

**Brian Smith - Oral History Memoir**

Interviewed in person by Barbara Ambos

May 16, 2018 -Massasoit Community College Library – Brockton campus

**BARBARA AMBOS:** And we are now recording, yes? Okay. This is Barbara Ambos interviewing Brian Smith on May 16, 2018. The interview is taking place at the Massasoit Community College library in Brockton, Massachusetts and is part of the Massasoit Veterans History Project. So, Brian, thank you.

**BRIAN SMITH:** Thank you for having me. Thank you.

**AMBOS:** I don't know if there's some specific area you want to start with, but this starts off with biographical information, general, so figure out where you came from and how you got where you are, so--

**SMITH:** Sure.

**AMBOS:** You were born in--

**SMITH:** I was born in Pasadena, California in 1983. Not long after I was born, I moved to Boston, Massachusetts, Dorchester, specific, with my parents because my mom was from the East Coast, and I guess she had a new employment opportunity; she's going to be a nurse, and so, that's where the family came. We came back to—or we went to Boston.

**AMBOS:** Was she originally from--

**SMITH:** She's originally from Long Island, New York. She's from Long Island, New York, but she moved up to Massachusetts—Braintree, Massachusetts—when she was about 19 years old. She's the oldest of nine. Her father passed away young and my grandmother remarried, and they all moved up here.

**AMBOS:** We hear stories of people who start here and they get somewhere else, and they have to come back.

**SMITH:** Right (laughs).

**AMBOS:** So are you the only child or you have siblings too?

**SMITH:** I have three younger sisters. I'm the oldest. Yep. It's Elizabeth, Kathleen [phonetic], and then Sarah.

**AMBOS:** And did you go to college before you military service?

**SMITH:** No, I went after, and I went after because—so I had no plans on ever going to college—ever. When I was in high school, I said, I'm not going to college. This is just not for me, education. I'm just not suited for it. But then came the post-911 GI Bill, and they were offering this opportunity for all veterans who met the requirements to go to college for free. And they would pay you to do it. And that was just an opportunity I was not going to turn away. So, off to college I went after I separated from the military. Yep.

**AMBOS:** So when did you go into the military?

**SMITH:** I enlisted officially May 26<sup>th</sup>, 2003. I enlisted into the United States Air Force. I separated six years later from that—six years from May 26<sup>th</sup>. I went in because I just needed some direction in my life. My father encouraged me to go; had a cousin who went into the army and another cousin who went into the Air Force. And it seemed to work very well for them; they kind of got their stuff together, so to speak, and I figured I would follow in their footsteps.

**AMBOS:** That's pretty typical.

**SMITH:** Yeah.

**AMBOS:** So how old were you when you started?

**SMITH:** Nineteen. I was two years removed from high school, and it probably took me--I believe I initially signed up when I was about 18, but it took about 6 or 7 months to go through the initial DEP process. I can't even remember what that acronym stands for, but it's basically you completing all this paperwork and kind of just hanging out before your ship date. I was also a little bit bigger, so I had to lose some weight; I had to meet the weight requirement of 194 pounds before I could actually complete paperwork and ship out.

**AMBOS:** Is there Basic Training for Air Force?

**SMITH:** Yeah. I think we're the shortest Basic Training, but yeah, I went to Basic Training down in Lackland Air Force Base right next to San Antonio, Texas and spent about seven weeks in Basic Training. (Ambos whispers about equipment) And then following that, I did my tech school also at Lackland Air Force Base to become the Security Forces, which is basically law enforcement, security police for the Air Force; so, that was an additional three months. It was about five months total down in Texas.

**AMBOS:** And that was your primary focus, then, was military police—is that what they call it?

**SMITH:** Yeah. So that was the path that I chose after the recruiter showed us this awesome video of (laughs)—well, at the time, it was pretty awesome—of a bunch of guys on HUMVs with these big automatic weapons, riding through the jungle and not necessarily what our career field does—part of it is—but that sucked me in. That and a four-thousand dollar bonus. So I said, Alright, four-thousand dollars; I've never seen that much money in my life. I could get that and do a cool job; I think I'll do that career field.

**AMBOS:** And where did they send you after training?

**SMITH:** My first duty station was Minot, North Dakota.

**AMBOS:** Brr!

**SMITH:** Yeah, (laughs), exactly. Middle of nowhere, have all of our nuclear missiles up there and so we did security for those, so. I spent about fourteen or fifteen months there. Luckily I got out when I did, and I got to travel the world from that point forward. It certainly was cold, as you said, 'brr'. They say, Why not Minot? And they say, Freezin's the reason. (Ambos laughs) It literally—I've seen the temperatures get down to about -40/-50 degrees, including the wind chill factor. It's completely miserable to be in that cold.

**AMBOS:** But, I'm being naïve because the Air Force—but you were on the ground? Or were you flying?

[06:21.2]

**SMITH:** Yeah, no, that's a good question. Because everyone asks me if I was a pilot when I told them I was Air Force, but we were security policemen, so we were just, we were on the ground, so we were like regular police officers or security patrolmen. Yes, we were on the ground--

**AMBOS:** For the base (talking at same time)

**SMITH:** Yeah. We protected personnel, assets, the installation—it depends on—the career field has so many duties and responsibilities in all these different areas and categories that you might not necessarily assigned to an installation. You might go outside the wire, so to speak, and patrol a certain area because we have some assets out there. But to answer your question, we were on the ground.

**AMBOS:** So you sounded like you went out to see the world. Do you want to give us your itinerary or find out interesting stories from that?

**SMITH:** Sure. I don't know if I have any interesting stories, but I'll certainly tell you where we went. Well my first duty station was North Dakota, but after that, I put in Code 88, and what that means is, the military will send you where they send you. And my duty station that I got from that was South Korea—Kunsan, Kunsan Air Base. And that's pretty much right on the Yellow Sea if my mind serves me correctly. And I spent a year there. And when you do a year in these special duty stations, which is what Korea's basically considered, you're supposed to get one of your top picks for following that duty station. And so I heard about this little place in Turkey called Izmir Air Station, where you get to wear civilian clothes and you're not in the regular uniform every day, and it's just a break from the norm, so to speak, of being a security forces member, and so I got that base, and I got assigned there for another year. And it was everything that I thought it would be. I loved Turkey so much. I'd love to go back some day, too. And after Turkey, we went to the Azores, Portugal—so the little Island of Terceira. And then I was there for about fourteen months. And then I did a deployment to Kandahar Air Base, and then I went back to Portugal, and that was about 2009 when I separated. So I got to do some bouncing around. I also got to do a little bit of traveling in between. But mainly Europe, mainly Europe.

**AMBOS:** And Kandahar Base, was that during our current conflicts or whatever are there now?

**SMITH:** Yeah. So it was part of Operation Enduring Freedom. So we just went over there as a support unit to do the airfield security, so just making sure that we protected our planes and all of our assets on the airfield.

[09:18]

**AMBOS:** Do you recall any of your instructors?

**SMITH:** Yeah. So in Basic Training, I remember Sergeant Williams and Sergeant Robleto [phonetic]. I don't know if I'll be able to forget—and not for anything specific, but it was probably just one of the more unique times of my life, and so when you spend so much time learning from instructors about how to transition into the military and what it meant to be an airman, and what it meant to serve in the Air Force, you don't forget those people who show you how to do that. And so, yeah—Sergeant Williams and Sergeant Robleto. In terms of other instructors, to be honest with you, I do not remember (laughs).

**AMBOS:** Did you have to qualify with certain equipment, besides I mean, well, you can tell me anything.

**SMITH:** Sure, yeah. We had to get qualifications on just about—well, of course, on all of our weapons; we had to get qualifications on driving in inclement weather. So for example, Minot, North Dakota, when I was there, there was a time when we had a few rollovers, where trucks would rollover because folks--the road was slippery or they weren't paying attention to how fast they were going when they would take a turn, we had just some vehicle incidents and so we had to do this training where we would get in this truck and go into this big, open lot and the truck's back wheels were—I can't remember what they were replaced with—but it was almost—if you can imagine the back of it being on like a bowling ball. And basically what you had to do was the instructor would send the car into—what's the best way to describe this—into like a careen, and what you would have to do is take the appropriate driving measures to straighten out the wheel, not slam on the brakes, otherwise, that's what ultimately would cause a rollover. And you just had to take the right corrective action to put the vehicle back on course. So that's one example of something we had to get certified on. And then being a police officer, we did carry

all kinds of weapons from M9 to M4; we were trained on the 249 Bravo. Basically what that is a heavy machine gun. Then we had a light machine gun, which was—excuse me, the 249 is a light machine gun, it's a SAW [squad automatic weapon]. The 240 Bravo is the heavy machine gun. And then depending on if you wanted additional qualifications, you could get qualified on the 50-cal or—I can't remember the name of it—but the automatic grenade launcher. The Air Force offered all kinds of opportunities for folks to get certified in different ways. You know, if you were good, you could even get Ranger certified, which is really just all for the army. But every year, I guess a few designated airmen would have the opportunity to go to Ranger School, and that's pretty unique in a lot of people don't know that about the Air Force—they get that opportunity.

**AMBOS:** What was the hardest part of the training?

**SMITH:** The hardest part about training? Um (pause), getting used to running, for me. My first time running, I think our first run we had to do two miles, and for me, somebody who had never run that much, I threw up in a trash can when I was done (laughs), so I had to really get used to that getting into shape and being physical pretty much every morning at five a.m., that was definitely not normal for me. And so I would say, definitely the physical fitness aspect of the military is something that I get used to. And also being away from my family. That was also a tough part that took a little while, but, and that didn't last long once I—

**AMBOS:** Did they write you often, or in this day of emails was the communication that open? Thought there may be some censoring.

[0:13:32.8]

**SMITH:** Oh, yeah. I got a lot of letters. We didn't have access to computers when I was in Basic Training. Not until I went into tech school did I have access to computers, where we could actually leave the building we were primarily assigned to and kind of wander around the installation a little bit on our own. But I mostly corresponded with folks via letters for the first seven weeks, which is what—I don't think anyone does that anymore.

**AMBOS:** Yeah. Is mail call still as important?

**SMITH:** It is still important, yeah, you really look forward to getting something in the mail, just a letter from whoever, just so could you have the time to be occupied to write back and to have a few moments of a break away from just the military stuff.

[14.18.1]

**AMBOS:** So, it was just your parents and sisters that you had left?

**SMITH:** Yeah.

**AMBOS:** How about a pet?

**SMITH:** Yeah, we had a family dog, Fozzie. Yeah, Fozzie Bear, and yeah, that was tough too.

**AMBOS:** So, you were telling me that the exercise part was hard to adapt to. What was the easiest part?

**SMITH:** The easiest part about the military? Oh, wow, you never hear that question.

**AMBOS:** Military lifestyle, yeah.

**SMITH:** The easiest part for me was, honestly—honestly, traveling. Some people look at traveling as a daunting thing to do, trying to find the terminal, trying to find your bags if they get lost, but I loved traveling. I loved being in almost an uncomfortable situation where I couldn't speak the language or I couldn't read a sign. And just going through the process of trying to

figure all of that out or finding somebody who can speak English and can explain where you need to go or—I mean, most airports have things written in English, but when you get to that destination or that country and you're out in the city, kind of navigating your way out and about, that part is fun. So for example, in Turkey, of course people speak English over there, but the primary language is Turkish. And when we went there, we didn't—so Turkey was unique in the sense that you didn't live on the installation. Everybody gets there, you have to live out and about the city somewhere around the installation within a reasonable distance, and so I lived in Alsancak, and I had to figure out how to take taxis, how to take the buses, and had to navigate it on my own and I loved learning how to speak Turkish in terms of giving directions; I loved trying to figure out their system and their way of life. And I would say that some parts were difficult, but it was the easiest thing to do. It's weird, it's like, I don't know, like I was meant to travel—and meant to navigate things and figure things out for myself in relation to traveling.

**AMBOS:** You mentioned that was the fun part of your sort of your sort of European, Turkish—you took your travel during leaves or was it assigned?

**SMITH:** I did some traveling, but Turkey was my assigned place, yeah. But when we would navigate or go to different parts of the country to like a resort—or I went to the Netherlands once—I got to do some traveling in that sense.

**AMBOS:** As part of your job?

**SMITH:** As part—no, not as part of my job, sorry; in more of my leisure time, taking leave. Yeah, so in that sense.

**AMBOS:** So it's asking about wartime service, so I don't know if you're able to talk about—you already mentioned you served in—

**SMITH:** Afghanistan.

**AMBOS:** Afghanistan.

**SMITH:** Kandahar.

**AMBOS:** And what are your recollections of that experience?

**SMITH:** Kandahar is—it's interesting when you ask wartime service because I guess, technically, we're over there, and they're in a conflict. And some people, I think, in the sense of war being in quote-unquote the shit or fire fight or something to that effect, that is not something that I necessarily had to deal with. But I guess I'll just speak to my experience of being in Kandahar. As somebody who just did airfield security, though, the biggest threat that we had were rocket attacks and that's about it. We had some people who would try to break through the fences or try to steal our equipment to launch rockets, and so we had to kind of deter that kind of thing so we didn't have a rocket attack. Otherwise, I mean my time was, it was really just routine. I went to work. I was in charge of leading a team that was in charge of the base security or the flat line security. And so I was a supervisor in that sense and I really enjoyed that job because I got to lead a team that was really diverse, and so we had folks from the Netherlands on my team, from the UK, Americans, and another country, which is slipping my mind. So that was interesting being able to work with people from different countries but working toward the same mission and working together with those folks will be an unforgettable experience. I also did security with our alarm system, we call it TASS Tactical Automated Security Systems, and basically I sat up in a base defense operations center with the French and with Bulgarians and the Dutch and English, and we just coordinated security together so if somebody had triggered and alarm outside the base perimeter, we would coordinate security to go out and just do a quick

assessment to see what was going on and determine whether or not it was a threat. Or if we did get a rocket attack, we would try to figure out where it originated from and again, kind of work as a team to solve or go find the threat. We pretty much worked six days on, one day off.

[20:18.5]

**AMBOS:** Different shifts?

**SMITH:** Different shifts. Yeah, we would have to sometimes to a day shift and then for a couple weeks and then swing to a mid-shift or a night shift, and then you'd have to readjust your internal clock pretty quick. That part was always tough, but once you do it, you kind of just, you adapt with a couple Monster energy drinks and (both laugh) figuring out the right sleep schedule, like you would maybe try to stay up for 36 hours straight so you could adjust to going back to sleep during the day. And then you could be on the night shift again and ready to rock and roll.

**AMBOS:** What was the weather like there?

**SMITH:** Hot. Hot during the summertime, and then believe it or not, it snowed once or twice when it started to get towards, was it—October it snowed twice. But during the summer, it was pretty hot. So what you would imagine the Middle East—how you might imagine it to be hot, it was exactly that, so like 120 degrees on a good day.

**AMBOS:** And it snowed, but did it rain?

**SMITH:** It rained a little bit, yeah, but not very much, not from what I can recall at least. And there was one sandstorm that we had just missed before we touched down, and I was told by some of the folks that we relieved that that was a pretty, pretty miserable experience, but luckily we missed it.

**AMBOS:** Have you stayed in touch with your—any of your—

**SMITH:** A couple, through Facebook. I don't know if you really consider that staying in touch. Every once in a while I'll send a quick message off to somebody. I guess that's the great part of technology, though, you can kind of just reach out when you want to say hi or when you don't. I did lose touch with more than I do keep in touch with. It's an interesting thing. You think that when you serve with people, wherever you are, whether it's wartime, whether it's not, you spend a lot of time with somebody in a patrol car. You spend a lot of time with somebody at an entry control point, waving people through. you know, that can be eight to twelve hours a day for a few weeks or even months at a time. You think you're going to bond with these people for the rest of your lives, and there comes a point where you maybe PCS or you go to a different duty station, and that's the last you kind of hear from folks. But, I mean some people are probably a lot more intentional about keeping in touch with folks than I am. For me, the military gave me this—at least I think this is the military. I moved around a lot, pretty much every six months to a year for either a temporary duty station or a permanent duty station. The point is, I moved around a lot and because I did that, saying goodbye to people was pretty easy for me after the second one. And so, I think at that point I knew that I would probably be saying goodbye to somebody that I would not keep in touch with or never, ever see again. Unfortunately, I think that happened for more people than maybe I would like to keep in touch with now. Because I wonder how this person's doing or that person's doing, and even with Facebook, I have no idea or no reasonable means to get in touch with them because either they're not on or, I don't know, they're just not immediately available.

[24:06]

**AMBOS:** Besides travel, did you have any other recreation when you were off duty?

**SMITH:** Besides traveling, off duty, what did we do? Uh. (pause)

**AMBOS:** You have to eat on base?

**SMITH:** Yeah, that's a good question. No, we didn't necessarily have to eat on base. Pretty much every—aside from Kandahar—we were able to go off base on all the other installations, so of course Minot, North Dakota; Korea, Turkey, Portugal. I guess one thing I did enjoy doing was eating and finding a new local restaurant with the cultural food and trying different things, exploring. But I guess that more relates to traveling. I don't know. I mean, spending time with folks having a drink after a shift.

**AMBOS:** What was Korea like? Is that the same area that—I mean, I'm so ignorant about stuff over there. Actually, I know a little bit about Vietnam, but our Korean bases there—is that where you were, where they're having all this testing?

**SMITH:** No. So I think all the testing is more up towards the DMZ, 30<sup>th</sup> Parallel.

**AMBOS:** And you were right on the ocean.

**SMITH:** Yeah. And I was more midway down South Korea over to the west. But every month we did prepare, and you hear about this in the news how the United States military in relation with the South Korean military and sometimes other countries will have these joint military exercises, and so we would do that once a month for about a week straight. And basically what you do is you simulate what would happen if North Korea came charging down south in an attack, and you would have to prepare and the sense of there would be a recall, which means everybody would get called to their flight to meet up, and then you would have to go arm and then you would have to put up the defensive fighting positions in the sea wire and the concertina wire and then basically prepare for an attack. And so we did that for about a week straight, once a month and probably one of the more not-so-fun parts about being in Korea. But, again, once it became a norm, it became a norm.

**AMBOS:** And you had to take it all down?

**SMITH:** And you'd have to take it all down. Which actually wasn't that bad because at that point, the exercise is over, and you're going to go back to doing whatever you would normally do, go back to your regular work shift or go back to having a weekend to go in town. But once the exercises occur, everything pretty much shuts down during that time period. Everybody is in MOPP gear and that's like the chemical attack uniform. Sometimes they have the masks on. What I'm saying is you just go, you know, balls to the wall for that one week. The norm kind of disappears for a while. But it's certainly unique to Korea, and again, another memory that I won't forget. It's interesting, though, to watch the news and what's going on now and how we're trying to mend relations with North Korea, and so watching the attempt to diplomacy between both countries and the United States, having been there, I find a lot of interest in.

[27:45.5]

**AMBOS:** Did you have international colleagues there or was it just U.S. and South Koreans?

**SMITH:** So in my experience, this could be different depending on which base you were at in Korea, it was all South Koreans. So we would work with—or I, in my position—depending on what posts I was at—I would work with some South Koreans. If I were doing the entry control, we'd have a South Korean guard there. Or if I was doing, security stuff, I would—the electronic alarms—the security stuff, we had another South Korean posted there. Every once in a while, we got to interact with those guys.

**AMBOS:** Interesting.

**SMITH:** Yeah, yeah.

**AMBOS:** Wow. Did? You learn any languages?

**SMITH:** Not in Korea. That was a tough one. I just—I couldn't do it (laughs). It requires so much because they write completely different from the way we do, and they pronounce things also a lot different than we do, and I just at that time didn't have any interest in even trying to tackle that one.

**AMBOS:** But you picked something up in Turkey?

**SMITH:** Yeah. Turkey—I don't know what it was about Turkey, but I really buckled down in Turkey, and I bought CDs and I bought a book, and maybe because I had to actually live out in the city where people weren't speaking English for the most part. And again, when I talked about navigating that whole city, Turkish culture on my own for the most part, I said, I want to learn this culture; I'm going to dedicate myself to it. And I did a pretty good job of learning basic Turkish. I was pretty proud of myself.

**AMBOS:** Interesting skill.

[0:29:30]

**SMITH:** Yeah (laughs). I wish I remembered most of it, though, I certainly didn't retain all of it.

**AMBOS:** So, you said you—what do they call it, separated from service—

**SMITH:** Yeah, separated.

**AMBOS:** Separated after six years?

**SMITH:** After six years, yeah.

**AMBOS:** And that was in what year?

**SMITH:** Two thousand and nine. Two thousand nine. Honorable discharge and took a few months off. I'd gotten out in May and so I really wanted to get started with school, but the GI Bill—this is actually during the incipient of the post-nine-eleven GI Bill. I hadn't even been around at all yet because it was a brand new version of it. That started in September; I got out in May, and so I kind of just hung out for the summer. I did a couple triathlon sprints and got into fitness and running and things like that. Just waiting for the college semester to start.

**AMBOS:** And was that back in Massachusetts?

**SMITH:** Yeah, that was back in Boston. So I got out of the military, moved back in with my mom and a couple of my sisters, and tried to get my feet down on pavement, figure out the civilian transition, which was tough. It's tough. So being around family was, I think, where I needed to be while I was going through all that figuring out, again, how to be a student; how to be a civilian again.

**AMBOS:** And which school did you end up going to?

**SMITH:** I went to Quincy College. So, September 2009, I picked right back up and got my books, went to school, and I thought I would want to be a law enforcement officer or police officer or I would work my way towards one of the federal intelligence agencies, but that didn't pan out the way I thought it would. But I studied criminal justice, I graduated in 2011, and I transferred over to University of New Haven, where I pursued my Bachelor's in International Justice and Security, again, more geared towards getting into an intelligence agency. And when I was down in UNH, I picked up a work study position, which is basically doing what I'm doing now here at Massasoit Community College as a Veterans Services academic advisor, so

supporting students who are transitioning from the military into college, helping them with the right support services to get enrolled. I did that work study and then I kind of fell in love with higher ed and so I've been in education ever since then.

**AMBOS:** That's great.

**SMITH:** Yeah.

**AMBOS:** So, you're answering most of these questions.

**SMITH:** (laughs) Feel like I'm rambling.

**AMBOS:** No. So, this says, Do you attend reunions? But there might be reunions that you don't necessarily keep in touch with kind of thing—does our unit have any reunions?

**SMITH:** (talking at same time) I don't know if there are reunions, no. And I think because all my units were mostly overseas and then people come and go, so it's not like a cohort, where you're there with people. I mean you might have a small core of like ones and twos, but when you get assigned to a flight, there are thirty other people, and sometimes there are upwards of like seven or eight flights. And so people are coming and going all the time. And so there's really not a cohort where you're going to have a reunion with people from two-thousand-eleven, and thirteen, you know what I mean.

**AMBOS:** It's not a concise time period.

**SMITH:** Right, exactly.

[0:33:16.9]

**AMBOS:** So, how has the military service impacted your feelings about war and the military?

**SMITH:** Oh, um, I don't know yet. I'm still grappling with how I feel about war. And how I feel about war-specific. I mean, I'd rather see peace than war, but I don't know. I compare generations back to World War II. In my mind World War II was a time where the United States actually really had something to go out and fight for. And now I don't know exactly what we're fighting for. I haven't figured it all out. I know what the media says, and I know what books—why they think we went to war or why we got involved with these conflicts, but having grown up a lot and having matured a lot, and having done some of my own research, I don't know—can't really figure out what we're doing, why we're doing some of the things that we're doing. So I don't blame anybody for this; I don't blame necessarily presidents or—I certainly don't blame the troops. I'm always going to be pro-military. I always will support—because if we are going to have wars, somebody's got to go out and do it; otherwise, they're going to draft people. So I think we should, as American citizens, be a hundred percent behind those who are willing to put whatever on the line for whatever reason. So, in that sense I'll always be a backer of the military. But in terms of my feelings about war, it's still something I'm grappling. Maybe in a few years from now, I'll have it figured out. (laughs)

**AMBOS:** It's a big question, very personal, too.

**SMITH:** Yeah, right.

**AMBOS:** You can decide if you want to answer this, too. What message would you like to leave for future generations who will view or hear this interview?

**SMITH:** Oh man. I don't know.

**AMBOS:** I don't want to put words in your mouth, but what you just said before seems to fit with that too.

**SMITH:** Yeah. So I'll say, so as a veterans services academic counselor who works with military folks and veterans and their dependents coming back to school and using the GI Bill or whatever BA or military educational benefit that they have, I think it behooves those people who had these benefits to make the most out of them to go to college and to pursue their dreams and to get educated and to learn and to not really squander an opportunity where you're going to have your tuition fees paid for and where you're going to get really paid, you're going to get a monthly stipend to go to college for most of the benefits. I think it makes sense for folks to take this opportunity and allow it to help them shape their future in a real positive way. I think education and having a degree leads to greater opportunities; or if not, your education, having a technical skill or ability. And with these educational benefits, I think everyone should, again, should take full advantage of it. I also think folks shouldn't stop giving their service to—you know, you hear, we're in the military; I served, or I served my country. When men and women leave the military, they should continue to give service to whatever community you're in, to your neighbor, to the people around you so we can have a better America, better communities, better cities, better towns—where we function more like communities. And I think in America, we're so individualized; we need to realize that and kind of put the brakes on come together and have, not necessarily a military camaraderie, but form some better camaraderie for the general good.

[37:33.9]

**AMBOS:** I have a question, it will leap all the way back to the beginning—

**SMITH:** Sure.

**AMBOS:** About the recruitment. Now you went into the Air Force, was it like an Air Force recruiter who came to speak or how did you get involved in that whole process? Or do they recruit for every military branch?

**SMITH:** Yeah, they have recruiters for every branch.

**AMBOS:** I mean, but each branch has their own?

**SMITH:** Mm-hmm. Yeah.

**AMBOS:** So you spoke with a—

**SMITH:** Yeah. So I talked to my cousin after he went through basic training and I knew that at that point, I think the air force is the best fit for me, and I didn't even seek to see what the marines or the navy or the coast guard or the army had to offer. I just said, Alright air force; this is going to be it, went in talked to the air force recruiter, and that was that.

**AMBOS:** You spoke of the weight issues, but vision issues they didn't—

**SMITH:** No other health issues, no other health concerns.

**AMBOS:** You didn't have glasses then or—

**SMITH:** No (laughs) I didn't at that time. Actually, you know what, I did have glasses, but—

**AMBOS:** But since you weren't flying it wasn't an issue.

**SMITH:** No, I didn't need to have twenty-twenty vision, and my eyesight isn't too bad anyways; it was really just for, real long distance. But yeah, smooth transition for the most part getting into the military, aside from having to lose about twenty pounds.

**AMBOS:** And you just decided from your cousin's experience that was the—it wasn't like some great fair or anything like that?

**SMITH:** (laughs) No. No, I didn't go to a high school fair, or a military recruiter didn't come seek me out. Something I'd made a decision on, and I was going to pursue it, and that's exactly what I did.

**AMBOS:** Brave. Is there anything else that you would want to share about your military experience?

**SMITH:** (laughs) Um, no, not that I can think of. Not unless you have more questions.

**AMBOS:** No.

**SMITH:** It's interesting. Like I don't—

**AMBOS:** Well, this one you might be able to bring from your professional position but as well as personal. What do you wish more people knew about veterans?

**SMITH:** So, I wish more people knew (sighs) not all veterans—so there are so many misconceptions about veterans. They all have PTSD or they're all physically disabled in some way. They're all crazy. They all fired a weapon. They're all infantry. They're all on the front lines. That's not the case. The things you might see glorified on—not necessarily the news—but in movies or in books, it is not necessarily that way. So for example, when I was in college, I had a couple other veterans in one of my classes. And then once some of the other traditional, straight-out-of-high-school students realized that they had asked one of the vets, Oh, How did you fire your weapon? When did you fire your weapon? When did you shoot somebody? And not really realizing that not all folks get into the military to shoot weapons; not all do shoot their weapons. I guess technically everyone is trained on how to use one (laughs). There are arguments against that, but there's got to be somebody on the front lines, there's got to be somebody as an intermediary supporting the front lines. And there are also people in the rear that have different jobs that don't necessarily do something to support the front lines but are just as important such as people who have to manage the finances or people who have to prepare food or take care of the facilities. The air force is like a little world. Everyone's got their own job. And not everybody is, again, fighting.

**AMBOS:** Professional killer.

**SMITH:** Right, yeah, an assassin (laughs). Right. It's not the way it works. And so for that reason, we don't all have PTSD; we don't all see an IED go off. And so I think people just need to really do a better job of educating themselves in what the military is and what we do.

**AMBOS:** Well, hopefully this will help.

**SMITH:** Maybe.

**AMBOS:** This recording.

**SMITH:** Yeah, that'd be one great thing that would come out of this.

**AMBOS:** Well, I think we've finished, unless there's anything else that comes to mind?

**SMITH:** No. I hope more veterans come up and take advantage of this opportunity, though. Yeah.

**AMBOS:** Okay, thank you.

**SMITH:** Thank you. Appreciate it.

[end of recording]