because we are facilitating them. Your typical active duty infantryman can't do that, because the only training he has outside of high school is what he's been trained with his weapon system. He has no idea how plumbing works. He can blow it up, but he can't fix it.

The high degree of discipline and training witnessed by members of the Marine Corps Reserve are also the same skills they bring to the civilian workplace. Joseph expanded,

The reality, though, is your infantryman today has to be extremely intelligent, extremely mature and extremely courageous and confident, especially when you talk about the new battlefield, because the amount of scrutiny that you are under today. Back in WWII, you could get away with literally murder and nobody would say anything. Today, not so much, so you have to be very confident in the things that you are doing are the right things.

To sum up how members of the Marine Corps are trained, Joseph concluded,

That is one of the things that we train our Marines in very much as well, that is, if everything falls apart, if I give you my plan and it goes completely up the butt once we cross friendly lines, if I get killed, if my second in command gets killed, if your platoon commander gets killed —, none of that matters, because you know

from what I have told you that we need to achieve this. This is our end state, this is what it looks like when we were done, when all the smoke clears, this is what is done. If the tactical mission has changed, if originally we said to attack and now we transition into defend, fine. As long as the end goal looks like what I mapped it out to be. But that is another reason. The Marines very much understand that sort of mentality, that concept, which I think puts them a leg up against their civilian counterparts.

Being able to adapt to different environments and cultures is a skill that military members bring to the civilian workplace according to Anthony, a member of the Air National Guard. He noted,

The one thing about the military and I think with the individual, is that the military teaches you the ability to adapt. You have to adapt. There are times when I was doing job while I was over there that was not within my Air Force Specialty Code (AFSC), but it had to be done and it had to be done in a hurry and correctly. I think as a military individual going into a civilian job, that is such a valued asset to anybody and I think that is important for the military member to get that out to that civilian employer.

Having both the confidence and the skills that transfer to the civilian job is important, but Marvin, a Marine Corps reservist, mentioned it is even more important to have realistic expectations when working for a civilian organization. He noted,

There is support for military and there is the bravado and the confidence you have, but it does not necessarily mean you are qualified or the skills are there, so I think for the Marine Corps side, you have to have realistic expectations. The same from the civilian side too; it can go both ways. You can't expect the most diligent

worker, because we do not always have those, but also, this Marine was trusted with logistics, millions of dollars' worth of inventory with their rank on the line, where they cannot leave. The only way to go is up, up in rank of responsibility, and gives them responsibility and they are going to take it. They are used to that. Just understanding the cultures and any way you can foster the compassion between both.

Members of the National Guard and Reserves understand the complexities of having to alternate between adjusting to working in the military, and, when discharged from active duty, being able to adapt to working as a civilian again. As Gina, a member of the Air National Guard, described,

With the deployment tempo, especially after 9/11, that has obviously sped up, and the Guard and Reserve are an integral part of the total force. It is not just active duty that is out there, it is the Guard and Reserve, we were the ones that go in and fill in. I was the only Guard person when I was deployed; I worked with all active duty. We fill in just like anywhere else, but we were the ones that come back and have to transition into real life. When you are on active duty, you get to stay in that mindset, so in reality, hiring Guard and Reserve folks you have to adapt. You have to go through the courses that life takes you through when you are in a deployed location and then when you come back and transition into reality.

Diversity and inclusion are as important to military organizations as they are to the civilian workforce. Both follow and adhere to strict Equal Employment Opportunities laws when hiring and terminating employees, but for military members they are put in a unique situation, as they do not work for an "at-will" corporation. Many civilian employees do work for "at-will" organizations, meaning at any time they can quit their job, or their employer can discharge them

for good reason. Being in the military means each member has taken an oath of office that binds them to a length of service unless they are discharged under less-than-honorable circumstances or are medically discharged. When a member of the military is sent to a foreign country, they receive training on diversity and inclusion in preparation for their deployment.

Some civilian corporations also provide diversity and inclusion training, but may not require their employees to work on an international scale, which the military requires. Roger, a member of the National Guard, describes the importance of working in an all-inclusive environment by stating,

I think military members are okay with standing out and being in a leadership role, I do not have a problem with that, but at the same time, you have to have that same sense of inclusion, you have to have that same sense of teamwork and building that sense of camaraderie, whether it is in the military or in a civilian workplace. So I think it is good to know that you are doing work to help that piece because I think if people understood how many challenges are placed in the military and on military persons, they would snatch up that experience, and they would say, you know what, this is exactly the same stuff we are going through in the civilian world and how do we plug in this person as much as we can in our processes? Because the reality is, it is really all the same stuff.

According to Anthony, a member of the Air National Guard, when civilian employers hire a military veteran, they are getting more than just an employee. He said,

I think it is so important for the employer, of course it looks good for them, they are hiring a hero and it is out there, yeah we hire. I think it is important for them to know and completely understand what it is. You are hiring an individual, but

you are not. You are hiring a unique individual. This is an individual that served in some pretty unique circumstances. I think these companies really need to understand the spectrum, the whole gamut of hiring a veteran, because it is not just a name. You are not just hiring a veteran. You are hiring somebody that probably has seen a lot of things. I think that they need to understand the magnitude of that. Not in a bad way, in a good way, because you are getting a lot of great qualities out of these individuals and getting things that no college is going to be able to give them.

The United States military has numerous careers, such as nurses, computer analysts, law enforcement officers, that are similar to civilian employment. Other jobs, such as infantry or explosives ordnance disposal are military specific, but require specific skills that can be translated to civilian employment. For example, each military job requires its members to function as a collective workgroup to accomplish assigned tasks. The military provides ongoing training and education in the areas of leadership, teamwork, communication skills, threat assessment, first-aid, diversity and inclusion, etc. All of these skills transfer well to the civilian workplace. Many of the participants in this study acknowledged they have a competitive advantage in their ability to learn faster and adapt to change more quickly based on their military training and experiences. Listing the training and education in the military might be easy to accomplish, but translating the skills to work in the civilian workforce presents its challenges.

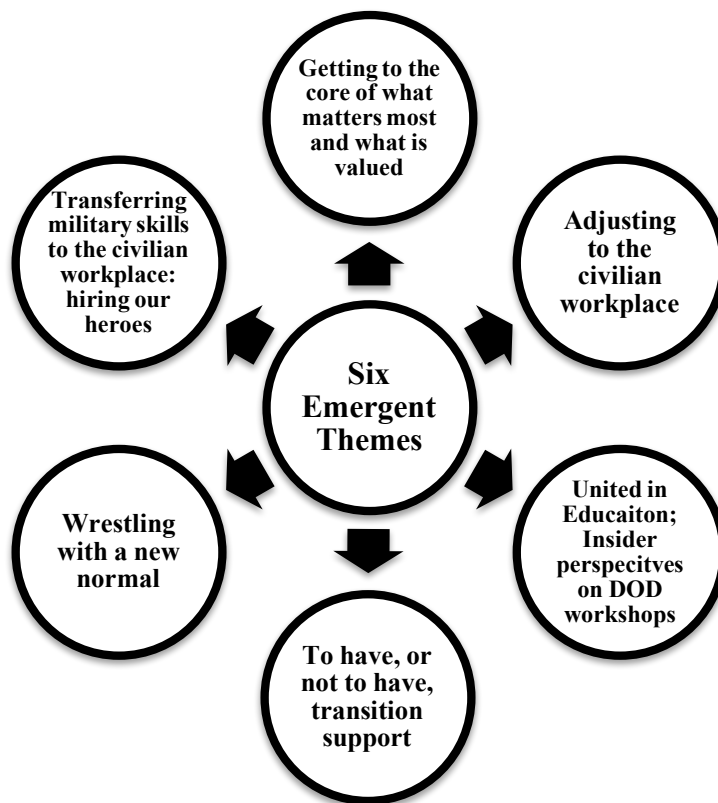
### **Summary**

This chapter identified six themes that emerged from the 25 interviews conducted with members from the National Guard and Reserves representing the Air Force Reserve, Army National Guard, Army Reserve, Navy Reserve and Marine Corps Reserve. All participants in this

study served in at least one post-9/11 active duty deployment in support of Operation Iraqi Freedom and/or Operation Enduring Freedom for a minimum of 6 months, and some participants were deployed for as long as 18 months overseas.

This qualitative, phenomenological study provided me with the rich descriptive data needed to inquire about the lived experiences of National Guard members and reservists as they transitioned from a post-9/11 active duty deployment to the civilian workplace. Table 4.3 shows the six emergent themes based on the analysis of the findings from the data collected: (a) getting to the core of what matters most and what is valued, (b) adjusting to the civilian workplace, (c) united in education: insider perspectives on Department of Defense workshops, (d) To have, or not to have, transition support, (e) wrestling with a new normal, and (f) transferring military skills to the civilian workplace: hiring our heroes.

*Table 4.3. Six emergent themes.*



The first theme highlighted the core of what matters most and what participants' value. Every participant in this study repeated their service's core values when discussing their ability to navigate between serving in the military while maintaining a full-time civilian career. The core values are something that is taught to each member as part of their indoctrination into the military. Each branch of the service created their own unique set of core values and their members are expected to know them, live by them, and use them as a guiding principle throughout their military career. Based on the responses throughout this study, National Guard members and reservists embrace these core values in both their military and civilian careers.

The second theme illustrated how the participants adjusted to the civilian workplace after a long military deployment. National Guard members and reservists are discharged from active duty upon completing a deployment, but they are not discharged from the military. In fact, many of the participants in this study were preparing to deploy for a second tour, and other members in their unit completed up to four tours of active duty service overseas. Being a citizen-soldier means transitioning to the civilian workplace each time a deployment ends, and adjusting to a civilian work environment that may have changed in their absence.

The third theme provided an insider perspective on the Department of Defense workshops facilitated throughout the United States. Since these workshops are open to all branches of the service: active duty, National Guard and Reserves, this theme is titled United in Education. The federal government provides funding for a one-week workshop facilitated by professionals representing the Department of Defense, Department of Education, Veteran's Affairs, and the Department of Labor. The objective of the workshop is to ease the transition for military veterans reintegrating to the civilian workplace. The participants' responses provide

insight as to potential continuous improvement processes for facilitators of these workshops to consider going forward.

The fourth theme is to have, or not to have, transition support. National Guard members and reservists are invited to attend Transition Goal, Plans, Success (GPS), a Department of Defense, workshop, but many elected not to attend because the majority of the sessions during the one-week workshop focused on members transitioning out of the military altogether. According to the Department of Defense Guide for Transition Counselors states, “After collaboration with representatives from the National Guard Bureau and the Reserves, DoD policy subject matter experts were informed that members of the National Guard and Reserves do not separate, they return to their units, or to the Individual Ready Reserve” (p. 6).

In response to this directive, DoD changed the title of the counseling to add “Transition” so members of the National Guard and Reserves would understand the workshops also apply to them. However, the “S – Success” in the Transition GPS title states, “We want you to be successful in achieving your post-transition goals, whether your goal is to find a job right away, or start a new career” (p. 7). Participants in this study returned to their full-time jobs, and were not searching for employment upon being discharged from active duty. Therefore, for participants who elected not to attend Transition GPS, their decisions were based on not finding value in the three tracks offered: education track, career technical track, and entrepreneurship track. None of these offerings fit with their post-9/11 transitional needs. Some participants explained they did not attend because they returned to their civilian employers shortly upon being discharged from their post-9/11 deployment, and did not want to take another one-week leave from their civilian employers. Others did not receive information, or an invitation to attend the Transition GPS workshop from their respective units or commanders.

Participants who did attend Transition GPS workshops found the content to be too elementary based on their years of working as a full time civilian employee. These participants believed they would find the workshops to be more beneficial if they would have grouped attendees according to their needs versus a one-size-fits-all workshop.

The fifth theme shared how the participants wrestled with the new normal in their lives. Participants in this study explained their primary challenges was not necessarily one of healing physical wounds, but a matter of unlearning the very skills that have kept them alive while serving in a combat zone: perpetual vigilance; snap decision making; intolerance for carelessness; and the urge to maintain attention to detail while operating in an extremely fast paced work environment. A Marine Corps participant noted, “How in the hell are we supposed to easily adjust to our civilian jobs after our training and combat experiences have made us anything but civilians?” Some participants in this study, the emotional journey adjusting to a new normal took longer than for others. All agreed it takes time, patience, and a whole lot of soul searching to find that new normal. An Army reservist stated, “If my military training taught me anything, it is I can handle just about everything.” Participants shared their stories of commitment and courage as they found strategies and meaningful ways to help them adjust to their new normal.

The sixth theme in this study illustrated how National Guard members and reservists went about transferring their military skills to the civilian workplace. Responses from participants shared their wide range of skills and talents they believe transfer well to their civilian careers. For example, leadership, advanced team building, resiliency, critical thinking and advanced communication skills are just some of the attributes participants discussed in this study. Some participants described the military advantage veterans bring to the civilian

workplace is based on their ability to lead a diverse group of individuals while taking responsibility for their own actions and those of others. The challenge some participants have translating their military training and skills is based on civilian employers not speaking the same language of their military employees. As a member of the Army National Guard explained, “I was an infantryman who shot machine-guns. My boss is less concerned with my ability to shoot straight, but he embraces the idea that I am able to operate equipment in highly-stressful situations.” Ultimately, equating military experience to civilian terms remains a challenging task for participants throughout this study.

These six themes paint a graphic picture of how these participants transitioned from a post-9/11 deployment to the civilian workplace. Chapter 5 offers a discussion of the findings as they relate to the research questions: What common situations do these military veterans experience in the transition process? What types of support mechanisms did these military members have during the transition process? What personal strategies did these military veterans use to manage their transition to the civilian workplace? The study’s limitations are also shared. The chapter concludes with recommendations for three areas: The Department of Defense and its transition programs, including policy changes, adult education programs, and future research in each of these fields.

## Chapter 5: Conclusions

### A Salute to Citizen-Soldiers

*A decompression period is critical, but it also has to be structured.  
They cannot just say, okay you are back from deployment; you are on your own for a month.  
Decompress and we expect you to magically be good to go.  
That is not decompression, that is just some random down time.  
Lt Col, Marine Corps Reserve*

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to understand the lived experiences of National Guard members and reservists transitioning from a post-9/11 deployment back to their civilian careers. The following question guided this study: What are the lived experiences of post-9/11 National Guard and Reserve military veterans as they transition back to the civilian workplace? This study included three attendant questions: (1) What common situations did these military veterans experience in the transition process? (2) What types of support mechanisms did these military members have during the transition process? and (3) What personal strategies did these military veterans use to manage their transition to the civilian workplace? The intent of this qualitative research study was to analyze interview data from 25 citizen-soldiers representing four of the five branches of the armed forces, and document their lived experiences during their transition period. My inductive analysis of these data was guided by Schlossberg's (2011) 4-S model and Bridges's (2004) transition theory.

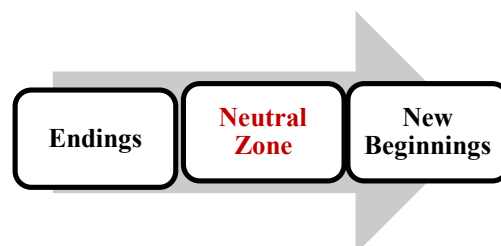
Many of the National Guard members and reservists interviewed for this study encountered challenges after their post-9/11 deployment when they returned to their civilian jobs. Although prior research focused on military members serving on active duty and transitioning to civilian life after leaving the military altogether, there is a gap in the literature regarding National Guard members and reservists transitioning from a post-9/11 combat zone to the civilian workplace. Participants in this study were discharged from serving on active duty upon completion of their deployments, but they were not discharged from the military. They

continue to serve in dual roles and are referred to as citizen-soldiers. A citizen-soldier continues to train with his or her military unit one weekend a month and two weeks a year while maintaining a full-time civilian career. As a result, they experience change but do not transition into a neutral zone as predicted by Bridges Transition Theory. This finding, along with responses to the research questions offers insights for military and civilian agencies charged with providing adult and continuing education to military members as they reintegrate to the civilian workplace. In this chapter, I discuss this theoretical finding then share how it informs the other, more pragmatic, responses to the research questions. This chapter concludes with a discussion of these findings, their implications for military and civilian agencies, other adult educators, and recommendations for further study.

### **The Theoretical Finding: New perspectives on Bridges’s Transition Theory**

Bridges (2004) distinguishes change from transition. He argues change is situational. For example, reservists returning home from a deployment are changes. “Transition, on the other hand, is psychological; it is a three-phase process that people go through as they internalize and come to terms with the details of the new situation that the change brings about” (Bridges, 2004, p. 3). Table 5.1 shows Bridges’s transition theory and how an individual “self” goes through the transition process: endings, neutral zone, and new beginnings. However, this study revealed National Guard members and reservists do not experience a neutral zone since they never really leave their military career or civilian jobs, but maintain their status as citizen soldiers.

*Figure 5.1. Three-part phase of Bridges Transition Theory*



This study found that a deeper understanding is needed of the transition process for National Guard members and reservists serving multiple deployments. They experience an end to a deployment and a new beginning when they return to their job or new position, but this study revealed they do not experience a neutral zone. For example, the first step, letting go, is the most difficult part of the process (Bridges, 2004). The “letting go” phase means disengaging from a current situation and saying goodbye to an old circumstance. National Guard members and reservists say goodbye to a post-9/11 location, and to fellow military members they befriended while serving overseas. The ending phase was challenging for some participants. For example, the biggest loss or ending phase for Gina, a member of the Air National Guard, was the loss of camaraderie she experienced when she returned home.

Probably the loss of camaraderie that I had with the people that I worked with and that I had the shared experiences with because as you come back from deployment, everybody plans on keeping in touch and people filter out throughout the timeframe . . . but it was probably the camaraderie among my military friends I served with overseas that was the toughest part to let go of.

The second phase, the neutral zone, is “where the business of transition occurs” (Bridges, 2004, p. 154). Bridges describes this period as being unproductive and disorienting to people as they may rush to escape it. Bridges’s (2004) second phase of his transition model, neutral zone, does not apply to the transition of National Guard members and reservists because they maintain an obligation to perform periodic military duties and can expect to deploy again during their military careers. Therefore, they do not find themselves as being unproductive or disoriented, but as getting back to business serving in the National Guard or Reserves while maintaining a full-time civilian career.

The third phase, new beginnings, is where National Guard members and reservists take steps to move in a new direction or realign with a new position or civilian job while also returning to their role as a traditional member of the National Guard or Reserves.

Bridges's (2004) transition theory makes the assumption that the former situation is left in the past, and it is not. Rather, the former situation of serving in another post-9/11 deployment is suspended until further notice. This transition theory does not take into account the alternating back and forth between deployments for those serving with the National Guard and Reserves. Therefore, the neutral zone is non-existent since it does not fully explain the adaptive demands placed on National Guard members and reservists and the cyclical nature of their deployments and returns to their civilian careers. Since Bridges's (2004) theory does not support the transition of National Guard members and reservists completely, this creates a strong case for generating future research regarding transitioning back-and-forth versus accepting a universal transition theory.

The absence of a neutral zone during the transition process means National Guard members and reservists must become adept at "code-switching"; a term frequently used when an individual alternates between two or more languages or cultures. For these citizen-soldiers, they must become adept at code-switching as they navigate differences in the culture and jargon of the military and the civilian workplace. This study offers evidence of how National Guard members and reservists, learn to build bridges over these troubled waters when they are discharged from a post-9/11 deployment and return serving as citizen soldiers. Details about how they build these bridges are understood by drawing on Schlossberg's 4-S model of transition.

## Responses to the Attendant Questions

My analysis of the 25 semi-structured, face-to-face interviews, yielded six themes: (a) getting to the core of what matters most and what is valued, (b) adjusting to the civilian workplace, (c) united in education: insider perspectives on Department of Defense workshops, (d) to have, or not to have, transition support, (e) wrestling with a new normal, and (f) transferring military skills to the civilian workplace: hiring our heroes.

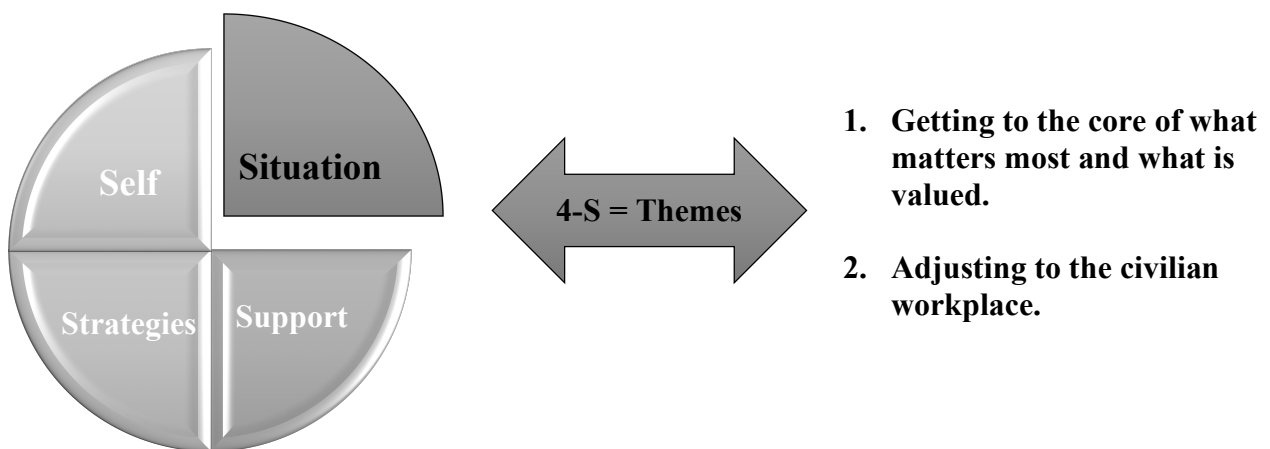
Table 5.1 displays the six themes as they relate to the three attendant research questions, which taken together offer a response to the central question: What are the lived experiences of post-9/11 National Guard and Reserve military veterans as they transition back to the civilian workplace? The discussion of these findings mirrors this organization.

*Table 5.1. Attendant questions and Themes that Emerged.*

| Questions  | Themes  |  |
|--|---|--|
| What common situations did these military veterans experience in the transition process?                       | Getting to the core of what matters most and what is valued.                  | Adjusting to the civilian workplace.                                       |
| What types of support mechanisms did these military members have during the transition process?                | United in Education: Insider perspectives on Department of Defense workshops. | To have, or not to have, transition support.                               |
| What personal strategies did these military veterans use to manage their transition to the civilian workplace? | Wrestling with a new normal.  | Transferring military skills to the civilian workplace: hiring our heroes. |

*Question 1: What common situations do these military veterans experience in the transition process?*

Schlossberg (2011) devised the 4-S model to identify the potential resources someone uses to cope with a transition. Situation depends upon the timing of the change and if there are multiple transitions at once. Most important is whether or not the individual has experienced a similar transition in the past. The first two themes describe common situations National Guard members and reservists experienced during the transition process.



*Figure 5.2. Schlossberg's 4-S Model + Themes 1 and 2*

**Getting to the core of what matters most and what is valued.**

For all 25 participants in this study, regardless of their branch of service, adherence to their military core values, particularly as it related to leadership, is what mattered most to them. This is important because each military branch defines its own set of core values. In this study, 10 officers and 15 enlisted members identified with and were able to quote their respective branch of service's core values. According to Parashar, Dhar, and Dhar (2004), values-based leadership is what people prefer in their organizations and expect from leadership. Participants representing each of the four branches of service explained that learning and abiding by these military core values is what is expected throughout their military career and beyond. One

participant said, “Living by our core values remains a critical component of the military landscape, which helps us navigate through change and challenging circumstances.”

For participants in this study, because they are citizen soldiers, living these core values (i.e., integrity, loyalty, service before self, honor, etc.) bleeds from their military career to their civilian jobs. According to Joseph, Marine Corps Reserve, “You also have Marines who can just turn it on and turn it off, like a flip of a light switch, just because that is what their makeup is. It depends on the individual.” These core values become a reflection of their character and serve as a moral compass when leading, making decisions, and following orders in and out of uniform. Some participants explained it was difficult coming back because their work ethic changed. Anthony, Air National Guard, stated, “My supervisors always commented, throttle back a little bit, throttle back, but I am like, if it has to be done, let us get it done.” For Anthony, going from working in a fast-paced military work environment to his civilian job, which he found to be boring and uneventful, was frustrating.

Having a set of core values in the military is indicative of its culture. These values impact both individuals and their organizations by guiding behavior that determines the organizations’ culture. Kouzes and Posner (2007) stated, “Values influence all areas of our lives and factor into every decision we make. When values are pronounced, they not only mold individuals and organizations, but also lead to distinct personal characteristics” (p. 49). George, a member of the Air National Guard argued, “On drill weekends, there is an expectation of our core values: integrity first, service before self, and excellence. We carry that brand with us, and when we take the uniform off, those core values do not go away.” Participants explained it is these shared values that promote loyalty, and teamwork and create a strong bond with other military members that inspire them to achieve their goals, and go above and beyond serving others. Their military

core values are the benchmark for decision-making that maintains order and provides a superior understanding of what is right and wrong, especially during time of war.

Every participant in this study described, in his or her own words, the importance of having sound, leadership. This is where the military's core values play an integral role in what matters most, and in what the participants value. According to Yukl (2010), "Leadership is the process of influencing others to understand and agree about what needs to be done and how to do it, and the process of facilitating individual and collective efforts to accomplish shared objectives" (p. 8). Leaders know how to get others to focus and remain steadfast in order to accomplish the military mission. Kouzes and Posner (2007) suggest, "Positive relationships between leaders and followers are crucial in enabling people to get extraordinary things done" (p. 25). This is not an easy task, which is why the establishment of, and adherence to, the military's core values among service members is critical to the ongoing success of all military missions.

Their commitment to these core values moves with them when they transition to the civilian workplace. It is what mattered most, and it is what they valued most. At the same time, the participants were challenged to find some balance between living by their military core values while in uniform and transitioning to civilian jobs where these same core values are minimal or non-existent.

### **Adjusting to the civilian workplace.**

Transitioning often includes dealing with many stressors and unforeseen obstacles. In this study, many of the citizen soldiers said they encountered various challenges adjusting to their civilian jobs after being discharged from their active duty deployments. National Guard members and reservists are trained throughout their military career to endure difficult situations and grow

in the face of stressors so they are prepared to meet unexpected changing demands. However, these members shared that there was minimal training and resources available when dealing with stressors and obstacles transitioning to their civilian jobs. Schlossberg et al. (2006) suggest that resilience is an important factor to consider when helping adults in transition. As participants in this study revealed, they may have struggled initially, but their resilience and will to overcome adversity that they learned in the military made each stronger. According to Joseph, Marine Corps Reserve,

Sometimes when you come off of a long reserve weekend, the first few hours on Monday morning, you might still be in Marine mode. On Friday evening moving into Saturday morning, you still might be in civilian mode, and someone might have to snap you out of it, like hey, put on your uniform, get your game face on, you are no longer in civilian mode, we are in Marine mode, it is time to focus.

He went on to say that some of his fellow marines, who served on active duty and then joined the Reserves, struggled more than others, but eventually they adjusted well to working in both civilian and military mode simultaneously. “That is where I have had some of my issues, is the type of discipline, commitment, and attitude you thirst for in the military. It is not fully absent in the civilian sector, but much of it is.” Part of making the adjustment from serving in the military and returning to the civilian sector is being able to successfully separate the two domains.

Many described their ability to compartmentalize their expectations and attitudes when working as citizen-soldiers. This is because the customs and courtesies of the military culture are vastly different from any civilian occupation. For example, high-ranking officers in the military expect their troops to stand at attention when they walk into the room, until that said officer puts them at ease. These same high-ranking officers are not going to get the same response when they

are in civilian mode as co-workers would not understand the military customs and courtesies. This is just one area where participants struggled with adjusting to the civilian sector after serving a lengthy active duty deployment. Being able to adjust and compartmentalize their work habits while working in their dual roles is important to ongoing success for National Guard and Reserve members serving as citizen soldiers.

When National Guard members and reservists transition from a military deployment to their civilian jobs, they must learn to balance both of these cultures effectively. The majority of the National Guard members and reservists in this study explained that transition was more difficult than expected, and at times, they felt isolated after leaving friends they spent months working with during their deployment. Some of the participants experienced feeling “on edge” or tense and had difficulty concentrating when returning to their civilian jobs. Others became angry and irritable when their civilian co-workers complained about petty matters; issues that did not compared to those they dealt with while deployed to a combat zone. Gina, a member of the Air National Guard, stated, “I was just in the middle of hell and now I am sitting in front of a computer. I just got back from being mortared every day. I do not care if you are upset about somebody talking about you.” Gina eventually left her job, and accepted a position with the Air National Guard full time, where she felt better suited to work with other military veterans.

Many of the participants explained it was difficult to adjust from the fast-paced military environment — where they were available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week — to the slower paced, non-threatening work environment of their civilian jobs. Many found their civilian jobs boring and missed the excitement of working alongside their military colleagues and felt they were making a difference.

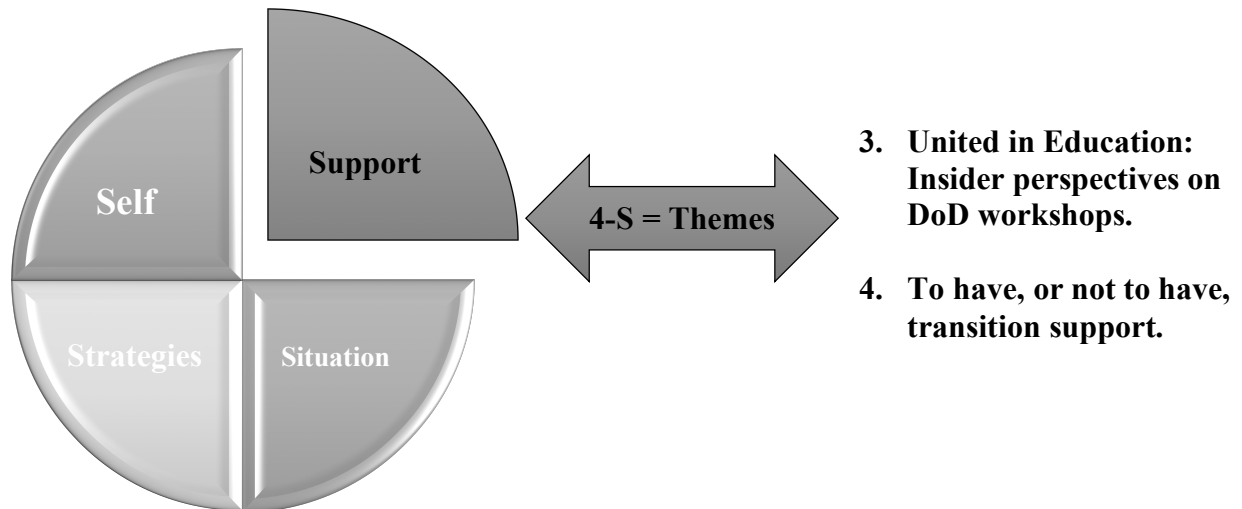
The military also trains National Guard members and reservists in the importance of situational awareness, especially when deployed to a hostile environment. One of the difficulties described by participants adjusting to their civilian jobs was how that hyper-vigilance can interfere with their ability to get through each day and enjoy life. As Leo, Army National Guard, explained, “When I went back to work, I definitely recognized that my head was always on a swivel; I am always looking out, what’s going on around me, where the potential risks and dangers are.” Other participants became easily upset, or reacted strongly to loud sounds around them, especially when attending public events like firework displays during the 4<sup>th</sup> of July.

Other obstacles participants faced when adjusting to their civilian jobs included having guarded feelings toward their co-workers and not being able to trust them, especially if they appeared as a threat. These types of feelings put a strain on building relationships in the workplace. On the other hand, having a strong support system in their civilian careers is what helped them make the adjustment from working in a threatening combat zone. For National Guard members and reservists, making this adjustment becomes part of being a citizen-soldier because many are called upon to serve multiple tours.

Thus, the common situations military veterans experienced during their transition were multi-faceted but the importance of adhering to their military core values, regardless of their branch of service, was at its core. And they acknowledged these common core values impacted their behaviors while serving in the military and working full-time civilian jobs simultaneously. Many participants pointed to challenges and the unexpected stressors they initially experienced during their transition. However, their resilience and desire to overcome adversity made them stronger. Many of the participants talked about the support that helped them adjust to resuming their roles as citizen soldiers.

*Question 2: What types of support mechanisms did these military members have during the transition process?*

Support refers to external resources National Guard members and reservists used to deal with their change. This study placed an emphasis on resources military veterans needed and support systems they had access to during the transition process.



*Figure 5.3. Schlossberg's 4-S Model + Themes 3 and 4*

### **United in Education — insider perspectives on Department of Defense workshops.**

With an all-voluntary military, many civilians are unfamiliar with and do not understand military culture and the experiences of those serving in the National Guard and Reserves. According to a report published by the United States Department of Labor (2016), “More than 2 million people are serving in active duty or selected Reserve components of the United States military around the country and across the globe” (p. 1). The Department of Labor (2016) also reported, “There have been more than 1.64 million deployments since 2001, and a continued presence in Iraq, Afghanistan, and other areas of conflict the need for military cultural competency has never been greater” (p.1.). Due to the ongoing military presence overseas, post-9/11, the United States Congress authorized federal funds for the Department of Defense (DoD)

to provide adult and continuing education workshops for military members transitioning out of the military to civilian life. The participants in this study offered thoughtful, insiders perspectives on these workshops.

The Department of Defense's Transition Goals, Plans, Success (Transition GPS) workshops are available to all active duty members, National Guard members, and reservists transitioning from active duty service to civilian status or to National Guard or Reserve status. Transition GPS was developed by an interagency team of representatives from the Department of Defense, Department of Education, Veterans Affairs, and the Department of Labor. According to the Defense Business Board's report to the Secretary of Defense (2013), "The objective of Transition GPS is to strengthen, standardize, and expand counseling and guidance for service members prior to *leaving active duty*" (p. 3) (emphasis added)). However, the National Guard members and reservists in this study did not leave the military. Roger, Air National Guard, explained, "For members of the National Guard and Reserves, they are united in education and training when joining the military, but they are not united in education when transitioning out."

Participants, who transitioned from a post-9/11 deployment, found that the standard modes of military thinking and behavior were very different from the civilian workplaces they returned to. Some participants explained that attending transition workshops helped them identify these differences and, as a result, were able to adapt to them more easily to their civilian jobs. As one participant noted, "National Guard members and reservists are excellent at adapting to working in both military environments while working full time civilian careers." Others elaborated on some of the unique challenges they faced relative to their active duty counterparts who return to full-time civilian employment following their post-9/11 deployment. These challenges are discussed later in response to question 3 beginning on page 184.

In addition to Transition GPS, some National Guard members were offered opportunities to attend a one-week retreat known as a Yellow Ribbon Reintegration Program (YRRP). Initiated by the Secretary of Defense, the YRRP provides services and outreach programs to National Guard members, reservists, and their families. The goal of the YRRP, versus Transition GPS, is to provide support to military members and their families throughout all phases of the deployment cycle. That is, it is not solely a transition workshop. Both Transition GPS and YRRP share the common goal of strengthening the community, supporting members of the military and their families, and uniting everyone through continuing education.

That said, some participants did not receive any transition assistance, were not made aware of transition workshops, were not interested in attending any workshops, or were unable to attend based on their immediate return to their civilian jobs. The differences between who received a lot of support and transition assistance and those who did not depended on their branch of service. For those serving with the U.S. Air Force Reserve and Air National Guard, there was a high participation rate in both Transition GPS and the Yellow Ribbon Reintegration Programs. Participants serving with the U.S. Army Reserve and Navy Reserve shared that they did not receive information regarding Transition GPS or their commanding officer did not make it mandatory to attend. Participants serving with the Marine Corps Reserve said they had a great deal of support from their commanding officers, which eased the transition home. Other Marine Corps reservists did not feel the need to attend a transition workshop. Instead, they sought assistance from each other rather than work with outside resources or civilian counselors.

Participants who did attend the Department of Defense workshops described them as “one size fits all” and generally not helpful. Members of the National Guard and Reserves argued they are different from their active duty counterparts. Citizen soldiers are much older; some are

college graduates, some are mid-level managers, and all are seasoned veterans. Therefore, they were less interested in learning how to write a resume or dressing for success. They would have found more value in collaborating with other veterans during the transition workshop. Many described the workshops as being “talked to” instead of a more engaging and interactive educational experience.

Others found the transition assistance workshop beneficial, but also recognized that it took a certain level of maturity in the attendee to recognize that government agencies today are providing resources that were not available to veterans prior to 2001. Such programs are the result of federal funds for Department of Defense transition programs approved by the U.S. Congress after 2001. Mary noted, “I guess maybe as you mature a little bit, you start to realize that the government is trying to offer you good things, and they are trying to be helpful to you.” While some participants appreciated getting paid to attend a transition workshop, and many said the workshops were good all recognized they were not great.

After 9/11, the U.S. Department of Defense has recognized the need to provide transition assistance to those who served in a combat zone, after 15 years, there remains room for improvement. With the increased role of National Guard members and reservists deploying in support of military operations worldwide, continuing education and transition resources for these citizen-soldiers remains important. Whether or not they take advantage of these resources is another question and they cited many reasons to support their decision.

### **To have, or not to have, transition support.**

While formal military programs have been established to provide assistance with planning and overall logistics of career transitions (Wolpert, 2000), research suggests that veterans feel emotionally underprepared to manage the transition to civilian employment

(Baruch & Quick, 2009). In this study, many participants debated whether or not they needed professional counseling to help during their transition period. Gina, Air National Guard, explained, “My support system was the people that I worked with because you are sharing the same experiences. You are all in a heightened state and are thinking is this the day that I am going to die?”

Other participants, who attended a formal transition workshop, said they were grateful for volunteers who helped facilitate sessions, especially the American Red Cross. Mary, Air National Guard, said these volunteers helped her transition because they offered additional resources outside of the military. She noted, “Even though they did not have cures for us, they had recommendations.” Her biggest take-away from the group sessions facilitated by the American Red Cross was realizing that she was not the only one feeling anxious, easy to anger, and at times depressed. She found comfort knowing there were professional resources in the private and public sectors willing to help ease back into her civilian workplace.

Many of the participants explained they were in a hurry to get out of their military uniform upon their return home and did not want to sit through another government-mandated workshop. Yet some participants discovered, weeks later, that they did not know where to turn when certain events triggered emotional responses they were not equipped to deal with.

Participants who attended the Yellow Ribbon Reintegration Program or Transition GPS benefited from learning where and how to access additional transition resources. Both programs provided additional resources and outlets where National Guard members and reservists could seek assistance on their own time and on their own terms. For example, Gina did not want to seek counseling initially because she felt she adjusted well when she returned home. She found comfort in talking with other military veterans instead of seeking professional counseling. She

stated, “When you come back from a situation like that, you try to talk to somebody that does not understand what you went through. They look at you like you are just insane, like you are making stories up.” Months later, however, she sought professional counseling and learned some skills to help her with the range of emotions associated with her transition.

Not all participants had access to professional counselors at their unit, but were aware of how to access them through other support systems such as the Veteran’s Administration. For example, participants, in this study, from the Air National Guard base were fortunate to have a professional counselor assigned to their Guard unit. This allowed members to seek professional counseling services during their drill weekends if they wanted. But, this was also a component that many participants struggled with, talking about their emotions or hinting they may have post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). To them, this was a taboo subject. Many of the participants felt that if they disclosed their true feelings, it might be noted in their medical records, or they would face a medical discharge from the military, or be labeled “unfit” for future deployments. Chris, Army National Guard, stated, “I did not want to discuss what I was going through because I did not want to come across as damaged goods.” Instead, for Chris, he found talking with other military veterans, who shared similar experiences, a viable outlet. Other participants disclosed that they experienced mixed emotions upon returning to their civilian employers because they found their jobs to be less meaningful, less significant, or less important than their military careers.

The military does provide professional counselors who are qualified to address these types of emotions. But getting participants to voluntarily meet with these counselors was something some were not ready to do while in military status. For example, when interviewing participants for this study at Navy and Marine Corps Reserve units, three professional counselors

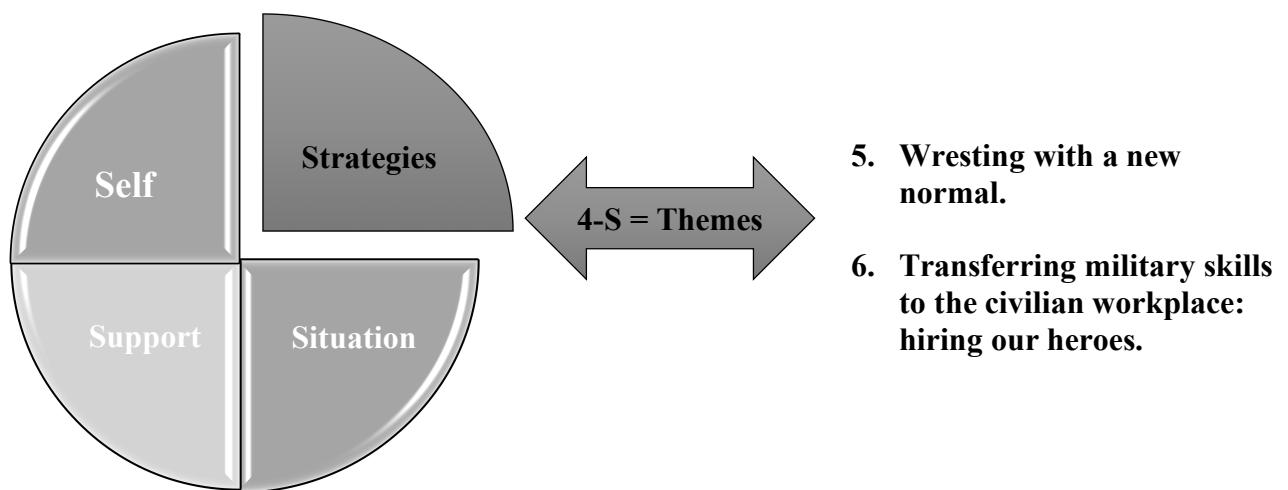
from the Veteran's Administration were on base meeting with members. Their primary purpose was to be available in the event any of the Navy or Marine Corps reservists wanted to meet confidentially and discuss whatever was on their minds. These counselors volunteered to spend their weekend with this unit to be a supportive mechanism for anyone who may have needed an outlet to discuss their concerns during their drill weekend.

Another concern some participants shared was learning how to deal with their transition anxiety on their own. Janelle, Army reservist, described her struggle with depression, and felt she did not receive the care she needed, because she did not take advantage of resources and transition assistance programs available. Instead, participants like Janelle struggled silently without seeking assistance. In this study, many described this as a "new normal" and personalized strategies to manage their transition to the civilian workplace.

Members of the National Guard and Reserves took advantage of various support mechanisms available to them such as Transition GPS workshops and Yellow Ribbon Reintegration Programs after. Discharged participants who attended Transition GPS found the transition resources focused on active duty members being discharged from the military all together, and not on citizen soldiers transitioning to their reserve components and civilian careers. Many of the participants explained they were in a hurry to return to normal, and did not feel they needed any transition assistance. Other participants preferred only to talk with fellow military members who shared their same combat experiences. Each had a collection of personal strategies they drew upon to manage their transition.

*Question 3: What personal strategies did these military veterans use to manage their transition to the civilian workplace?*

Strategies are concrete tactics National Guard members and reservists used to facilitate the action needed to manage their transition from a post-9/11 deployment to the civilian workplace. How an individual strategizes is important, and their perspective during the transition process is crucial to enacting coping strategies.



*Figure 5.4. Schlossberg's 4-S Model + Themes 5 and 6*

### **Wrestling with a new normal.**

Serving in a post-9/11 deployment dramatically changed the operations tempo for these citizen-soldiers. According to the participants, prior to September 11, 2001, their military service included one weekend a month and two weeks a year of training and continuous education in preparation to serve during an active duty deployment. After September 11, 2001, deployments became expected, and the duration of each deployment lasted between 6 and 18 months in a combat zone. This increase in deployments for members of the National Guard and Reserves became a new normal for these citizen-soldiers, which, in turn, required them to transition between their military careers and their civilian jobs often. More importantly, one has to

remember that the participants in this study worked in civilian jobs that varied from law enforcement to ordering supplies; they had been located in a combat zone where their safety was threatened daily.

Almost all participants in this study described some reaction upon returning from their post-9/11 deployment, especially during their first weeks at home. Although the majority of participants said they did not experience any major problems five of the 25 (20%) met with professional counselors to help them adjust to their new normal upon returning home. Others said they experienced strong physical reactions during their transition, such as trouble sleeping, rapid heartbeat or breathing, and feeling anxious when attending public events.

Others described more emotional reactions. They experienced nightmares, and flashbacks of uncomfortable memories, were easy to anger, felt fearful, felt depressed or, agitated, and were easily annoyed. According to the VA National Center for PTSD (2010), “Physical and emotional reactions are normal following deployment to war. But sometimes the behaviors that kept you alive in the war zone get on the wrong track, and some problems may need outside assistance to solve” (p. 9). Anthony, Air National Guard, noted, “It is about the emotional part of it. You are going to win with your emotions and you are going to lose with your emotions.” He added, “There is a big difference between making out payroll checks and firing a shot and taking a life.”

Participants throughout this study reiterated that their military training prepared them, mentally, to deal with difficult situations. This same mental toughness became a liability for some National Guard members and reservists as they rotated back and forth between their military roles and their civilian jobs. Gina, Air National Guard, recalled, “Ballad was getting hit hot and heavy. We got mortared every day, three times a day, it was absolutely insane. I am in the middle of hell, and every morning I would wake up, I am like okay Lord, is this it?”

Participants experiencing near-death experiences while serving in a combat zone struggled with adjusting to their new normal more than those not serving in a hot zone. She added, “When I came back, I felt like I was okay. I had never in my life been in that stressful of a situation before, so I really did not know how to handle that.” Months later, she reached out to a professional therapist and worked through the emotional turmoil that kept her up at night.

Anthony struggled most with the emotional adjustment. He said, “It was pointed out not just by my wife, but by my dear friends, my short temper, and not having a lot of tolerance for things, that was difficult.” He found himself unable to deal with his mixed emotions of joy, resentment, relief, and anxiety during his transition, which made him feel unsteady. Fortunately, Anthony found comfort in talking with a professional counselor assigned to his National Guard unit. He noted, “I do not think it is so much anymore mental toughness. I believe they are embracing the understanding we need to be mentally prepared.” He went on to state, “It is nice to see my Air National Guard base is absolutely wonderful with addressing mental health issues. This is part of the reason as to why I’m staying in.” Not all participants have easy access to a counselor during their drill weekends, but all had information about where to find the resources available to them.

Only three of the 25 (12%) participants said they did not experience any physical or emotional challenges during their transition. For example, when Grant, Army reservist, returned home, he said he returned to his civilian job as a police officer in a largely populated urban city 3 days later. He noted, “Where I work is a quasi-military organization. I work for the police department, so it is pretty much the same thing whether I am here or there. I feel sometimes it is way more dangerous here than overseas.” Grant did not wrestle with his new normal because he felt it was not any different from the combat zone he just left.

Many, however, found returning to their civilian jobs was as equally challenging as it was preparing to leave. Their new stressors were things like finding that their civilian jobs had changed, finding that they had new team members, or learning that they did not receive a promotion when another member of the team did. According to Chris, Army National Guard, “I came into work and it was different, because I was in a team lead role, and someone had filled in for me, and shortly after coming back, they promoted my replacement. The promotion should have been given to me.” He explained that there are federal laws protecting military members from being held back from any promotions they would have received if they were still working in their civilian job, but he chose not to address this matter with his employer. Instead, Chris resigned and went to work for another company. The ups and downs of transitioning from a deployment require patience, understanding and accepting that things may have changed. Marie, Air Force Reserve, said, “Transitioning from a combat zone to the workplace was like having culture shock in your own culture.”

The Department of Defense created specialized programs such as Transition GPS that support service members and their families during their transition. The National Guard and Reserve components have numerous support programs that provide assistance, such as the Yellow Ribbon Reintegration Program and other Joint Family Service Assistance Programs. Additional programs and services are available at no cost to military members, and can be found on various websites, such as the American Red Cross and the Veteran’s Administration.

Still, the biggest struggle for some participants was picking up the phone and making that initial call. Janelle shared, “If I would have forced myself to make a phone call, I think it would have been easier. Because I would have had somebody else’s interpretation of what I had just gone through. It was not just me internalizing everything.” Janelle acknowledged she was on a

downward spiral by internalizing her fears and negative thoughts by imagining worst case scenarios versus breaking down these barriers, and working through these challenges. She eventually reached out to a professional counselor. Like Janelle, other participants eventually acknowledged that talking to a professional counselor was what helped them most adjusting to their new normal.

The majority of participants struggled with seeking professional counseling because of the stigma that exists around mental health issues. Kathy stated, “When I came back, I had a panic attack. I told the doctor that was doing my medical evaluation, and he said, I am not going to write that down. Instead he put down that I was having a sleep disturbance.” Participants feared they faced potentially being medically discharged if they were found to be unfit for military service. This was not the case for Thomas. He shared, “I went to counseling for 18 months and benefitted greatly from that, and I did not have any negative repercussions.” Since 9/11, the military has recognized the need to provide mental health resources to those who need it. But the majority of participants in this study believed there still remain a stigma about seeking mental health counseling, which is why many did not initially seek professional counseling upon returning home from their deployment. They adjusted to their new normal on their own, and with the assistance of other military veterans.

Other participants were not comfortable disclosing whether they felt emotionally unstable. One health care provider even avoided disclosing Kathy’s panic attack, thinking he was protecting her from being put on a medical profile, when in reality, the health care provider missed an opportunity to provide resources and get Kathy the professional counseling she needed. “Stigma about mental health issues can be a barrier for people who need help. Finding

the solution to your problem is a sign of strength and maturity. Knowing when and how to get help is actually part of military training” (VA National Center for PTSD, 2010, p. 9).

In Kathy’s situation, she showed strength by disclosing the fact she was having a hard time adjusting, but the person responsible for completing her medical evaluation failed her by not having her access the health care system. Anthony argued, “There is a stigma no matter what, there is, as soon as you say “profile.” It’s not just a stigma, it’s the whole process of it.” Many participants believed there remains a stigma, and they fear if you admit you are feeling unstable then others will think you are crazy or have PTSD. Some participants said they would rather work out their issues alone versus documenting their concerns and having this information in their medical record.

The majority of the participants, upon returning from their post-9/11 deployment, were eager to resume life and get back to “normal” whatever that entailed. According to the American Red Cross (2011), “Service members often return from deployment with a battlefield mindset that takes a while to lessen. This mindset may include emotional toughness, mission focus, hyper-vigilance, and distrust” (p. 8). For example, when Chris returned to his civilian job, he no longer felt he was making a difference, and he was bored. “When I got back, I was just like, what is this place, what am I doing here? I was bored and did not feel like there was any impact from what I was doing.”

Chris eventually found a new career working with a private company as a government contractor, which offered him an opportunity to return to Afghanistan in a role that was similar to his military training. Chris, and three other participants, eventually quit their civilian careers and found work that was closely related to their military jobs. Others made the adjustment, but it took time, and they eventually sought professional counseling to help them adjust to their new

normal. Making this adjustment took courage, determination, and resilience, skills the participants described they gained by serving in the military.

### **Transferring military skills to the civilian workplace: hiring our heroes.**

The translation of participants' technical skills, known as Military Occupational Skills (MOS), or Air Force Specialty Codes (AFSCs), can be difficult to translate to potential civilian employers when participants seek employment, or when promotional opportunities arise in their current jobs. While the importance of their core values: loyalty, reliability, integrity, commitment to duty, and honor translate well to the civilian workplace, participants often struggled with describing these skills to their employers. At the same time, their "soft skills" training in the military — leadership, management, and organizational skills — translated well to their civilian jobs. Although some recognized that switching from their military career to a civilian job could be extremely difficult, members of the National Guard and Reserves pointed out the advantage they have over their active duty counterparts is that they already work full time as a civilian while serving in the military. But, it was the mental shift back and forth that became challenging, especially after serving on a lengthy deployment.

Some participants described it as the loss of the adrenaline rush. Chris said, "I just want to go back to Afghanistan where I felt I was making a real difference." Bahten (2012) argues, "War is horrible, but there is nothing like life-and-death fight to make you feel truly alive. The adrenaline rush is tremendous, and can never be replaced" (p. 1). This sentiment was shared by some participants. They were, not saying they would choose chaos or war over stability and security, but instead, that they yearned for a civilian work environment, which offered them a place where they felt competent and confident in their work. According to Chris, "I returned to work and it was different. I felt disenfranchised and bumbling along." During their post-9/11

deployments, participants relied on their unique skills to accomplish difficult jobs under the harshest conditions with the greatest attention to detail. The feeling of making a difference and being viewed as a highly competent member of a team is what all of the participants shared in common, and is something they all wanted to find in their civilian jobs.

Returning to their civilian jobs required them to shed the identity of a soldier, airman, or sailor, and adapt to their dual role as a citizen-soldier. Participants explained they may take off their uniform and return to their civilian jobs, but their core values and personal branding is what they bring to the civilian workplace. For example, George, Air National Guard, stated, “I cannot imagine owning a company and not having people work for me that have such a high level of integrity and respect. You are bound to succeed. I do not see how you can fail with that.” It is their personal branding — coupled with their uncanny ability to adapt to change, transition from their military to civilian roles, and remain focused on teamwork — that prepared them for the adjustments back and forth from their military roles to their civilian careers.

For others, the challenge was not about the translation of skills, but the culture shifts between the military to their civilian workplace. For example, a component of serving in the military is abiding by all of the explicit customs and courtesies that serve as clear guidelines for appropriate behavior on and off duty. Members serving with the National Guard and Reserves are trained to strictly adhere to these guidelines while on active duty, but when they return to their civilian jobs, these guidelines do not always apply. In comparison, their civilian workplace, rules may be ambiguous. According to Marie, “It is like culture shock in your own culture.” Some participants valued highly organized work environments similar to what they found while serving on active duty. Many expressed dissatisfactions upon returning to their civilian jobs, where this same level of organization and structure was lacking or nonexistent.

Partnership for 21<sup>st</sup> Century Skills (2004) explains that civilian employers seek to hire military veterans because of their skills, which include communicating effectively, adaptability, setting goals, modeling responsible behavior, and thinking critically. All of these skills are reflective of what members of the National Guard and Reserves bring to the civilian workplace. The most notable was that employers are interested in employees who have a strong work ethic. This work ethic exemplified by the participants in this study, who worked full-time civilian jobs while serving in the military at a minimum one weekend a month and two weeks a year. It does not include multiple lengthy deployments and additional hours spent completing higher education correspondence courses required for promotion.

Many participants personalized their transition from a post-9/11 deployment to their civilian jobs and chose to meet with professional counselors, attend DoD transition workshops, or confide with fellow veterans who shared similar combat experiences. Many of the participants described their transition as adjusting to a new normal, and some said they did not experience any major problems making the transition. Others, who had difficulties making the transition found help weeks after their return home. Other strategies used were their military skills — leadership, management, and organizational skills — to help them obtain new civilian careers, or seek promotions in their current jobs. Participants explained even that although they switched between their military and civilian careers, the one constant was their adherence to the military core values. Taken collectively, these three attendant questions offer a robust response to the central research question: What are the lived experiences of post-9/11 National Guard and Reserve military veterans as they transition back to the civilian workplace? This next section offers that response.

**What are the lived experiences of post-9/11 National Guard and Reserve military veterans as they transition back to the civilian workplace?**

This qualitative phenomenological research study sought to understand the lived experiences of post-9/11 National Guard and Reserve military veterans as they transitioned back to the civilian workplace. Following the horrific attacks on September 11, 2001, the United States entered a period of intense combat operations known as the Global War on Terror (GWOT). Among the 1.64 million service members deployed, 800,000 were members of the National Guard and Reserves (Baiocchi, 2013).

While the specific details of each interview was unique, the 25 National Guard members and reservists representing the U.S. Air Force, Army, Navy and Marine Corps in this study shared common situations and experiences during their transition period. One common situation was an acknowledgement of their branch of service's core values, and the guidance these core values — integrity, honor, loyalty — provided in both their military and civilian careers. A second common situation participants experienced was their adjustment to working in their civilian jobs. Participants shared examples of the unexpected challenges they faced when they returned to their civilian careers while maintaining their reserve status with the military. All shared similar stories that was best understood through the emergence of the first two themes: getting to the core of what matters most and what is valued, and adjusting to the civilian workplace. Some participants struggled with finding these same values in their civilian workplace, while others adjusted without any concerns. What they all shared was their commitment to military service while working as private citizens.

When National Guard members and reservists return from a post-9/11 deployment, they are allowed to take time off between their active duty service and returning to their civilian workplace. The length of down time among participants in this study varied between 3 days to 4

months. All participants eventually returned to their civilian jobs. Based on their responses, their experiences were both challenging and uneventful, and all had support mechanisms during their transition period. One of the predominant support mechanisms participants described was the federally funded Department of Defense (DoD) transition assistance programs (TAP), which is now called Transition GPS. In addition, some members of the National Guard received invitations to attend a one-week retreat, with their families, known as the Yellow Ribbon Reintegration Program (YRRP). These are only a few of the support mechanisms available to all military members.

Even though support mechanisms were available, not all participants attended. This resulted in a third common theme: To have, or not to have, transition support. Some of the participants were unable to attend transition workshops because they returned to their civilian jobs immediately upon their return. Some participants stated they did not receive any information regarding the YRRP or Transition GPS. Others found keeping to themselves best suited their personality, and did not want to discuss their mixed emotions while on active duty. Participants that elected not to seek professional counseling did so because they felt there was a stigma connected to mental health concerns. Instead, they found comfort talking with other military veterans that shared their same combat experiences, and their support mechanism consisted of informal conversations with family and friends.

Among the participants that attended DoD workshops experienced ongoing camaraderie among fellow military veterans. In other words, they were united in education — insider perspectives on DoD workshops. Being united again with other service members, while receiving continuing education was a benefit some participants described helped them during their transition. Participants provided insightful recommendations regarding ways DoD

workshops could continue to be improved. For example, many felt they could have offered sessions that focused on the needs of those serving with the National Guard and Reserves instead of a one-size-fits-all workshop. As one participant described his experience “We are united in education when we deploy, but are not united in education when we return.” Overall, many participants found the transition assistance workshops to be good, but recommended further research be conducted as part of a continuous learning and improvement process.

Serving in a post-9/11 deployment and then transitioning back to their civilian jobs presented a new normal for the participants in this study. Many explained prior to September 11, 2001, their obligation as a citizen soldier was one weekend a month, and two weeks a year of military service. When the United States declared a Global War on Terrorism (GWOT) in 2001, the Department of Defense relied heavily on the National Guard and Reserves to deploy to Iraq and Afghanistan along with their active duty counterparts. Many were prepared and well trained to serve in their respective military jobs when they deployed, but few were prepared to manage their transition to their civilian careers upon their return. Participants explained their transition to their civilian jobs as wrestling with a new normal, which emerged as a fifth theme throughout this study.

For many, this new normal meant dealing with physical reactions during their transition, such as feeling anxious, trouble sleeping, and not wanting to attend large public events. The mental toughness that prepared participants to serve in a heated combat zone was the same mental toughness they struggled with adjusting to their new normal. Dealing with their 35-mixed emotions meant seeking professional counseling weeks after some participants returned. Initially, some explained they felt everything was normal when they returned home, but weeks later they

struggled with managing their transition to their civilian jobs. This is when they sought professional counseling to help them adjust to their new normal.

Finally, this study revealed the personal strategies participants used to manage their transition, which was the transfer of their military skills to their civilian careers. Many participants recognized that switching from their military careers to their civilian jobs was more difficult than expected, but found their military skills helped them adjust. For others, their ability to transfer their soft skills, such as, interpersonal, organizational, and leadership skills benefited them because they were able to compartmentalize the two different working environments. For others seeking new civilian employment they struggled with translating their military skills to a potential new employer. In this study, they shared various personal strategies such as relying on government agencies to help them manage their transition to reaching out to other military veterans and conducting peer-to-peer coaching. One common strategy every participant used was their reliance on their military core values to guide them through the transition process. As such this study has implications for National Guard members and reservists, civilian employers as well as insights on the transition workshops. I also offer the participants recommendations for other citizen soldiers.

## **Implications and Recommendations**

### **Implications for National Guard and Reserve Members**

The National Guard and Reserve components of the military provide ongoing readiness training for their service members so they are available to serve on active duty during peacetime, unexpected conflicts, and war. Since September 11, 2001, the Department of Defense (DoD) has increased its reliance on members of the National Guard and Reserves dramatically. According to the Congressional Budget Office (2005), “The reserve components are integral to current

operations — of service members deployed in 2004 in Iraq and Afghanistan, about 33 percent were reservists, and the DoD foresees continued reliance on them” (p. 1). Many of the participants in this study disclosed that when they initially joined the National Guard and Reserves, they did not anticipate the increased frequency and duration of deployments.

Participants explained that some of the activations overseas lasting more than six months to a year are more disruptive to their civilian careers than expected. Fortunately, the United States Congress enacted legislation to provide military members with employment protections under the Uniformed Services Employment and Reemployment Rights Act of 1994 (USERRA). This federal law provides National Guard members and reservists employment rights, which guarantees the right to be reemployed by their civilian employer after serving on active duty, and prohibits employers from discriminating against them because of their military service.

One implication for National Guard members and reservists is to ensure that their employers do not discriminate against them in any aspect of their employment, such as receiving promotions or pay increases upon their return to their civilian careers. Many participants stated it is reassuring having a federal law such as USERRA protect their employment rights, but many also shared that there have been instances when they felt discriminated against, but knew it would be too difficult to prove it was based on discrimination because of their military service. Another implication for the National Guard and Reserve components is being able to recruit and retain new members without them fearing reprisal by their civilian employers each time they get called to serve on active duty.

For National Guard members and reservists, who are self-employed, the implications can be great due to the financial loss experienced while serving on active duty. The Veterans Entrepreneurship and Small Business Development Act of 1999 provides financial assistance to

small business owners when an owner, or other essential employee, is ordered to active duty in support of a military conflict. However, there is often a severe impact on small business owners, who may face substantial hardships when activated. According to the Congressional Budget Office (2004), “Self-employed reservists activated for more than three months posed a very serious threat to their business or professional practice” (p. 19). In some cases, reservists had to subcontract their business to their competitors or had to close their businesses for the duration of their activation.

All of the participants in this study were employees of a company, and many of them volunteered to be activated anywhere from 180 days to 18 months on active duty. Even in the event participants volunteered to serve on active duty, they remain protected under the federal law USERRA, which specifies that employers cannot discriminate against military members in hiring, retention, or promotion. Also, employees’ absence from their civilian jobs entitled them to the reemployment rights and benefits they would have had if they had been continuously employed, even if they volunteered to serve on active duty. Employers must regard them as on a leave of absence or furlough, and they are entitled to all the benefits that other employees on non-military leave receive. However, there are also implications for civilian employers who have National Guard members and reservists working for them, as discussed in the next section.

### **Implications for Civilian Employers**

“Hiring a hero” means having a member of the National Guard or Reserves transfer their military skills by returning to their civilian jobs. On their first day back they should be able to resume their role as productive members of a team, where they show an innate ability to bond with others and display a desirable trait to want to lead other people and manage projects.

Participants are accustomed to transferring their military skills to the civilian workplace, but not all employers are accustomed to interpreting these skills when seeking to hire a hero.

National Guard members and reservists face many challenges when transitioning into their civilian jobs. According to a recent study conducted by the Apollo Education Group (2015), unemployment rates for veterans returning from a post-9/11 deployment are significantly higher than rates for other veterans and the civilian population. Kleykamp (2009) argues, “Reasons for the disparity are diverse — injuries suffered on the battlefield, difficulty translating military experience to employers, not enough transition assistance from the military and negative stereotypes about these veterans’ skills and emotional stability” (p. 35 ). However, many of these challenges can be minimized by training civilian recruiters in how to translate veterans’ military training and skills to effectively match them with potential civilian careers. According to Maxwell (2011), “A consistent challenge is understanding employers’ criteria for success so any coaching and guidance will result in better hiring rates.” However, it is also the responsibility of veteran applicants to communicate their skills and training during the interview process in order to differentiate themselves from the general population.

A more serious implication for employers is the negative stereotypes among those responsible for recruiting and hiring, as well as among current employees. Although the military has a proven track record of training top-notch leaders, employers and their employees have exhibited a variety of negative stereotypes about military veterans transitioning to the civilian workplace after serving in a combat zone. For example, Chris, a captain with the Army National Guard, shared his experience with a civilian co-worker when he returned from serving a 1-year deployment in Afghanistan. Chris noted, “I was chatting with a fellow veteran, when a female co-worker heard us talking. She asked, ‘Did you go to Iraq?’ I replied, yes. She responded, ‘So

you are going to show up one day all crazy and kill us all?”” Chris found himself unable to respond to her comment. He shared during our participant interview that he struggled with the negative stereotype associated with combat veterans. He said the individual making the comment was also a member of a protected class, and his first thought was that she would not want to be treated any differently based on her class, so why should he be treated any differently? Military veterans are considered a protected class in the civilian workplace. Not providing diversity and inclusion training for employees can result in negative stereotypes toward military veterans by fellow co-workers.

With today’s all-volunteer force, corporations seem less aware of the various military skills among National Guard members and reservists that transfer to civilian jobs. As a result, talent acquisition personnel responsible for screening applicants are unable to equate an applicant’s rank with an equivalent managerial standing in their company. For example, Marie, an Air Force reservist, worked for a Fortune 500 Company where she was also an active member of their Military Veteran’s Employee Resource Group. She explained that a recruiter from the Human Resources Department asked her to review and translate the military qualifications from a veteran’s resume. The recruiter questioned the leadership qualifications of the applicant, who served as a colonel at the U.S. Pentagon and was applying for a director’s position with their company.

In fairness to the human resource employee, she had no military background or training that would have equipped her with knowledge to properly translate an applicant’s military skills, and rank. Yet the recruiter was expected to hire qualified military veterans. In fact, the company prided itself in being a military-friendly company and posted the slogan, “Hiring our Heroes” on their company’s website. Today, 1 in 150 corporate executives has a military background, but in

human resources the ratio is 1 in 600 (Zicarelli, 2006). The implications of not being able to connect a high-ranking military officer with his or her leadership skills are a missed opportunity for both the employer and the potential employee. Similarly, not offering military culture competency training to those responsible for screening, hiring, and retaining employees can be a losing proposition for both the employer and potential employees.

Employers with National Guard members and reservists as employees face difficult decisions when their military employee is activated. Employers have to decide whether to hire a substitute, and train that person until the military employee returns, or keep the position open and allow work to be completed by other employees. The implication for the employer is the disruption to the company's normal workflow. Another implication is the additional cost to hire a replacement employee through a temporary agency, which can be costly to the employer. Also, employers often are notified of their employees' activation with little warning. According to the Congressional Budget Office (2004), "Reservists notified their civilian employers an average of 13 days before their mobilization began. Almost 60 percent of reservists gave their employers advance notice of one week or less" (p. 12). Participants in this study found their employers to be very supportive of their military service, and three of the 25 participants (12%) left their civilian employers upon returning from serving overseas for other reasons, not because their employer did not support them during their post-9/11 deployment. For those that attended a DoD transition workshop, they provided insights to their experiences along with constructive feedback.

### **Implications for Transition Workshops**

An important aspect of this study was that it included perspectives and insights from National Guard members and reservists who attended transition workshops upon being discharged from active duty service to their civilian careers. The feedback collected from

participants, representing four of the five branches of services, should be utilized to improve the content and delivery of the Department of Defense workshops and provide recommendations for continuous improvement.

Most participants found the curriculum of the transition workshops focused on much younger demographic members without civilian work experience. For example, a large portion of the transition workshop focused on resume writing, and participants in this study they were transitioning to their civilian careers versus seeking brand-new employment. The implication of the research results regarding Transition GPS and other transition workshops is to remind and educate the respective government agencies charged with facilitating these workshops to take into consideration the demographics of the audience and tailor the transition assistance training accordingly. Participants felt the current state of the DoD transition workshops are designed to provide active duty members transitioning out of the military altogether, not National Guard members and reservists who are likely to be redeployed.

The findings from this study illuminate the need to provide additional assistance geared toward National Guard members and reservists who transition back and forth between active duty service and the civilian workforce, often multiple times. By understanding the needs and challenges of all transitioning military, the U.S. Armed Forces can better address the needs of all its members more efficiently to include members of the National Guard and Reserves. To that end, I offer the participants' insights and recommendations.

### **Recommendations: Building Curriculum around Adult Learning Theories**

Human Resource Management — Based on studies on cognitive psychology, pedagogy and sociocultural studies, the theory of social constructivism suggests that the role of adult education is to facilitate personal and professional growth among individuals in a collaborative

way of thinking about one's self, their community, and the world (Jonassen et al., 1999).

Interviewing military veterans for civilian jobs can be a daunting task for hiring managers. This is especially true if the applicant, who is a military veteran, does not clearly articulate his or her military experience using terminology understandable to human resource recruiters or hiring managers. This communication gap can lead to a qualified military veteran not attaining employment and an organization not hiring a qualified candidate.

A recommendation for Human Resources is to build a learning community between the civilian workplace and military veteran by providing hiring managers with continuing adult learning opportunities to understand recruitment and hiring strategies. This would include tools and resources specific to how military skills relate or can be adapted to civilian careers. One example of building a collaborative learning community within an organization is by engaging Human Resources diversity and inclusion programs. For example, if hiring managers lack knowledge of the military's values, and occupational fields then create an affinity group, or a military veteran's employee resource group within the company to provide additional insight regarding a candidate's military experience. By facilitating adult, continuing education workshops for those responsible for recruiting and hiring new employees, resources can be provided to increase knowledge and prevent companies from overlooking talented candidates.

The theory of social constructivism suggests the role of adult education is to facilitate personal and professional growth among individuals. This is a win-win for civilian employers and military veteran applicants. The hiring a hero campaign needs to go beyond a slogan, but instead offer a constructive way of thinking about each applicant, the community and also embrace a much more global perspective when screening potential candidates for civilian jobs.

Department of Defense — Despite efforts to prepare military members transitioning to the civilian workforce through facilitator led Transition GPS workshops, many veterans struggle with presenting their skills and experience obtained during their military service while making application for civilian jobs. A recommendation would be to offer a blended-learning approach where military veterans could access on-line training courses dedicated to resources designed to ensure military veterans translate their Military Occupational Specialties (MOS) to fit civilian job vacancies. These same on-line resources would also provide guidance in how to properly document their military experience on an application or resume, and prepare them for the interviewing process.

A recommendation would be to have the Department of Defense and civilian organizations collaborate and provide on-line, live chat rooms for military veterans to ask specific questions when completing an application or building their resume. Through these collaborative efforts individuals with a military background could also offer continuing education to assist Human Resource personnel struggling to translate specific details of military service. In turn, human resource specialists could also provide continuing education to Department of Defense personnel responsible for facilitating transition workshops, providing insights to the hiring and screening process used by civilian organizations.

Continuing and Adult Education — According to Knowles, et al., (2012), “For many kinds of learning, the richest resources for learning reside in the adult learners themselves” (p. 64). The military veteran as an adult learner oftentimes, put their personal and professional goals on hold as they dedicate a portion of their adult lives to serving our nation. As a benefit for their military service, the U.S. government provides continuing and adult education benefits to them. For example, the GI Bill is the single-most important resource for military veterans looking to

pursue continuing education. There are limitations, and military veterans have to meet the requirements outlined by Veteran's Administration GI Bill website. According to Knowles (2012) "Emerging theories of adult learning are based on the unique characteristics of adults as learners and result in differentiated educational practices" (p. 207). For example, his andragogical theory is based on four assumptions of how adults learn: (1) changes of self-concept, (2) the role of experience, (3) readiness to learn, and (4), orientation to learning (p. 1). Military veterans have an opportunity to share their experiences through adult and continuing education programs.

A recommendation to military veterans who have earned these education benefits is to take advantage of sharing their experiences with other students in the classroom. Also, as technology has advanced so has the availability and convenience of online education. Another recommendation is to take advantage of this benefit and complete an advanced degree. Military veterans need to capitalize on this earned benefit by continuing to exercise their readiness to learn. Today, military veterans can continue their higher education at an accredited two-year or four-year college or university, and receive additional compensation as a full-time student. Adult and continuing education changes an adult's self-concept, but also changes the self-concept of those around them that can learn from their unique military experiences.

National Guard and Reserve Members — Military members serving with the National Guard and Reserves navigate between two very different working environments. For some participants in this study they shared that when applying for a civilian job they did not disclose their military service when completing the job application. Many participants stated they did not know how to translate their military skills to the civilian job they were applying to for full time employment. A recommendation for National Guard members and reservists is to access the on-

line skills translator tools provided by various agencies. For example, skills translators such as O'Net's Military-Civilian Crosswalk, Military.com's translator, or Career One Stop, are tools veterans can utilize to translate their military experience into civilian terms.

Numerous organizations seek to hire military veterans, but veterans are ultimately responsible for providing a clear and comprehensible description of their military and civilian experience to civilian organizations. The hiring a hero campaign provides military veterans an opportunity to transfer their military skills and experiences to the civilian workplace, but it does not guarantee a job over a civilian applicant with the same knowledge, skills, and abilities (KSAs). Another recommendation for all National Guard members and reservists is to create a resume and cover letter that specifically outlines their transferrable knowledge, skills, and abilities (KSAs) differentiating them over civilian candidates that do not have the unique training and experiences gained by applicants who volunteered to serve in the military.

### **Participants' Thoughts and Recommendations**

At the conclusion of each interview, participants were asked if they had any recommendations for future citizen soldiers transitioning from a battlefield to their civilian workplace, for government agencies providing transition assistance, or for individuals charged with facilitating transition assistance workshops. Following are some of the recommendations from participants.

Janelle, an Army Reserve Technical Sergeant also working as a civilian law enforcement dispatcher, recommended to stay connected with somebody who has already been deployed from your unit, and who knows exactly what you are about to go through, and establish a one-on-one mentorship program to help prepare for the transition so the soldier does not feel all alone. Upon returning, Janelle faced other unexpected challenges. Based on her experiences, her

recommendation for others is, “Force yourself to go interact with somebody instead of saying no, I just want to stay to myself. If I just forced myself to make a phone call, I think it would have been a little easier.”

Janelle found many of her fellow veterans faced some sort of depression, whether it was rage, actual sadness, or just avoidance. She stated, “Avoidance is huge in the military. So I recommend making sure there are outlets for communication, and getting one-on-one time with other veterans.” Finally, Janelle recommended if someone is feeling vulnerable, tell them to be vulnerable. “You cannot make a change; you cannot do anything in life unless you have that vulnerability. You cannot heal if your bandage is still covering the wound.”

Chris, a captain with the Army National Guard, recommended getting advice from others, which is what helped him make the transition from serving on a battlefield in Afghanistan to working in an office environment upon his return. He noted, “Sometimes if you are not feeling good about yourself one of the best ways to feel better is to go help somebody else. Take advantage of your relationship building abilities and invest in people.” Chris shared this was not easy for him because he considered himself to be an extreme introvert. Staying connected and reaching out to others for assistance was something he recommended, especially to other military veterans who consider themselves to be introverts.

Patricia, an Army reservist, recommended using MilitaryOne Source, as they offer three confidential, one-to-one mental health visits at no cost to the veteran. She felt she was rushed through Fort Hood upon being deactivated from overseas, and instead recommends that the military slow down the out-processing and offering additional one-to-one counseling. She stated, “When veterans return, offer them a confidential listening session, and uncover their needs instead of putting them in a group setting, and asking if we are all good.” Patricia experienced

begin rushed through an assembly-line-type out-processing environment where she felt rushed to sign out of the military installation and get on the plane to return home. She also recommended establishing a unit-level position such as a transition officer to offer continuous support.

Thomas, a Marine Corps reservist, recommended that the Department of Defense transition programs offer different workshops going on at the same time instead of facilitating a workshop for all veterans as a one-size-fits-all model. Thomas explained, “If you are sitting through a day on resume writing, and you already have a civilian career, then resume writing is not going to assist you with your transition back to the civilian workplace.” He recommended that the Department of Defense offer a robust menu of choices. He noted, “There are so many aspects to a healthy full recovery.” As a wounded warrior returning to his civilian profession as a FBI agent, and attorney, he also recommended allowing outside companies facilitate workshops, companies that have experience in various industries and can create a military-friendly environment. Thomas explained, “Bring in people that avoid facilitating sessions using death by PowerPoint and instead believe in engaging. Allow veterans to talk, and share their experiences with others, and keep it interactive.” His recommendations also align with adult learning methodologies of knowing your audience and creating a constructive, meaningful, and interactive learning environment.

A final recommendation from John, a member of the Air National Guard, was to keep in touch with the people who are important to you. “If you have made connections while you were deployed, keep up with those connections. Keep the team spirit alive as much as you can. Also, realize that your civilian team does want to be supportive of you.” John recommended to share appropriate stories when asked, and involve your civilian colleagues as much as possible, because “you will find a lot of support that you didn’t necessarily think was there.” These are

some of the thoughts and recommendations participants offered during our interviews, which lead this study to offer recommendations for further research.

### **Recommendations for Further Research**

The findings that emerged from this study documented the lived experiences of National Guard members and reservists transitioning to the civilian workplace. These findings and conclusions lend themselves to be used to support further qualitative or quantitative research that investigates the curriculum and design of Department of Defense transition workshops, suggesting that they become more inclusive. For example, the facilitating agencies should evaluate the return on investment of these transition workshops for all veterans, and not just active duty members transitioning out of the military.

Members of the National Guard and Reserves attend the same workshops alongside their active duty counterparts, but do not necessarily receive equal benefits from the workshops compared to members serving full time. The need is to understand the post-9/11 transition experiences of National Guard members and reservists in a larger post-military platform would benefit all service members. This further enforces the need to implement curriculum designed by professional educators specializing in adult, continuing, and higher education leadership. Future research could also look at methods of formalizing evaluation methods to understand the real impact attending transition workshops has on attendees instead of word-of-mouth evaluations between facilitators and their participants. Participants in this study provided insights and what had happened in the workshops, such as, their reactions and what they learned. Future research could provide a more in-depth understanding of how their behaviors changed, and results of the transition experience where the data is used, applied, and tested by each participant.

Next, with the ongoing drawdown of military members from the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan there has been a substantial growth in the number of transitioning veterans who return to their civilian careers. With the growing presence of National Guard members and reservists, there remains a need to conduct further research regarding providing adult education to those responsible for recruiting and retaining military veterans in the civilian workplace. Furthermore, this research beckons further study in adult education regarding the demographic characteristics and combat experiences among National Guard members and reservists and how they intersect successfully within their civilian careers. For example, in the military, rank and grade separate officers and enlisted personnel. Their rank and grade are also connected to levels of responsibility and authority. This research recommends that a study be conducted, in the field of adult and continuing education, which explores diversity and inclusion training in the civilian workplace. Specifically, training offered to all employees regarding the adherence to customs and courtesies by military members, and the transition of citizen soldiers back-and-forth between their military culture and the civilian workplace.

Finally, professional educators and leaders responsible for college enrollment, persistence, and completion may benefit from future research regarding strategies to support National Guard members and reservists who are continuing their higher education while maintaining their role as citizen soldiers. Based on findings from this study, future research is recommended that could build upon the understanding that those in adult leadership have about the diverse characteristics of military-connected college students. Many of these service members acquire G.I. Bill and other post-9/11 education benefits. Educators in the field of adult leadership could benefit from future research as to gain a better understanding of these students and their specific needs while enrolled in higher education. A future recommendation is to call

upon future researchers to frame studies that build a more comprehensive understanding of citizen soldiers in relation to their fluid and evolving academic goals, leadership pursuits, and employment outcomes.

### **Research Questions for other Scholars**

With more and more military veterans earning education benefits based on their military service, the post-9/11 Veterans Educational Assistance Act of 2008, took effect, with potential implications for institutions of higher education. With the expanded education benefits comes the recent drawdown of military forces serving in Iraq and Afghanistan. This transition has resulted in changed relationships, routines, and roles for military veterans. Following are two questions to consider for future research:

1. What is the experiences of military veterans, over the age of 25, transitioning from the military to higher education?
2. How do institutions of higher learning support students who served with the National Guard and Reserves during their transition from a post-9/11 deployment to an academic environment?

### **Research Questions for other Academics**

The influx of military veterans transitioning from serving in a post-9/11 deployment and returning to the civilian workplace has increased since 2001. Many of these veterans return as wounded warriors with disabilities, such as Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), which may affect their career success. For academics working in Human Resource Management and charged with providing adult education programs to internal employees, following are potential questions to be researched to increase the transition of wounded warriors to the civilian workforce.

1. How are the needs of post-9/11 wounded warriors being addressed in the civilian workplace?
2. What adult, continuing and education programs are available to employees on how to meet the needs of military veterans returning to work with injuries sustained in combat?

### **Research Questions for others Studying Human Resource Management**

Female participants in this study stated they struggled with being the only female to deploy with their unit making it very difficult when they transitioned home. For some participants they shared they could only relate to other females because they shared similar experiences of isolation during their post-9/11 deployment. Others stated they experienced male colleagues wanting more than a platonic relationship during their deployment, and found the exchange to be distracting and uncomfortable at times. Following are suggestions to continue research for those studying Human Resource Management.

1. What is the U.S. military doing to provide sexual harassment training to members of the armed forces?
2. What is the best way to teach military leaders how to meet the needs of female military veterans during a deployment?

### **Research Questions for those Working in Adult Education**

Transition assistance workshops are provided to military veterans transitioning from a post-9/11 deployment back home. One learning objective of Transition Goals, Plans, Success (Transition GPS) workshop is to identify performance gaps, and deliver adult education training that is focused on improving workplace performance before the participants reenter the workforce. For those working in adult education following are questions to consider:

1. What is the return-on-investment (ROI) of the Transition GPS workshops on military veterans' transition success to the civilian workplace?
2. What is the effectiveness of transition workshops for those serving with the National Guard or Reserves versus members leaving the military all together, and how are the results being measured?

### **Concluding Remarks**

The increased reliance on activating members of the National Guard and Reserves has focused attention on how lengthy deployments impact both members of the military and their civilian employers. Yet after completing a thorough literature review, minimal research was found regarding the transition experiences of National Guard members and reservists serving in a post-9/11 deployment for over 90 days and returning to their civilian jobs. Numerous studies focused on active duty military personnel transitioning out of the military and seeking civilian employment, but few studies were found regarding citizen soldiers. As a result, the transition experiences of these members have been documented and examined in this study.

A qualitative research methodology was selected in order to conduct semi-structured, face-to-face interviews with 25 National Guard members and reservists, representing the Air Force, Army, Navy, and Marine Corps, as they transitioned from serving in a post-9/11 deployment to their civilian careers. The intent of documenting their experiences was to provide a voice for them and a place in a research area that provided insights into the lack of resources provided to members serving with the National Guard and Reserves. This study also provides detailed evidence regarding the overall transitioning experience of citizen soldiers, and it establishes a platform to discuss how government agencies can continue to provide continuous improvement processes regarding their transition assistance programs for all military veterans.

The researcher recognizes that the best part of choosing qualitative methods to conduct the research for this study was meeting, greeting, and being able to interact with fellow post-9/11 military veterans who continue to serve. Their stories reflect the resilience and resolve that continues to be exhibited by members of the military who volunteer to serve our nation while also maintaining full-time civilian careers. In addition, this research study's primary objective is to provide a foundation for subsequent studies to build from.

Finally, our United States armed forces must always be prepared to support a highly successful military strategy across the full range of potential threats that continue to face the security of our citizens and our nation. Our military remains an all-volunteer force, and the reliance on members of the National Guard and Reserve forces continues. The men and women who compose the National Guard and Reserve components, throughout this study, are a true testament to the desire, willingness, and ability of our countrymen and women to serve our nation while also making a positive contribution to their civilian employers as private citizens. Our Reserve and National Guard forces — past, present, and future — are among our nation's greatest assets. Their role is the preservation of our nation's security, and they must continue to be resourced and supported by providing them with adult and continuing education opportunities.

## Epilogue

*Not everybody that comes back has had the exact same experiences.  
Not everybody has PTSD. You might have transition issues, but that is normal.  
Anybody that went through a transition after serving in a combat zone, there  
would be adjustments; it is normal to have transition issues.  
Major, Wisconsin Air National Guard*

Civilian employees also serving with the National Guard and Reserves (citizen-soldiers) represent 40% of the two million armed forces deployed to Afghanistan and Iraq. According to Greden et al. (2010), “Twenty-five to forty percent of citizen soldiers develop PTSD, clinical depression, sleep disturbances, or suicidal thoughts. Upon returning home, may encounter additional stresses to obtaining care, and half of those needing help are not receiving it” (p. 1). For example, Janelle, a member of the Army Reserve, disclosed during her transition from Afghanistan, that she experienced high levels of anxiety, and, yet, the health care provider minimized her concerns by describing her condition as “difficulty sleeping.” A recommendation is to provide additional training to all health care providers responsible for screening returning veterans during their out-processing from active duty. In addition, developing peer-to-peer counseling sessions for citizen soldiers at their home units would provide a healthy outlet initially and may lead them to seek professional counseling at a later date.

As a Marine Corps officer explained, you have to turn off your military bearing at your civilian job and turn it on during drill weekends, but always stay on your “A” game. National Guard members and reservists are trained to make this mental shift by thinking like a military member one day, and returning to work as a civilian employee the next. However, for participants transitioning from a post-9/11 deployment, switching from military mode to civilian status is not always easy. A recommendation for our Reserve and National Guard men and women who served this country with honor in the Global War on Terror in Afghanistan and Iraq

is to seek out support services for their hidden scars such as depression, anxiety, marital problems, and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). There are numerous resources available at no cost to members of the National Guard and Reserves, but for many participants, the challenge was recognizing that they needed additional assistance and making the first call.

Participants stated that they feared there is a stigma when admitting to having mental health issues. Recommendation resulting from this study, for all citizen soldiers, is to take care of yourselves first, and then worry about the issue of mental health stigma later. Today's military is very supportive and does not seek to discharge its members based on mental health matters. In fact, non-military mental health professionals receive specialized training, from the Department of Defense, orienting them to military culture and combat issues, which serves to enhance the resource pool of clinicians in the likelihood intervention is needed. A recommendation for any citizen soldier struggling to adjust to their civilian life and workplace is to seek out these professionals and get back to your "A" game.

For employers, it is critical to establish a working environment of positive expectations for all employees emphasizing productive, supportive, and effective work relationships and performance. By meeting prior to their military colleague's return to discuss the transition of their co-worker(s), it is also important to address the concerns of civilian colleagues. Sponsoring a welcoming event that can foster cohesion and a sense of community will benefit everyone involved. Also, plan for making any special accommodations for an employee returning to their civilian job after being injured. For wounded warriors, recovery and self-esteem are greatly connected to returning to their professional careers, and staying connected with their co-workers.

Another recommendation for employers is to prepare your workplace by facilitating workplace reentry workshops for civilian employees without prior military service. There are

numerous myths about National Guard members and reservists that need to be addressed in the workplace prior to their return. For example, a civilian employee asked Chris, a member of the Army National Guard, if he was going to come to work one day and shoot everyone. For civilian employees adjusting to working alongside co-workers returning from serving in a combat zone, their level of anxiety and concerns also need to be taken into consideration. At the end of the day, returning service members will appreciate the efforts and concerns of their managers, colleagues, and their civilian employers. Make the post-9//11 transition a win-win for everyone.

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## APPENDICES

### Appendix A: Request to Participate

Dear Military Veteran,

My name is Jean Marie Pyzyk, and I am a doctoral student at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee pursuing a Ph.D. in Adult, Continuing & Higher Education Leadership. I am conducting a research study on the meaning of the lived experiences of post-9/11, Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF) and Operation Iraqi Freedom (OIF) National Guard members and reservists who transitioned from military service to the civilian workplace.

**Purpose:** The purpose of this study is to better understand the meaning of the experiences of post- 9/11 National Guard members and reservists transitioning to the civilian workplace. Their experiences will provide insight on ways to create more effective resources for veterans transitioning to civilian employment. This study will also research different strategies based on the situation of the military veteran at the time of the transition from the military to the civilian workplace. Various support systems will be identified that helped military veterans transition to the civilian workforce and the study will highlight specific resources that played an integral part in the transition process.

**Risk:** This research exposes subjects to minimal risks, meaning that the probability and magnitude of harm or discomfort anticipated in the research are not greater than those ordinarily encountered in daily life or during the performance of routine examinations or tests in educational settings. No aspects of this research project are anticipated or designed to cause discomfort, inconvenience, or physical danger to the subjects. There are no known long-term risks to subjects.

**Direct benefits:** A \$10.00 gift card to Starbucks is given to each participant in appreciation of their time. In addition, the research may benefit members of the veteran community by educating both employers and fellow veterans about the perceived transition experiences of U.S. military veterans to the civilian workplace.

**Indirect benefits:** This research will also benefit the field of Human Resource Management as both non-profit and for-profit organizations seek to hire and retain military veterans.

**Eligibility:** To be eligible to participate in this study, participants must have served on active-duty in support of Operation Enduring Freedom and/or Operation Iraqi Freedom, with the National Guard or Reserves, and have been honorably discharged from active-duty military service. Participants will also have served for more than four years in the United States armed forces, and completed either basic military training, officer training school, or graduated from a United States military academy.

**Voluntary Participation:** Your participation in this study is voluntary. You may choose not to take part in this study, or if the decision is made to participate, you can withdraw at any time. You are free to skip any questions asked. If you do not complete the autobiography and face-to-

face interview, any information previously provided will be discarded from the study and deleted.

**For more information or to submit a request to participate, please contact me at [jmpyzyk@uwm.edu](mailto:jmpyzyk@uwm.edu) or by phone at (414) 530-4577.**

Thank you for your service to our country, and for your willingness to participate in this study.

Respectfully yours,

*Jean Marie Pyzyk*

Jean Marie Pyzyk  
Doctoral Student  
University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee  
School of Education  
Adult, Continuing & Higher Education Leadership

## **Appendix B: Consent to Participate**

**Study Title:** *Understanding the lived experiences of post-9/11 National Guard and Reserve military members transitioning to the civilian workplace.*

**Person Responsible for Research:** Jean M. Pyzyk

**Study Description:** The purpose of this study is to understand the meaning of the lived experiences of post-9/11 National Guard members and reservists transitioning to the civilian workplace. This study will capture the viewpoints of 16-20 participants who have made the transition from the military to the civilian workplace. These lived experiences will provide insight on ways to create more effective resources for veterans transitioning to civilian employment. Your participation will involve meeting with me for approximately one hour for an audio tape recorded interview to discuss your experiences transitioning from the military to the civilian workplace. Your participation in this study is voluntary. You can decide to be a part of this study or not. Once you start, you can withdraw from the study at any time, and all of the notes and tape-recorded electronic files will be destroyed. The results of the research study may be published but your identity will remain confidential and your name will not be made known to any outside party.

**Risks/Benefits:** In this research, no foreseeable risks exist for you. If any risks should arise, such as you feeling uncomfortable or anxious, the interview will be terminated and you have the choice of accepting any minimal risk for continuation with the interview or exit participation in the study. You will be provided the face-to-face interview questions prior to beginning the interview to allow time for review. By providing questions ahead of time, you will be able to review and consider if there are any questions you do not wish to answer. Additionally, you are reminded you can terminate your involvement with the study at any time or skip questions you do not wish to answer. There are no costs for participating. Although there may be no direct benefit to you, a possible benefit from your being part of this study is informed decision-making by military and community leaders leading to revisions of current support programs or development of new support programs that best meet the needs of today's military veterans in transition. In addition, revelation of your reintegration experience contribute to a better understanding of unique challenges for our nation's citizen soldiers (Air Force, Army, Navy and Marines).

**Confidentiality:** Identifying information such as your age range, rank, branch of service, level of education, and time in service will be collected for research purposes to assist in the researcher's understanding of your military experience. Your responses will be treated as confidential and all reasonable efforts will be made so that no individual participant will be identified with his or her answers. The researcher will remove any identifying information after analyzing and transcribing the data, and all study results will be reported without identifying information so that no one viewing the results will ever be able to match you with your responses. Data from this study will be saved on a password-protected computer in a locked office for three years and then destroyed. Only Jean Pyzyk will have access to your information. However, the

Institutional Review Board at UW-Milwaukee or appropriate federal agencies like the Office for Human Research Protections may review this study's records.

**Voluntary Participation:** Your participation in this study is voluntary. You may choose not to take part in this study, or if the decision is made to participate, you can withdraw at any time. You are free to skip any questions asked. You are free to skip any questions asked.

**Who do I contact for questions about the study:** For more information about the study or study procedures, contact Jean Pyzyk, the primary investigator, at [jmpyzyk@uwm.edu](mailto:jmpyzyk@uwm.edu) or (414) 530-4577 or email my major advisor at Dr. Barbara Bales at [bbales@uwm.edu](mailto:bbales@uwm.edu).

**Who do I contact for questions about my rights or complaints towards my treatment as a research subject?** Contact the UWM IRB Manager, Melissa Spadanuda, at 414-229-3173 or [irbinfo@uwm.edu](mailto:irbinfo@uwm.edu).

**Research Subject's Consent to Participate in Research:**

To voluntarily agree to take part in this study, you must be 18 years of age or older. By signing the consent form, you are giving your consent to voluntarily participate in this research project.

---

Printed Name of Subject/Legally Authorized Representative

---

Signature of Subject/Legally Authorized Representative

---

Date

## Appendix C: Interview Guide

### Interview Guide

*(For Interviewer Use Only – Not for Distribution to Study Participants)*

#### INSTRUCTIONS

*Good morning (afternoon). My name is Jean Marie Pyzyk. Thank you for volunteering. First, I will explain my research study and provide you with a copy of my letter of intent describing my dissertation research study. Second, I will ask you to sign an agreement to participate form that will be kept in a secure file for the next 3 years. Third, I will begin tape-recording our interview session asking you a series of questions that are asked of each participant in my dissertation study. Finally, at the conclusion of our interview I will give you an opportunity to ask any questions regarding my research, and I will provide you with my contact information in the event you want to add any new information to our conversation.*

(Explain procedures to ensure participant confidentiality, length of data retention, and participant rights to withdraw from the interview at any time. In addition, encourage participants to expand upon any questions and add anything that may come to mind about experiences during their transition from their post-9/11 deployment to the civilian workplace.)

#### TAPE RECORDER INSTRUCTIONS

*If it is okay with you, I will be tape-recording our conversation. The purpose of this is so that I can get all the details but at the same time be able to carry on an attentive conversation with you. I assure you that all your comments will remain confidential. I will be compiling a report which will contain all students' comments without any reference to individuals.*

#### PREAMBLE/CONSENT FORM INSTRUCTIONS

*Before we get started, please take a few minutes to read this preamble (read and sign this consent form). (Hand R consent form/preamble.) (After R returns preamble/consent form, turn tape recorder on.)*

| <i>What are the lived experiences of post-9/11 National Guard and Reserve military veterans as they transition back to the civilian workplace?</i> |   |  |  |
|--|---|--|--|
| No.  | Research/Attendant Question(s)  | Interview Question(s)  | Support for the question (pilot study, literature, etc.)   |
| Q1   | What common <u>situation</u> do these military veterans experience in the transition process? | Describe the <u>situation</u> leading up to joining the military, and once you joined.<br>f) What was your military specialty code?<br>g) Which branch of service did you serve with?<br>h) What was your highest rank you achieved before being discharged? | Pilot study showed importance of gathering rank, time-in-service, and other demographic information. |

|           |  |   |  |
|-----------|--|---|--|
|           |  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>i) How long did you serve during OEF/OIF before being discharged from active duty service?</li> <li>j) What civilian career did you transition to after serving in OEF/OIF?</li> </ul>   |  |
|           |  | <p>Describe your <u>situation</u>/civilian career prior to being activated to serve in OEF/YOU'RE your <u>situation</u> during your deployment, and your <u>situation</u> after being discharged from active duty service.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>f) What transition assistance did you receive upon being discharged?</li> <li>g) How long did you attend a transition assistance program?</li> <li>h) Was the Yellow Ribbon Reintegration Program mandated, and did you attend?</li> <li>i) How long were you off before transitioning to your civilian job?</li> <li>j) When did you attend your next drill weekend after returning from OEF/OIF?</li> </ul>   | <p>Pilot study showed various time periods between being deactivated from active duty service to transitioning to the civilian workplace.</p> <p>Literature supported YRRP for National Guard members and reservists.</p>  |
| <b>Q2</b> | What types of <u>support</u> mechanisms did these military members have during the transition process? | <p>Describe how you felt upon being notified you were being activated to serve in a post-9/11 deployment?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>e) How many days of notice did you give to your civilian employer?</li> <li>f) What professional career were you working in as a civilian?</li> <li>g) Did you employer have someone to fill in for you during your absence?</li> </ul> <p>How did your civilian employer show <u>support</u> prior, during and after being activated to serve in OEF/OIF?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a) Describe any support services you received prior to deployment.</li> <li>b) Describe any support services you received during your deployment.</li> <li>c) Describe any support services you received after your deployment.</li> </ul> <p>What role did ESGR (Employer Support of the Guard and Reserves) play in your</p> | <p>Pilot study showed support from family and friends. Focus remains on support specifically from civilian employers.</p> <p>Literature indicates the importance of ESGR regarding reintegration of National Guard members and reservists rights during and after deployments.</p> |

|           |   |  |  |
|-----------|---|--|--|
|           |   | transition to the civilian workplace, if any?  |  |
| <b>Q3</b> | What personal strategies did these military veterans use to manage their <u>transition</u> to the civilian workplace? | Describe your experiences during your transition from OEF/OIF to your civilian workplace.<br>e) How did you prepare yourself to make the transition from serving on active duty back to your civilian job?<br>f) Describe how you felt during this transition period?<br>g) What measures did you take to prepare your civilian employer of your return?<br>h) How did your civilian employer prepare you for your return?   | Minimal literature found on the transition experiences regarding National Guard members and reservists returning to the civilian workplace.<br><br>Pilot study supported need to research NG and reservists. |
|           |   | Describe any strategies used during your transition from OEF/OIF back to your civilian employer.<br>e) How did you personally prepare yourself to make the transition?<br>f) What professional services did you use to assist with the transition, if any?<br>g) What strategies were offered through your military unit, if any?<br>h) What transition assistance programs were offered thru your civilian employer, if any?  | Literature regarding transition theories focused on individual strategies used to make a successful transition.  |
|           |   | Describe your work responsibilities while serving on active duty during OEF/OIF.<br>e) How do these skill sets apply to your civilian employer?<br>f) What measures did you take to inform your civilian employer of your military training and responsibilities during OEF/OIF?<br>g) How well did you make the transition from serving in OEF/OIF back to your civilian job?<br>h) What benefits did you find from serving in OEF/OIF that you bring back to your civilian employer? | Pilot study indicated data be collected regarding unique skill sets of the citizen soldier.  |
|           |   | Describe any unique experiences you had while transitioning from a post-9/11   |  |

|           |                          |   |  |
|-----------|--------------------------|---|--|
|           |                          | deployment to the civilian workplace, if any.                         |  |
| <b>Q4</b> | Conclusion of interview. | Is there anything you would like to add that we didn't already cover? | Provide opportunity for interviewee to add additional information. |
|           |                          |   |  |

## CONCLUSION:

Thank you for your participation and willingness to speak about your transition experience from your post-9/11 deployment back to the civilian workplace. As stated, your comments and participation will remain confidential and may help improve civilian employers' knowledge about the recruitment of military veterans as well as aid the improvement of future transition assistance programs.

Please feel free to contact me if you have any questions related to this study. I can be reached by phone (414) 530-4577 or email [jmpyzyk@uwm.edu](mailto:jmpyzyk@uwm.edu). As this research is part my dissertation, if you have overarching concerns, my major advisor, Dr. Barbara Bales, can be reached by email at [bbales@uwm.edu](mailto:bbales@uwm.edu).

At this time, I have no further questions; however, if additional questions arise, may I contact you? Thank you and feel free to contact me at [jmpyzyk@uwm.edu](mailto:jmpyzyk@uwm.edu) if you have future questions or comments you'd like to add to the study.

Provide participant with a \$10.00 Starbucks card for their time and assistance.

## Appendix D: Enlisted Rank Insignia of the U.S. Armed Forces

### Rank Insignia of the United States Armed Forces

| ENLISTED  |   |   |  |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |
|---|---|---|--|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| E-1   | E-2   | E-3   | E-4  | E-5   | E-6   | E-7   |   | E-8   |   | E-9   |   |   | SEA   |
| AIR FORCE   |   |   |  |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |
|    |    |    |   |    |    |    |  |    |     |    |    |    |  |
| Airman Basic (AB)   | Airman (Amn)  | Airman First Class (A1C)  | Senior Airman (SrA)  | Staff Sergeant (SSgt)   | Technical Sergeant (TSgt)   | Master Sergeant (MSgt)  | First Sergeant (FS)   | Senior Master Sergeant (SMSgt)  | First Sergeant (FS)   | Chief Master Sergeant (CMSgt)   | First Sergeant (FS)   | Command Chief Master Sergeant (CCM)   | Chief Master Sergeant of the Air Force  |
| ARMY  |   |   |  |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |
|    |    |    | <br> |    |    |    |   |    |     |    |    |    |   |
| Private E-1 (PV1)   | Private E-2 (PV2)   | Private First Class (PFC)   | Corporal (CPL)<br>Specialist   | Sergeant (SGT)  | Staff Sergeant (SSG)  | Sergeant First Class (SFC)  |   | Master Sergeant (MSG)   | First Sergeant (1SG)  | Sergeant Major (SGM)  | Command Sergeant Major (CSM)  | Sergeant Major of the Army (SMA)  |   |
| MARINES   |   |   |  |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |
|    |    |    |   |    |    |    |   |    |     |    |    |    |   |
| Private (PvT)   | Private First Class (PFC)   | Lance Corporal (LCpl)   | Corporal (Cpl)   | Sergeant (Sgt)  | Staff Sergeant (SSgt)   | Gunnery Sergeant (GySgt)  |   | Master Sergeant (MSgt)  | First Sergeant (1stSgt)   | Master Gunnery Sergeant (MGySgt)  | Sergeant Major (SgtMaj)   | Sergeant Major of the Marine Corps (SgtMajMC)   |   |
| NAVY  |   |   |  |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |
|  |  |  |   |  |  |  |   |  |  |  |  |  |   |
| Seaman Recruit (SR)   | Seaman Apprentice (SA)  | Seaman (SA)   | Petty Officer 3rd Class (PO3)  | Petty Officer 2nd Class (PO2)   | Petty Officer 1st Class (PO1)   | Chief Petty Officer (CPO)   |   | Senior Chief Petty Officer (CPO)  | Master Chief Petty Officer (MCPO)   | Force Command Master Chief Petty Officer (FORMC)                                      | Fleet Command Petty Officer (FLTMC)   | Master Chief Petty Officer of the Navy (MCPON)  |   |
| COAST GUARD   |   |   |  |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |
|  |  |  |   |  |  |  |   |  |  |  |   |  |   |
| Seaman Recruit (SR)   | Seaman Apprentice (SA)  | Seaman (SA)   | Petty Officer 3rd Class (PO3))   | Petty Officer 2nd Class (PO2)   | Petty Officer 1st Class (PO1)   | Chief Petty Officer (CPO)   |   | Senior Chief Petty Officer (CPO)  | Master chief Petty Officer (MCPO)   | Command Master chief (CMC)  |   | Master Chief Petty Officer of the Coast Guard (MCPO-CG)                               |   |

Courtesy of the Department of Defense ([www.defense.gov/military](http://www.defense.gov/military))

## Appendix E: Officer Rank Insignia of the U.S. Armed Forces

| Rank Insignia of the United States Armed Forces  |   |  |  |  |   |   |  |  |   |   |
|--|---|--|--|--|---|---|--|--|---|---|
| OFFICERS   |   |  |  |  |   |   |  |  |   |   |
| O-1  | O-2   | O-3  | O-4  | O-5  | O-6   | O-7   | O-8  | O-9  | O-10  | Special   |
| AIR FORCE  |   |  |  |  |   |   |  |  |   |   |
| <br>Second Lieutenant (2d Lt) | <br>First Lieutenant (1st Lt)        | <br>Captain (Capt)                  | <br>Major (Maj)                     | <br>Lieutenant Colonel (Lt Col)     | <br>Colonel (Col)          | <br>Brigadier General (Brig Gen)     | <br>Major General (Maj Gen)          | <br>Lieutenant General (Lt Gen)     | <br>General (Gen)                  | <br>General of the Air Force (GAF) |
| ARMY   |   |  |  |  |   |   |  |  |   |   |
| <br>Second Lieutenant (2LT)   | <br>First Lieutenant (1LT)           | <br>Captain (CPT)                   | <br>Major (MAJ)                     | <br>Lieutenant Colonel (LTC)        | <br>Colonel (COL)          | <br>Brigadier General (BG)           | <br>Major General (MG)               | <br>Lieutenant General (LTG)        | <br>General (GEN)                  | <br>General of the Army (GA)       |
| MARINES  |   |  |  |  |   |   |  |  |   |   |
| <br>Second Lieutenant (2ndLt) | <br>First Lieutenant (1stLt)         | <br>Captain (Capt)                  | <br>Major (Maj)                     | <br>Lieutenant Colonel (LtCol)      | <br>Colonel (Col)          | <br>Brigadier General (BGen)         | <br>Major General (MajGen)           | <br>Lieutenant General (LtGen)      | <br>General (Gen)                  |   |
| NAVY   |   |  |  |  |   |   |  |  |   |   |
| <br>Ensign (ENS)              | <br>Lieutenant Junior Grade (LTJG)   | <br>Lieutenant (LT)                 | <br>Lieutenant Commander (LCDR)     | <br>Commander (CDR)                 | <br>Captain (CAPT)         | <br>Rear Admiral Lower Half (RDML)   | <br>Rear Admiral Upper Half (RADM)    | <br>Vice Admiral (VADM)             | <br>Admiral (ADM)                  | <br>Fleet Admiral (FADM)           |
| COAST GUARD  |   |  |  |  |   |   |  |  |   |   |
| <br>Ensign (ENS)            | <br>Lieutenant Junior Grade (LTJG) | <br>Lieutenant (LT)               | <br>Lieutenant Commander (LCDR)   | <br>Commander (CDR)               | <br>Captain (CAPT)       | <br>Rear Admiral Lower Half (RDML) | <br>Rear Admiral Upper Half (RADM)  | <br>Vice Admiral (VADM)           | <br>Admiral (ADM)                | <br>Fleet Admiral (FADM)         |
| WARRANT OFFICERS   |   |  |  |  |   |   |  |  |   |   |
| ARMY   |   |  |  |  | MARINES   |   |  |  |   |   |
| <br>Warrant Officer (WO1)   | <br>Chief Warrant Officer (CW2)    | <br>Chief Warrant Officer (CW3)   | <br>Chief Warrant Officer (CW4)   | <br>Chief Warrant Officer (CW5)   | <br>Warrant Officer (WO) | <br>Chief Warrant Officer (CWO2)   | <br>Chief Warrant Officer (CWO3)  | <br>Chief Warrant Officer (CWO4)  | <br>Chief Warrant Officer (CWO5) |   |
| NAVY   |   |  |  |  | COAST GUARD   |   |  |  |   |   |
| The grade of Warrant Officer (WO) is no longer in use.   | <br>Chief Warrant Officer (CWO-2)  | <br>Chief Warrant Officer (CWO-3) | <br>Chief Warrant Officer (CWO-4) | <br>Chief Warrant Officer (CWO-5) | The grade of Warrant Officer (WO) is no longer in use.  | <br>Chief Warrant Officer (CWO-2)  | <br>Chief Warrant Officer (CWO-3) | <br>Chief Warrant Officer (CWO-4) |   | The grade of chief Warrant Officer (CWO-5) is no longer in use.   |

Courtesy of the Department of Defense ([www.defense.gov/military](http://www.defense.gov/military))

## CURRICULUM VITAE

### Jean Marie Pyzyk

#### EDUCATION:

University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee  
**Doctorate (PhD)** Urban Education 2017  
Specialization: Adult, Continuing, and Higher Education Leadership  
Minor: Human Resource Management

**Master of Science** (Administrative Leadership) 2009  
DPI License: Principal (5051)

Carroll University  
**Master of Education** (Adult and Continuing Education) 2005

DPI Teaching License(s): English and Speech Communication 2002

University of Wisconsin-Oshkosh  
**Bachelor of Science** (Speech Communication) 1990

#### EMPLOYMENT HISTORY:

JM GEORGE CONSULTING, LLC 2017 – Present  
United in Education | A veteran owned company  
10701 W. National Avenue, Ste. 200A, West Allis, WI 53227  
Position: Senior Consultant and Owner  
Part-time

FedEx GROUND UNIVERSITY 2016 - Present  
17950 W. Corporate Drive, Brookfield, WI 53045  
Position: Learning & Development

NORTHWESTERN MUTUAL 2011 - 2015  
720 E. Wisconsin Avenue, Milwaukee, WI 53202  
Position: Learning & Development Consultant  
Manager (Operations)

ARCHDIOCESE OF MILWAUKEE SCHOOLS 2007- 2011  
3501 S. Lake Drive, Milwaukee, WI 53207  
Position(s): Principal | Asst. Prin. | English Teacher

CUDAHY HIGH SCHOOL 2001 – 2005  
4950 S. Lake Drive, Cudahy, WI 53110  
Position: English and Speech Teacher

## **MILITARY VETERAN:**

### U. S. AIR FORCE RESERVE

1984 – 2008

440<sup>th</sup> Airlift Wing, Gen Mitchell IAP, Milwaukee, WI 53207  
(Honorable Discharge)

|                    |                |                               |
|--------------------|----------------|-------------------------------|
| Officer Position:  | 1991 – 2008    | MSC Officer/Executive Officer |
|                    | Officer Rank:  | Major (0-4)                   |
| Enlisted Position: | 1984 – 1991    | Emergency Medical Technician  |
|                    | Enlisted Rank: | Staff Sergeant (E-4)          |

### **Operation Desert Shield/Storm**

1991

Position: Medical Technician (SSgt)  
Medical Service Corps Officer (2Lt)  
Deployment: Six months

- Activated with 440<sup>th</sup> Medical Squadron as a Med Tech (E5); received officer commission while deployed overseas; returned as a Medical Service Corps Officer (2Lt).

### **Operation Iraqi Freedom (OIF)**

2004

Position: Executive Officer (Major)  
Protocol Officer  
Deployment: Six months

- Volunteered to deploy as an Executive Officer (Captain) to Major General Jay (John) Flournoy; received promotion to Major while serving overseas.

## **MILITARY EDUCATION (In-Residence):**

|                                |                                 |          |
|--------------------------------|---------------------------------|----------|
| Communication Officer Training | Keesler AFB, Biloxi, MS         | 12 weeks |
| Squadron Officer School        | Maxwell AFB, Montgomery, AL     | 6 weeks  |
| Health Services Administration | Sheppard AFB, Wichita Falls, TX | 12 weeks |
| Emergency Medical Technician   | Sheppard AFB, Wichita Falls, TX | 12 weeks |
| Basic Military Training        | Lackland AFB, San Antonio, TX   | 6 weeks  |

## **MILITARY TOURS:**

|  |                             |
|--|-----------------------------|
| Operation Iraqi Freedom, Kuwait        | March AFB, California       |
| Operation Desert Shield/Storm, Germany | Lowry AFB, Colorado         |
| Bitburg AFB, Germany                   | Niagara Falls ANG, New York |
| Spangdahlem AFB, Germany               | Bolling AFB, W.D.C.         |
| Osan AFB, South Korea                  | Lackland AFB, Texas         |
| NATO Military School, Czech Republic   | Sheppard AFB, Texas         |
| United States Pentagon, W.D.C.         | Keesler AFB, Mississippi    |
| Langley AFB, Virginia                  | Nellis AFB, Nevada          |
| Savanna ANG, Georgia                   | Maxwell AFB, Alabama        |
| Eglin AFB, Florida                     | Volk Field, Wisconsin       |
| Travis AFB, California                 | Final tour: Kawai, Hawaii   |

## **MILITARY DECORATIONS:**

Meritorious Service Medal, Air Force Commendation Medal, Air Force Outstanding Unit Award (2 devices), National Defense Service Medal (1 device), Global War on Terrorism Expeditionary Medal, Global War on Terrorism Service Medal, Military Outstanding Volunteer Service Medal, Air Force Expeditionary Service Ribbon, Air Force Longevity Service Award (4 devices), Armed Force Reserve Medal (2 hourglass devices and M device), Air Force Training Ribbon

## **RECOGNITION AND EVENTS:**

- Recipient of the 2016 Citizen of the Year from the Wisconsin Justian Society of Lawyers: an affiliate of the National Italian American Bar Association.
  - Certificate of Special Congressional Recognition by U.S. Congressman Paul Ryan.
  - Certificate of Recognition by City of Milwaukee Mayor Tom Barrett.
  - Certificate of Recognition by State of Wisconsin Governor Scott Walker.
- Taught English as a Foreign Language to former military officers, once serving under a communist regime, located in Eastern Bloc countries (Poland, Czech Republic, Lithuania). Represented the U.S. Air Force. Was one of four military officers deployed as an instructor part of a NATO Partnership for Peace initiative.
- Successfully lobbied members in W.D.C. to provide funding for the testing of National Guard members and reservists (nationwide), who volunteered to be added to the National Marrow Donor Program. Received the C.W. Bill Young Donor Drive Congressional Award in W.D.C. after facilitating five successful marrow donor drives at the 440<sup>th</sup> Airlift Wing, Milwaukee, WI.
- Since 2001, volunteer to serve as protocol officer to the Chairman and the Joint Chiefs of Staff during the National Memorial Day Concert, produced by Capitol Concerts, aired live on PBS from the west lawn of the U.S. Capital building every Memorial Day weekend.

## **PROFESSIONAL ORGANIZATIONS:**

- National Society of Collegiate Scholars (NSCS)
- Association for Talent Development (ATD)
- Society of Human Resource Management (SHRM)
- Veterans of Foreign Wars (VFW)
- Reserve Officers Association (ROA)