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Interviewee: William Ryan Thibeault
Interviewer: Miles Pearsall
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Note: A portion of this interview has been redacted.

Miles Pearsall: All right, good morning. Today is March 20, 2020. My name is Miles Pearsall, the interviewer for the University of Montana's oral history project, and today I'm going to be interviewing Will Thibeault. Will's a veteran who attends the University of Montana. We both met each other back in 2016 when, I believe, we both were starting our fall semester, correct? And we've been friends ever since, and he's agreed to sit down with me today to do this interview.

How are you doing today, Will?

William Thibeault: Pretty good. Yourself?

MP: Doing well, thank you. So, starting off here, Will, I was wondering if I could get a little bit of background from you for our listeners? So, could I have your full name, birth date, and place of birth?

WT: Yeah, William Ryan Thibeault. Let's see, I was born May 30, 1990, in Brunswick, Maine. Get the good old 207.

MP: What are your parents' names, and what do they do?

WT: My parents are Gary and Carol. My dad works at a shipyard where he's a shipfitter. He has for like 40 years. My mom is in, essentially, HR, and she works for a county government as their HR manager back in Maine.

WP: That's great. Could you just tell me a little bit about like growing up in Maine in your childhood? What was that like?

WT: Pretty simple. Not very—I feel like in relation to a lot of other kids that I've heard they're growing up, it was pretty uneventful. I mean, I was always messing around out in the woods with my friends. I didn't play video games. I just don't play video games, so I was always outside with my friends. We rode bikes. I lived in a neighborhood—the town is kind of segmented into neighborhoods divided by a lot of woods and such. I was off always out in the woods like playing paintball, fishing, or shooting stuff with bb guns, hiking. Or we were out on the coast because we only lived, I think, maybe half an hour or so from the coast. So, we'd go fish off the docks. I mean that's pretty much—I feel like that's a pretty stereotypically Maine thing to say.

MP: Yeah, and having grown up rural myself that I can definitely—

WT: It's like there's not really a whole lot of cultural things quote unquote to do so you just—

MP: I guess, rural culture, maybe.

WT: Yeah, just kind of mess around outside with your friends.

MP: That's awesome. So, what school did you attend when you grew up there?

WT: Well, for high school I went to Mount Ararat High School, which is one of the bigger ones in the area that—it's kind of like Montana in that it's a lot of small towns, so a school district will cover several. I think there's six or seven towns that all went to the high school. It was the same with the middle school; the elementary school was a little bit different. Yeah, we had a good hockey team. We sucked at football, which is also stereotypically Maine, and lacrosse.

MP: Yeah, that's pretty big up there. How many people were in your graduating class?

WT: We were the biggest graduating class in like 20 years, and we had like 300. Something like that, yeah.

MP: That's awesome. Did you have any mentors while growing up who kind of helped shape your early life before you entered the military?

WT: Yeah, there's two high school teachers that I actually, to this day, still keep in touch with and write to, and every time any time I go home I always meet up with them.

MP: Would you mind if we have their names?

WT: Yeah, one of them is John Dever (?) and one is Jillian Watt (?). I've told both of them several times over the years they just they were the two that I think that I got something out of their class beyond just the curriculum, beyond just the coursework. I actually learned something from them, and it just kind of always stuck with me. They're just really great people, and it's just kind of been important to me that they stay in my life or I stay in theirs or whatever. But I was also in Civil Air Patrol in high school. Pretty much the whole time I was in high school

MP: I didn't know that.

WT: Oh, I didn't know that you didn't know that. Yeah, I think I was the executive officer of our squadron by the time I graduated and went into the military. One of our, they call them senior members—the adults—one of them, Steve Higgins (?), he's a Vietnam vet. He was in the Air

Force. I don't remember if he was an airplane mechanic, or if he was a boom operator in KC-130 for the refueling plane. I don't remember. I know two people that they're either one of those. But I know he was in the Air Force in Vietnam and—I think we both just kind of were kindred spirits, and he really helped me develop, I think, starting out as a leader and me and helped me sort of just get that first sort of cardinal direction with my leadership style and how to do that. And just kind of how to be a military member and just being generally just a decent, good person, I guess in a weird way of saying it.

MP: No, that's great. So, would you say since you did Civil Air Patrol at that young age that it was fairly early that you knew you wanted to go into the military?

WT: Oh yeah. Oh yeah. There was never a question. I was going into the military. I was not going to college, which I laugh at now. I was definitely going to go in the military Early, little kid. I remember playing with matchboxes and the tanks and the helicopters always interested me far more than like any of the other weird made up stuff or cars or whatever. Yeah.

MP: That's awesome. What was your branch of service?

WT: I was in the army—the only branch.

MP: Wow, harsh. [laughs]

WT: I stick by it.

MP: That's fair. I was in the Coast Guard, but all right.

WT: Service is service.

MP: How'd you settle on an army?

WT: I really wanted to fly. I wanted to be a pilot, but then I got glasses when I was in 6th grade and that kind of crushed flying dreams. Then I think it was also around that time around 6th or 7th grade that I read the book—not watched the movie—*Band of Brothers*.

MP: Oh, okay. Stephen Ambrose, right?

WT: Yes. That was just, man, these guys volunteered. They were to a higher standard, and they were just really tight knit. They jump out of planes, which sounded pretty badass, and it's like there's a...I think when they're going into Bastogne they were, someone was like, “Looks like you guys are about to be surrounded,” and Lieutenant Winters, or Captain at that point, says, “We're paratroopers. We're supposed to be surrounded. I was like, ‘man, I wanna be in a unit that has that mentality.’ I knew I didn't want to do the Marines. I don't really, oddly enough I'm from the coast, not really comfortable in the water, which definitely rules out the Navy and the

Coast Guard. Then in the Air Force, I just didn't know a whole lot of the jobs, so it was like 'well, if I'm going to serve'—oh and then 9-11 happened when I was 11. And I think that sort of cemented 'well, if there's going to be a war then I want to—if there's gonna be fighting then I want to fight. I wanna participate in that; I wanna do my part.' Of course, at that age it's such an abstraction you don't even know what that is. But the army, I love the unit patches, I loved the insignia. I was a nerd you know; I love that stuff. I don't know. It's like 'man, if I'm gonna serve, I wanna be a soldier.' Soldiering sounds like what I wanna do.

My answers are gonna be really long-winded just so you know.

MP: No, that's awesome. The more the better. When did you enlist?

WT: Right out of high school.

MP: What year was that?

WT: 2008. I graduated high school like June—May 8, and I think I enlisted right after that and then I left for basic June 23.

MP: Where was your basic training?

WT: Fort Benning in Georgia. The Fort Benning School for Wayward Boys.

MP: How was that experience. Is there anything particularly memorable of your basic training?

WT: it definitely was an eye-opener. It opened my mind to how, I think, socially sort of sheltered Maine was. The people there just seemed so more just so—that's the best word I can come up with, socially advanced than I was. That sounds funny to say, but I don't know how else to describe it.

MP: I can understand. I mean, coming from a rural place myself when I went to boot camp, no, that makes a lot of sense. Because when you grow up so secluded like that, I mean, it's an eye-opener.

WT: You're in your kind of your own little world and life is like sort of idyllic, and then all of a sudden, it's like 'oh, there's people that actually went through hard times as kids.' Really hard times and grew up—I mean, I worked. I did chores around the house from the time I was essentially tall enough, but I didn't really have it bad. I didn't grow up on a farm. I didn't really work, you know what I mean? I didn't have real privation prior to the military, and there were people going into it that already had and it was eye-opening. Other than that, I was used to Civil Air Patrol, which actually honestly strives pretty well and does pretty well to have military discipline. None of the, I don't know, the discipline or the getting yelled at really bothered me at that point. It was like, 'yeah, this is what happens in the military.' I loved shooting. I had

never fired anything other than like a Ruger 10 / 22—anything bigger than that. My parents didn't hunt and didn't have guns around the house, so I fired a buddy's Ruger 10 / 22. So, getting to shoot an M-16 was a ton of fun, back when they still shot the M-16, and then all the different machine guns. I just remember having just an ear-to-ear grin the first time I fired a SAW. It was like, 'oh, that is fun.' I mean, basic training—I enjoyed it honestly. I was already in shape, so I didn't really struggle. I don't feel like I struggled that much with the physical nature of it. I was active all the time anyway before it, so that wasn't a real kick in the ass like I feel like it may have been for some people. I mean it sucked. Don't get me wrong. It's basic training. It's not supposed to be fun, but to the amount that you can enjoy it, I had a good time in it. It was like you're doing soldier stuff. You're shooting guns, stuff like blowing up, you're wearing face paint, you're in camo, you're dirty, you're just sucking. That's the stuff I wanted to do, so I had this weird naive, like, 'this is fun' attitude.

MP: That's awesome. So, what M.O.S. did you end up going to out of boot camp?

WT: I was infantry. I was 11 Bravo. We didn't do basic training and then AIT. We did one station unit training, or OSUT, and then it was 14 weeks, 16 weeks, something like that—I don't remember. It was a long time ago. We did an expedited, if you will, basic training and then went right into infantry—not school, but infantry stuff. Specifically, we focused more on tactics. We did a lot more squad level drills and shooting. We shot a lot more in basic for the infantry than regular army basic training does. We shot a lot. I think in a normal army basic training after you qualify with your M-16 that's like they'll go to blanks and doing situational training exercises. We shot a ton of live fire—like squad level drills, team level drills. We did a ton of shooting. It was a lot of fun.

MP: So, where did you go after your one station unit training?

WT: I stuck around Benning for another month because I did airborne school. I think I was an airborne holdover for like a week, and then you go to jump school, which is just on the other side of Benning. It's on Main Post Benning. I mean, you do airborne school and that's three weeks of running a lot and a lot of pull-ups and that's pretty much it for PT. Then you go through all your drills of doing PLFs, parachute landing falls, and actions in the aircraft and correcting malfunctions and whatnot. Then you jump. It's the easiest and, I think, one of the most fun schools. It's one of the few schools the army doesn't take the fun out of. It's a lot of fun. If you're in shape and can run and do pull-ups, it's the easiest school. You do a PT test the first day and then you—like you do PT but there's no...It's not that...I mean, I was also right out of infantry, OSUT, and 18, so I was also in really good shape. I loved it. I mean, you're singing Airborne cadences; you're singing, "Blood upon the Risers." You're doing all this old school World War II paratrooper stuff. That's what I want to do so that was—

MP: Yeah, since the time you were in, "what, 6th grade?

WT: Yeah. And here I am actually doing it. But then it comes to time for your first jump, and it sounds really cool but it's an abstraction until then and then all of a sudden the plane's parked outside and you're wearing, I don't know, 60 pounds of parachute. It's like, 'oh shit, this is really happening!' It's like 'this sounded really cool in the recruiter's office.' But you know, you get on the plane and you take off. I mean, it's not a long flight to Fryar Drop Zone right across the border in Alabama. The door opens, and you jump. [laughs] It's fun. It's a hell of a rush. Jumping out of planes is a ton of fun.

MP: That's awesome. Once you completed jump school, where were you assigned to then?

WT: I went to Fort Polk in Louisiana—Fort Puke—and what was then 4th Brigade of 10th Mountain Division. The bastard brigade of 10th Mountain Division. Yep. It's a good unit though. It gets a bad reputation because of it's at Fort Polk, which sucks, but the unit itself is real—our record on deployments is, and in training, was really good.

MP: Oh, wow! That's awesome. What was kind of your day-to-day work there? Was that an airborne unit?

WT: No. It is the leg unit of all leg units. We are not armored, so we don't ride around Bradleys or Strikers. We don't jump, and we're not air assault, so we don't ride around in helicopters very, not in training very much.

MP: It's a lot of walking.

WT: A lot of walking, a lot of walking. We used to say PT is either you're either running or you're rucking. [laughs] No, but daily you go in for PT at 5:30 or 6:00, something like that. You do your first formation, you do PT for like an hour, hour and a half—or for an hour, yeah. In 10th Mountain, it was an hour. People think of the military as basic training, but once you're in, unless you are actively training for a deployment and you're in that part of the training cycle where you're starting to really ramp up, it's a day. It's a day job essentially. We come in early, but we do PT and then there's tasks around company that you have to do. Mondays were motor pool Mondays. So, as soon as PT's done and everyone's changed, you go to the motor pool and you dispatch all the vehicles. You do operator maintenance on all our Humvees and the LMTV, the modern incarnation of a deuce and a half essentially, and that's Monday. Other than that, there's ranges; there's a lot of paperwork and such because it's the government. There's ranges. I mean, as you get closer towards a deployment, you'll kind of ramp up so there's more ranges, there's more live fires, you're out in the field more often for longer periods of time. But I mean, outside of those individual events, it's essentially just a day job.

MP: So, I guess going back to ramping up to deployment, how many times were you deployed?

WT: Three.

MP: Okay. What years were those?

WT: My first was with 10th Mountain, which was October 2010 to October 2011. We did 12 months. The second was September 2012 to March 2013; we did six. We were gonna do nine, but we wrapped—we turned our COP over to the Afghan border police and they didn't really have anything further for us. That was our task for the deployment, so we went home early—our company did at least. Then the last one was October 2014 to July of 2015. We did nine months. So 12, 6, and 9.

MP: What were some of your responsibilities on that, maybe like rank and position during those deployments?

WT: Well, they were all different. I was in 10th Mountain. I was just a joe essentially, so I carried—I rotated through pretty much everything. I carried just a rifle, I carried a grenade launcher at one point that's attached under your rifle, and then I carried the SAW—the squad automatic weapon which is a light, relatively lightweight, squad-level or team-level, belt-fed machine gun. I carried the 240, the medium machine gun. I was a gunner on our trucks if we were—excuse me—if we were mounted. I was the RTO, the platoon radio operator, for a good portion. For whatever reason, I am like a savant with radios. Our radios are a royal pain in the ass so because of the encryption on them, so if you're if someone's good at it it's like 'oh, you're a radio operator now.' Because very few people want to know it yeah and most people are just like 'stupid radio, it doesn't work' instead of figuring. So, if you know—if you're good with them, it's kind of just like well now you're a radio operator then. For whatever reason I apparently had an aptitude for it, so I carried the radio for a while. Then I was made a team leader for kind of the last third or so of the deployment—of the first deployment.

10th Mountain was my—I would quote, not to be weird but—growing up years, childhood in the army. I was 18 to 21 in 10th Mountain, so I was figuring out, I feel like, myself and life as much as I was figuring out the army. There's a lot of introspection there that has happened since leaving. I was just kind of soaking up everything and everything that I could. I was promoted to sergeant the month that we left. The month that we came home in October 2011, I made sergeant, so I was definitely a team leader at that point. Then we got home IPCS to Campbell, Fort Campbell. I'd re-enlisted for Fort Campbell while I was over there. My buddy and I in the platoon did. We reenlisted together to go to Fort Campbell together, and we both ended up in 3rd Brigade of the 101st Airborne. Rakkasans! The venerable and the elite 187th Infantry Regiment. It is the most decorated infantry regiment in the army, and the battalion I went to. 3rd Battalion is the most decorated battalion in the—single battalion in the army. Yeah. When we do battalion runs or brigade runs, there's someone holding the battalion colors, and then there is someone literally just holding a staff with a zillion streamers on it because the flag would be too heavy with all the streamers because there's literally that many. It's a storied and elite unit, and to serve in the Rakkasans in the 187th is an incredibly prideful thing. I mean, we beat our chest as much as Ranger Battalion, as much as Special...well, Special Forces doesn't. But as much as Ranger Battalion does, Rakkasans, we are known on Fort Campbell as

being the loudest and the most sort of beat our chest brigade. They hate us because they need us.

I was a sergeant, so I was definitely a team leader there. Alpha Company, Angel Company, which was my home. You know, any time I talk about the military, you're probably gonna hear about Angel Company. That was my home for the whole four years that I was there. I was a team leader. I was in 2nd Platoon, which was arguably—this might be biased—but arguably the best platoon in the company. We had just outstanding leadership. The whole company did. I mean, the whole company did. I will always kind of...if I'm there, it's the best. Not because of me, but just because I...But, no, so I was a team leader, and I caught them in the middle of their train up for deployment. I got there in February, and we deployed in September.

MP: So, you said good pretty good leadership, would you say NCOs and officers just pretty good from the top down?

WT: Top down. Angel Company, I think really was blessed, honestly, the whole time I was there. There was never a point in time where it was like 'man, I hate our company commander. I hate our first sergeant. I hate the platoon leadership,' or whatever. One of my best friends and I from Angel, he and I talk all the time. We say 'the stars aligned.' Angel was just—maybe because it was Angel.

MP: Good name for it.

WT: The old angels from hell. Yeah, we just had an outstanding company commander and first sergeant. Then the platoon leadership on all of the platoons was just really good, and then we had excellent squad and team leaders. I think Angel had—our sort of command climate, if you will, I think was very conducive to training and mentoring new team leaders, younger team leaders, really well. It was a very cohesive and very tight-knit company. Angel, before that deployment the 12-13 deployment was probably arguably the best, specific group of people I have ever or will ever be a part of.

MP: Did you have any particular mentor that sticks out to you for when you first got to Angel that kind of helped you?

WT: Definitely, our platoon sergeant, First...or, Sergeant Cardoza, not First Sergeant. Sorry. Sergeant First Class Tony Cardoza. He was just outstanding. I mean, he really was like the father. I think I've only ever heard him yell maybe once. It was expected that you're going to operate on adult rules, and he let squad and team leaders handle things at the lowest level. He didn't micromanage. Expectations were really high, but he allowed for the space to meet those expectations. It wasn't like 'here's the expectations—micromanage.' I think if you set the expectations like he did, you get people that perform that high. And we did. We really did. Our squads were all shit hot. Then our platoon leader at the time, Lieutenant Desanzo, was really awesome too. He was kind of at the end of his rotation when I got there, so he left pretty quick,

but then the lieutenant we got, Lieutenant Bauer, I still talk to him all the time. He was just an outstanding lieutenant. I mean he was still a butter bar. But no, he understood that he went into a unit to a platoon with really good NCOs, so he really listened and allowed the NCOs kind of their say. Still need to meet his intent, of course, but he really allowed for the space for the NCOs to voice their say and voice that experience.

MP: It sounds like a really, really cohesive and, yeah, really well trained. That's great to hear. I don't know if I asked you already, but when you did deploy, what countries did you deploy to?

WT: Afghanistan.

MP: All three?

WT: All three terms.

MP: Is there anything from those deployments you would like to discuss, like what life was like, just maybe your day to day over there versus being in garrison?

WT: Very different there. It depended on the deployment. The first two, and the first especially—the 10th Mountain deployment, the first one, was at the height of the troop surge in '10 and '11. It was a lot more kinetic, a lot more fighting. We went looking for fights on that trip. 10th Mountain is also just a really aggressive unit, but I think we were, it felt like at least, we had more of an initiative on that deployment to really go out and find the bad guys, if you will. It was a lot more kinetic. The second trip was less so. It was kind of the tail end of being out at combat outposts—small company outposts—and at real aggressive patrolling. It was starting to where down the—the ROE was kind of starting to taper off at that point. The mission was changing. By the last trip, Angel was the TRF, which is the theater reserve force. You sit around and wait for something bad in country to happen. So, we're at Bagram Air Base, which is like the size of Rhode Island. It's huge. It's huge. To someone that had been to two deployments where we were on company-sized outposts, Bagram was—it's not even Afghanistan. It's such an alien—

MP: Is it almost like a piece of America just kind of dropped into Afghanistan?

WT: Yeah. I mean, there's streetlights; there's stop signs. You have to look up and out to see mountains to be reminded that you're in Afghanistan. I was used to on COP life, on the first few trips, smoking light comes out every night. Light discipline, noise discipline. There's no lights. You walk outside on a COP, and there's no lights. Period. If you're going anywhere, you're doing it under night vision, or you have a red headlamp. But on the COPs—I mean, COP life was the first two trips. We built most of our base my first trip, so if you weren't patrolling—out on a patrol with your platoon or in a tower—you were probably, early on, you were help mainly fill hescos.

MP: I know they're those barrier walls that are on the outside of the—

WT: Yeah, it's like metal—it's like a metal cage with this weird, almost felt-feeling material. Stronger than felt but you know what I mean. They're like eight—they come in different sizes, but the walls were eight feet tall. They're big. It's four feet by eight feet or some weird...yeah. You just string them out and fill them with dirt, and they're insta-wall. Not insta- because it takes a lot of effort to fill them. We would do, I think, six- to eight-hour guard shifts in the tower where you're sitting in the guard tower watching. You got a machine gun and a PAS 13, a thermal sight. So, you're on guard; you're eating mermite food. It's not MREs, but it's definitely not home cooking. It's not like hot food. We had the chow tent. It was pretty austere. You're definitely in the middle of nowhere. Then patrolling. Not in the wintertime because it's really cold and snowy, but in the fighting season like roughly March till, I don't know, October, November, it was game on. We got in—I don't know the exact tally—but a lot of firefights. I mean, we did a lot of movement to contact. We'd go looking for fights. The goal is bring down the level of violence in your AO.

MP: Area of operation?

WT: Yeah, yeah. The area that your company is kind of responsible for. So, to secure the populace, you get the people that are making it not safe—to put it delicately. [laughs]

MP: How much time was there between your last deployment and when you got out of the army? You said you got out in July 15.

WT: We got home in July of 15, and then I got out in January. I was off-base on terminal leave in November. I had two months of terminal leave to burn but—

MP: What'd you do during that time?

WT: Terminal leave?

MP: Yeah.

WT: I did a road trip out to visit family in San Diego, and I was there for, I don't know, a while. And I drove up here to Montana, and then I think I went home for...I flew home for Christmas, and then I was there for, I don't know, a couple weeks or something like that. Then I came back here and started school.

MP: Okay, yeah, in 2016. How did you decide you wanted to come to UM? Was it your trip to Montana?

WT: Oh, no. I already had an address here. I had already been accepted to school. No, it was honestly—I knew I wanted to come out West. I did not want to go back East. I don't particularly care for the East Coast.

MP: I feel the same way. [laughs]

WT: Preaching in the choir. I knew I wanted to come out West. I wanted to be in the mountains. I didn't really have a concept of public land. I knew what national park—there's not really much public land back East. I knew about national parks, but I didn't have a concept of national forests or wilderness or whatever. But I knew I wanted to be in the mountains, and school and the GI bill was kind of like my ticket to do that. So, I was looking at Washington and Seattle and Montana and, I think, Colorado. There's a couple of schools in Colorado that were on the list for a while.

MP: Yeah, oh, I'm sorry—

[This portion of the audio has been redacted.]

WT: I know you probably talked to Sean (?), or have since talked to Sean, but so I called and it was 2:00 in the morning in Afghanistan. I called Sean, and Sean, he answered some of my school questions and he was like, "Wait a minute," he's like, "you're calling from a DSC number. Are you overseas?"

I was like, "Yeah."

He's like, "Dude, it's gotta be like super early in the morning. Like, holy hell! What do you want to know?" I think we talked for like an hour. That literally, that did it. I stopped even looking at other schools. I think I went on and applied to UM as soon as I got off the phone with him. It was like 'well, that's it.' I'd never been to Montana, never been to this part of the country and it was like 'yep, going there. That sounds awesome.'

MP: Yeah, and we were lucky too, that—this might be interesting for the history aspect too, is it wasn't until 2014 that the Forever GI Bill came out to where you could, I believe, go to a different state school than your residence school.

WT: Yeah, the Veterans Choice Act—

MP: Oh, Choice Act that's what it was, yeah.

WT: Yeah, the Vet's Choice Act, veterans are given in-state tuition no matter what state they go to. They don't have to be a legal resident of that state, which is like...that to me is, I saw that and that's like, 'I'm not going home.'

MP: Oh, same here, and that wasn't until '14 or '15. So, right towards the end of our time. I know for me I was like, 'oh, where am I going to go?' Then that came out I was like 'oh, Montana.'

WT: Literally anywhere I want.

MP: Yeah, exactly. Exactly. So, what have you been doing? What's your major?

WT: It's resource conservation. The joke is that it's watered down forestry. I like it because it focuses more on the ecology, sort of the science—the hard science—side of forestry. I don't have anything against forestry; the science side of it interests me more so that's what I'm doing.

MP: What have you been doing in your summers since you've been in college?

WT: Well, this will be my fourth season working for the forest service as a firefighter.

MP: Okay, and is that something you're gonna keep doing after you graduate?

WT: Yep, oh yeah?

MP: Okay, and when are you graduating?

WT: In a couple of months. Huzzah!

MP: All right, so spring 2020.

WT: Yep, finally. God! [laughs] Make it sound like it's bad. Finally.

MP: Yeah, yeah. We're finally there, yeah.

Looking back on kind of from where you started in high school and where you are now, is there anything we haven't discussed that you would like to talk about? Maybe a question I didn't think of. It's kind of—man, open it up to the world. I don't know. I mean, I could, clearly, talk at length about Afghanistan and all that. I spent almost three years there, but without a specific question it's just gonna be me yammering.

MP: Okay, well, I got one more if you don't mind. What advice would you give to anybody who was thinking to enlist or go into the military in general?

WT: Talk to all branches' recruiters. Learn what's out there because there's probably jobs out there that you didn't know existed in each branch. That personally, I think, would be a big one. Otherwise, it's a major sort of life decision to join the military. It's a commitment unlike any other, quote job. I will never try to convince someone to not join the military. It worked for me.

I loved my time in the military. I wouldn't change a second of it, and I'm thankful for all the time that I spent in. But I understand that it doesn't work for a lot of people, so I would always tell people to make sure that it really is what they want to do. Talk to a recruiter, talk to a veteran. Get the real experience because the recruiters—I think the stereotype of recruiters lying is kind of not 100% true, but they are going to give you a very glossed-over version of the military. I think talking to a veteran and really sort of getting the experience and what it was really like is beneficial. I'll always push for the army, personally, because I was in the army obviously.

Then to someone that's enlisted and hasn't left yet, I would say take nothing personal and have fun with it. Understand that it's going to be days that suck, but that it exists that way for a reason and you're a part of something bigger than yourself, which is incredibly—it's something really, I can't think of the word I wanted. Words are hard. It's something to be incredibly proud of. It's fulfilling in a way that I don't know that any other job would be, and that obviously is purely my experience but to be a part of something that is so much bigger than you and does something so important for just kind of the ideal of the United States. Then for the army, I mean, we got between 10th Mountain and 101st, we were awarded a couple of different unit awards. That's part of the unit's history forever.

More than my own service, that is something that I am more proud of than words could explain. To know that history, I helped or just was a tiny part of writing that unit's history—a chapter of that unit's history.

MP: I'll be there forever.

WT: It's like that streamer is on our guide on our colors forever. Joining the military is you're taking a step towards something that is bigger than you, that's really important, and it's something to be incredibly proud of and and enjoy and have fun with it. I'm immensely thankful for everything the army did for me, and the friendships that I have. You get close to—I mean, it weirds my family out how close I am to people I've only known for a few years—that I'm closer to them than I am to my family. [laughs] I could ramble.

MP: No, it's amazing the relationships you make.

WT: I think that's the best part of the military. That's what we should talk about. That's the best part of the military. Like the job is whatever. The people you meet and the relationships that you have and how close you are with them are—it makes the worst time imaginable worth going through. I think about the worst times overseas, and I would not trade anything on the planet for those exp...for those memories. In 2012 over Thanksgiving around that time, we were doing—and with Angel—we were doing an OP in Paktika Province. They were shutting down FOB Tillman, and there was a road intersection where the CLIP, trucks, convoy, coming in that would carry out most of the stuff from FOB Tillman. I guess got hit a lot—the CLIP was always getting hit at that road intersection. It's up in the mountains, and so Angel, we had two of our platoons—us and 2nd and then 3rd Platoon—flew in in the middle of the night. It's in

November in Paktika, Afghanistan, so it's brutally cold. We flew in in the middle of the night and walked in a couple miles or whatever to our OPs. We sat there for like a week overwatching this road intersection, and the CLIP came in and the convoy came in and they closed it down. Then we walked back to a different LZ and got airlifted out by Chinooks.

The coldest I've ever been in my life. I cannot imagine temperatures colder than that. Just the shenanigans and stupid shit that we did to pass time and joke and make it fun, I wouldn't trade that quote suffering for anything. That's one of my most cherished memories of life is that week that we spent in just brutally cold temperatures, and that's because of the people. It's not the job, I mean, that was sitting there in the cold. That sucks. [laughs]

MP: Yeah, it's the people that make the difference though for the job.

WT: Yeah. The people make it worth it. It's you, it's just you out there—your unit. It's like you have to depend on each other, and to depend on each other at that level, you have to be just unbelievably close. You love them and sort of the group more than yourself. That is a relationship—a group think—that is addicting to be a part of. It's hard to not be a part of a group like that once you've been a part of that. Like a group that would literally kill and die for each other

MP: That's great. Thank you so much for sitting down with me today, Will. It's been a pleasure. Thank you for your service.

WT: Thank you for your service.

MP: [laughs] Don't thank me.

WT: Don't thank me for my service. [laughs]

[End of Interview]