

Bonnell Langford

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WEBB: My name is Thomas Webb and on behalf of the Pritzker Military Museum and Library I'm here with Bonnell Langford, Navy Vet from the Persian Gulf Conflict era. So the late 80s into the early 90s.

LANGFORD: Mmhmm.

WEBB: And we're gonna talk about your military experience today!

LANGFORD: Yeah!

WEBB: The first question I always ask is the easiest and that's just when and where were you born?

LANGFORD: I was born in Chicago, Illinois, 1967 February 19th.

WEBB: And pretty common upbringing?

LANGFORD: [Interrupting, laughing] I can't believe you say that out loud! [WEBB laughs] I don't talk about my age. [Langford laughs more]

WEBB: Pretty common upbringing, or? Life in Chicago, what was that like growing up?

LANGFORD: You know like - that's a great question. My mother is of Mexican heritage, my father is of German heritage, but they were both born in the United States but their parents and their grandparents, you know immigrated from Europe and Spain and Mexico and you know having that multi-racial background, I would have to say it was unique in my upbringing especially in Chicago. 'Cause Chicago's a melting pot of many races and ethnicities, so for me, being a white Mexican was really an interesting tale. But you know typical upbringing you know grew up in the city moved to the South Side of Chicago and then went to high school in - on the South side in Morton East, and then...you know I have family that are no longer with us but you know, a-typical. You know father worked at the factory, mother you know worked part time as a salesperson so it was kind of your a-typical middle class upbringing I would say.

WEBB: Was there a history of military service in your family?

LANGFORD: Yeah there was. My father was in the Army. His family were in the military - uncles in the Navy, Army - so my background is you know "serve your country". I was the least likely person to go into the military just because of who I was, and my upbringing...I was

pretty spoiled kid and I didn't really like discomfort, so for me it was always, it wasn't in my cards. Even when I was in high school, you know, why would I -? It wasn't even a thought. You know I saw my dad, I saw my uncles, you know great for them, I was always gonna go to college. And I did, for a semester, but - you know I wasn't successful because I was just a wild, crazy nut from Chicago. So...yeah.

WEBB: So after high school you did the one semester?

LANGFORD: I did.

WEBB: Where at?

LANGFORD: I went to school in Dallas.

WEBB: Oh okay.

LANGFORD: It was a university - Brookhaven - private school, you know very...private. [Laughs] That's the only way to explain it. But - yeah - I wasn't ready for college. I was too much interested in - myself, and self-gratification.

WEBB: Yeah.

LANGFORD: That's the only way to explain it.

WEBB: Yeah. So knowing this did you get advice from your family about the military as maybe a means of - [laughs] "You gotta do this, or-?"

LANGFORD: God no!

WEBB: Okay.

LANGFORD: I'll tell you the story 'cause it's - I kinda wrote it in that questionnaire that you had it was kind of funny. You know - after I came back from my first semester I was just you know off the charts, doing what I wanted, you know my parents were - "You gotta do-" - well my parents really didn't care, they would've been happy if I'd've lived in my house 'til I was in my old age. That's kinda how they were. You know they didn't want us going anywhere, you know, "Stay home, home is the safest place, dadadada."

WEBB: I think Germans and Hispanics both have that kinda --

LANGFORD: Yeah, absolutely! You know. It was my background and you know it was the family unit, you know, had a -- came from a big family, big extended family, so my uncles my aunts my cousins were kinda like our tribe, you know, so like nobody's gonna, you know, infiltrate our tribe. So no to answer your question there wasn't a - you know - a siren to join the military. It was quite the opposite. And one day - I'll never forget it! It was summertime, it was raining, I woke up walked down the street and you know this street I had never walked down before there was a recruiting station, I walked in - 'cause I was

like, "What is this? You know. It looks cool!" And I liked the way the camouflage looked and whatever - I mean, of course, I knew it was a military recruiting station but I had never been in one so for me it was kinda like an adventure. So I walked in and there was a Marine, you know, in his full dress unif- you know the tan one with the red strip down the side and you know the full on whatever. And he's like, "Come here, you know, you." Or whatever he said. And he's like, "Do you wanna kill the enemy?" And I was just like - he was just too - and he had a knife on his table and guns and to me it was overkill. You know, I wasn't that violent? But I of course you know being a- an American you just grow up you know playing Army or whatever so you kinda have that inclination. So he turned me off, I was like, "No, not today, I'm not really in the murder business this year, you know." So I walked out and there was a sailor and the sailor literally grabbed my shoulder and pulled me into his office and he's like, "Do ya wanna see the world? Do ya wanna sail the Seven Seas?" Or whatever he said and I was like, "Yes." I was gone a week later.

WEBB: Hmm.

LANGFORD: A week! So I came home after I sign on the dotted line that day - that's how impromptu it was for me - and this is crazy that I, you know, you even think about this stuff now. Walked home, you know, that was my plan. Told my dad, he didn't believe me, my mom didn't - nobody believed me! And I was packing, you know, during the week, and I'm like, "You know I'm leaving! You guys gotta- " And they're like, "What do you mean you're leaving?" You know that's how we kinda were you know it was - we all kinda lived our own lives and you know we met -weekly or whatever. [Laughs] So you know my mom's crying, my dad's like so happy, he's like, you know, finally, you know, he's gonna do something with his eighteen year old life you know? Or eighteen and a half, whatever age I was at the time, I was young. My dad was encouraging, you know, started teaching me how to salute immediately. My mother, on the other hand, was completely lost her mind, you know, called up the recruiter, "He -- My son won't go", you know so they fought it to be honest. And I was like defiant, I'm like, "No, this is what -- the choice I've made this is what I'm doing and whether you like it or not that's what I'm gonna do!" And that's the story.

WEBB: Hmm. You said your father served in the Army. Do you remember what era-?

LANGFORD: He was in Pearl Harbor.

WEBB: He was at Pearl Harbor.

LANGFORD: Yeah, my father was old - like me - and, you know, he had already - you know like...he was an older father. So he was in World War II.

WEBB: Mmkay.

LANGFORD: So I grew up in that. But he never really talked about it?

WEBB: Sure.

LANGFORD: Kinda like any veteran you know they don't really you know talk about it, so - Are you a veteran?

WEBB: No, I am not.

LANGFORD: Okay. So for him, you know, it was kinda like me, you know, the apple doesn't fall too far from the tree, I don't take pleasure in talking about, you know, it, but when you are asked questions you definitely are more than forthcoming in your answers, that's kinda how I see it. But...to answer your question again, no they weren't overly excited about me going in the military because, you know, I was the only son and you know I was supposed to go to college and get a degree and dadadadada. And I completely turned it upside down.

WEBB: Well, there's also a transition from the World War II era through Vietnam that sort of changes, I think, what people think are - is acceptable for a service ,you know.

LANGFORD: Right!

WEBB: So -- so where do they send you first? What's the [Langford laughs] first thing that happens to you when you show up to the...

LANGFORD: Well, I was gone a week later I went to MEPS [Military Entrance Processing Station], downtown Chicago. Is that what it was called? Yeah MEPS, Military Entry something. And then I went to Great Lakes! Great Mistakes! And then they said - the recruiter said, "Oh, you're gonna go to Great Lakes!" And I'm like, [laughing] "Great Lakes, where's that? I've never heard of Great Lakes." And they're like, "Oh yeah! It's north of Illinois." You know, living here I'm like, no, I said I wanted to get out of Chicago I wanted to get out of Illinois and then not only that they sent me there in like the dead of winter. So I had joined like the - September, like it was like raring up for winter -

WEBB: Yeah.

LANGFORD: And then you know I was there two months so by the end of my boot camp it's [?] freezing cold in Chic- in Illinois. And - I think that's why they call it Great Mistakes but - yeah that's where I went.

WEBB: What -- I mean, they said, "Did you wanna travel the world?" But did they make you any kind of promise?

LANGFORD: That's a great question, no they did not. I was unaware of the pitfalls and red tape of understanding how to enlist, you know, they were good at it and they still do it today...I - didn't know enough -- I said I wanted to go to school, they're like, "We can make that

happen!" You know, so you really pushed the G.I. Bill, back then, and that's kinda why I joined 'cause, you know, I'm like, I need money to go to school! You know my parents aren't gonna pay for it. So that was kind of the motivating factor for me...but - though no MOS I went in undesignated so you know in the Navy if you're undesignated you are - you're in trouble. And you better be smart enough to get out of it. So that's kind of - that was the beginning. Yeah.

WEBB: So what was boot camp like and especially maybe the first couple of weeks of being indoctrinated into the military? You've kind of described yourself you know the typical eighteen year old with tastes of freedom at school so the military is much different than that. What was kind of your experience of getting started?

LANGFORD: Well...being brought up the way I was, very pampered and comfortable. [Laughs] My parents were very good parents they made sure we were comfortable, you know, we had everything we wanted everything we needed, you know we weren't wealthy but they knew how to be comfortable people. So then when I went in I kind of brought that with me and you know I walked in with a robe and slippers and a dopp's kit full of skin care products - [laughing] you know, I mean I was like - I thought I was going away you know to summer camp and they immediately pegged me. And it was crazy because the boot camp, you know, there were those guys - I don't know drill sergeants, I guess, you can call - they - I can't remember what they called them in the Navy but it was the equivalent of a drill sergeant in the Navy, I think that's what they're called as well. You know, I was like a red target they immediately focused on me because of how I came in there, you know, it was like, "Who is this guy?" And they called me "Country Club Langford". So it was bad, you know, immediately I was, you know, that guy right there we're gonna get rid of him. But it was a challenge for me. You know, I thought boot camp was hysterical, to be quite honest. I mean I can imagine - I see video of how it is, today, like with males and females together, and they're like hanging out and cooking, I'm like, "What is going on?" When I was in, it was quite different...Their job was to weed out the weak and, you know, I was one-hundred and ten pounds wet when I was that age. And -- but size has nothing to do with military and or boot camp, it's about being able to think quickly, and to be able to strategize and to, you know, kinda problem solve so for me it was always something that I had learned - you know, my parents they had knocked me in the head or whatever, so I was used to that kind of yelling in your face and, you know, just, you know, very stern and strict, you know, familiarity.

WEBB: You're there, kind of, right - either right during the transition or right before the transition into a different kind of military, the kind of military that we have today.

LANGFORD: Yeah.

WEBB: There's been a lot of social changes - I'm curious, you know, you've described that boot camp where they're in your face yelling, did you notice any, like maybe, reprimand of the drill sergeants any, like, sort of shift with the drill sergeants -?

LANGFORD: That's a great question.

WEBB: -- To a calmer?

LANGFORD: No. They were unhinged. And I think back about their personality types and -- I was always in trouble. So for me I was always being sent off to like boot camp boot camp where it was like 24 hours just push-ups and I remember they used to make us jump up and down, jumping jacks with the rifle so that - 'cause they couldn't hit you and they knew that, that was - I was in that time frame, where they were transitioning away from hitting us to knowing how to get away with it. And the way they did it was either work out you to death or to make you work out with the rifle and you literally would knock yourself out. I mean I knocked myself out because I was jumping and the scope hit me right in the head and literally knocked me out. So yeah, my experience boot camp - but it - to me, it was, just, I didn't see it as abuse or whatever, it really was teaching me valuable lessons on how to overcome certain weaknesses. So I loved it. I loved the training. I loved everything about it. You know, I tell people it was the worst thing I did and the best thing I ever did, to be quite honest. It was -- boot camp was just cra- I mean, we started with eighty guys and we ended with like fifty-five so they weeded out that many guys. And, you know, just to throw - me for a loop they were always testing me for some reason I don't know why but, like, my fourth week in, maybe my, no maybe my sixth weekend 'cause it was eight weeks, eight weeks and some days they decided to pull my wisdom teeth out while I was in boot camp. All four of 'em. So it was the morning of a test that we had to perform in order to advance to the next week 'cause it was you know your tests were done weekly. So if you didn't pass that weekly test you went back two weeks or a month or they just got rid of you. So here this was kind of a poignant moment for me, you know, of what they can do to me. And this was after mess duty, which was the worst you know they give you a week in the mess hall and it's like, "Oh my God", like guys were like rot [laughing] rot-foot or whatever they call - and I'm like, "What are you talking about, rot-foot?" I didn't know what that even was. These guys would literally - they'd be in water for like an hour and their feet would fall apart, I'm like, "That's so bizarre." Like - but I was able to power through it. And I think they noticed that because everything they threw at me I was able to get by. Now remember...I was eighteen and a half and I was one-hundred and ten lbs. wet. But, you know - and I was kind of like, these big guys, you know, they're like supposedly men and they couldn't even handle a little water, and I'm like, "Then what is going on with this, this is makes no sense." So after that -- I think it was like a week after mess duty, they decided to pull all my teeth out of my mouth and they said, "Oh, by the way, you're gonna have to run three miles after you get all your teeth pulled out." And I was like, "What?! Are you crazy?" So they did that to me, and - just to see how far they can push

me, to see if I would, you know, buckle, so that morning they sent me to the dentist and they pulled all my wisdom teeth out. They were impacted. So here I am bleeding, my mouth is full of cotton, and they're like, "Okay, now you gotta go run three miles." And that's what I did. And here I am running, in boot camp, the three miles, and I'm literally spitting out clots of my blood and people are like, "What's going on? Is he gonna live?" And I'm like, "Y-n- I have to do it. This is --you know - no choice." I mean, how insane is that? Could you imagine having your tooth pulled out and then having to run three miles? And that's not just running three miles that is jumping jacks, push-ups, you know whatever. For hours on end.

WEBB: At what point do they start to give you--?

LANGFORD: [Laughing, interrupting] I had to think back, it's hysterical.

WEBB: [laughing] It's something.

LANGFORD: It's crazy, yeah!

WEBB: At what point, do they start, maybe, aligning you with an MOS or start training you in some kind of specialty? Is that after boot camp or is it start during?

LANGFORD: That's a great question. Well...during boot camp you have an option to go to school, and the only one I ranked into was "A" school so I went to Seaman Apprentice school 'cause I didn't know any better you know it seemed like the right thing to do at the time, and it was kind of, you know, "Here, just sign on the dotted line and this - you're gonna be a seaman!" And I'm like, "Okay, great I'll be a seaman!" So after boot camp I went immediately to "A" school which was - I think it was in Great Lakes, I just went to another part of the base. You know, they give you a briefcase, and you go to school and you think you're cool. And it's kind of - you learn the water, you learn the trade of being a boats man or a seaman. And, it's silly you learn knots and nautical jargon and how boat and you know - I mean it is valuable information but, you know, who cares. But it is valuable if you're gonna go to a boat, which they had already had planned on doing to me. So, during boot camp they - my petty officers they were so excited about my tour. They were like, "We're sending you to the La Salle." And I didn't know any - I didn't know what the La Salle was, you know, to me it was you know just some other place they were gonna send me. But they knew and they were kind of comical about it because I think they both were on it so they kind of suggested me to be on it and the USS La Salle which was the command ship of the Middle East force was the only white ship in the Navy in that region.

WEBB: Hm.

LANGFORD: So when I ended "A" school, I didn't know any better where I was going, what I was doing, and then, you know, eventually it kind of filtered, you know the USS La Salle is in

the Middle East. And now, I think back and I'm like, "Now I know why they put me through so much training to see if I can actually endure what was happening out there." 'cause it was so hot, and, you know, I mean there was shit going on all the time, and. So I think, you know, thinking back, you know, those guys that were my, drill sergeants they were awesome, they were like your father, because they teach you like a father would or a mentor would of how to be a good person.

WEBB: Hmm.

LANGFORD: Yeah. I get kinda teary-eyed up about it, it is really is true if you respect the process. You know, I think a lot of people had bad experiences - 'cause I know people, guys that are - I was enlisted with and, you know, they just talk about the military like it was the worst thing. You know for me, it was such a experience and a great experience, you know, why would you go through life being sour? You know what I mean? Like why would you be sour about something that really taught you how to be a man or how to be a good ethical, scrupulous person, you know what I mean? So, um - what was the question again? [Both? laugh] I love to talk by the way.

WEBB: Um.

LANGFORD: Do you go by Thom or Thomas?

WEBB: Thom is fine.

LANGFORD: Okay.

WEBB: Well was there any specific person? I mean you talked about that mentorship, that kind of father figure, was there any specific person that, really - I mean you talked about going to, being sent to the La Salle.

LANGFORD: Yeah.

WEBB: That was a good thing. You think that was, I mean, these two gentlemen that you know maybe directed you that way -

LANGFORD: Yeah.

WEBB: -- they were looking out for your best interests or they were still-?

LANGFORD: It was their job.

WEBB: Kinda challenging you, at that point.

LANGFORD: I think were challenging me but that was their job to find, you know like any recruiter would, you gotta find the right person for the right job. And it was me - it was only me. I was the only one that was sent to that ship. And I think they, they were like, "You know what? This guy's, he did everything we asked him to with, you know, without moaning

or complaining about it." So I think they were kinda like, "Well, you know we send this guy to hell, maybe he will be a good candidate for that type of environment."

WEBB: Mmkay.

LANGFORD: Because, you know, he – but, no, they weren't mentors they were - weh [?] I guess they were, but temporary mentors, you know they just kind of for that time frame they kind of guided me through what they needed to, but then after "A" school it was, kinda like, you know, you show up - you know my orders were to show up on Christmas day, so I had to go to Norfolk, Virginia on Christmas Day. Which was fine for me because I thought Christmas was stupid - or still do, you know it's a made up holiday. I mean I get it, I mean I get Christmas is, "Wow Christmas!", but for me, it really never had any weight to it?

WEBB: Yeah.

LANGFORD: You know, it's a Hallmark holiday as far as I'm concerned. I can see why people enjoy it and, you know, the tradition of it, I'm not really a traditional guy in that sense, you know a made-up day - why not make every day, day, Christmas as opposed to just one day on the 25th? Which really is frustrating 'cause it interferes with my schedule. [Webb laughs] That's really how I kinda see it. [Langford laughs]

WEBB: You're at Great Lakes and that's really not that far from here.

LANGFORD: [Laughing] No.

WEBB: I assume that you got some kind of time off on the weekends or whatever through boot camp did you come back down here? Did you interact with family and friends or anything like that? Or did you stay up there with your fellow cadets?

LANGFORD: That's – no, I did not have a weekends... that I could get, come back home.

WEBB: Okay.

LANGFORD: The time was limited so I would stay on base or in the general area, you know like for a couple hours you were allowed to go off base. During "A" School we got a little relief, it was very controlled, I stayed on base, you know played pool, drank beer, dadadada, partied a lot and, but as far as going home, no I never did. I was like "Why? You know. I'm gone."

WEBB: I'm supposed to be seeing the world.

LANGFORD: Right! Exactly.

WEBB: [Laughs] Okay. Did your family accompany you to Norfolk on Christmas Day or?

LANGFORD: No. I was ordered, I had my orders to go there and being a single guy I just showed up, remember I was only eighteen, nineteen, so I showed up in Norfolk Virginia, of course, you know, no one's there, because it's Christmas, and, you know, just kinda navigating the whole thing. I walked in, there was a lady you know who was the admin kind of like a receptionist, I guess, but in the military. You know, she's like, "Here's your - gimme your orders, you know, dadadada." Very military, and I was just following what I was told to do. And she's like, "What are you doing here?" And I'm like, "Well, this is what it says, I had to be here today." So then she gave me direction to go to like a barracks, which was kinda cool, it's kinda like a college dorm type and, you know, checked in and kinda sat in my room, just - kinda just sat there, waiting for the weekend to be over 'cause I think it was like the weekend but it was also Christmas and a couple days kinda passed by and I didn't know what to do because nobody was there, they were all on holiday. So, I kinda, walked around the base and it was very interesting - it was cold, it was rainy but I just remember the base being very military, you know, helicopters, boats everywhere, Norfolk, Virginia is known for a port, but it was NAS [Naval Air Station] Norfolk so -but it was on the water. So for me, it was kinda -- I'm taking pictures and I felt like I was on holiday.

WEBB: Okay. There are very specific times in our countries history where the military is focused on a particular enemy: World War II, Vietnam. When you're going through your boot camp in the 80s, who are they sort of saying, "Okay, this is who you could potentially be fighting. This is the enemy. This is who you're trying to protect the country from." Are they trying to indoctrinate you into looking at a certain group of people or is it more of a general enemy? ...If that makes sense?

LANGFORD: Yeah, absolutely, that's a great question, I was just pondering. Um - no, no.

WEBB: Just, a general-?

LANGFORD: Not when I was in, no. And...for me once again, I was a naive teenager and the enemy didn't exist, you know, who was the enemy? The enemy were the Russians, I think - not even then! You know it was like...it wasn't really a known enemy like it is today, it was really...Back when I joined G.I. Bill was really pushed and it was really a way for a misguided guy to get his shit together, and that's kinda how I saw it. And the training and the...the drum beat of what motivated us, really, was just, you know, the United States and we're the best of the best and that really was it. We are training you to be...the best soldier you can be, no, you know, classification of who the enemy was whether they were from different parts of the world or what have you. No, not at all. Quite the contrary. It really was very benign, about who you are fighting with. And I would imagine, it's probably still the same, unfortunately, because of just the nature of our history, right now, I think it's difficult to kinda extract that mindset from current people, but back when I was in 1000 years ago, it really wasn't - you know it was just we're gonna be you know the best soldier you can be. And to be honest, I joined the

Navy because I didn't really wanna, I didn't wanna be a grunt, I didn't wanna walk around with a rifle, I didn't wanna sleep with my rifle, I wanted to be, you know, on a boat, something I was familiar with, and to kind of, [laughing] you know just sail the Seven Seas, to be quite honest.

WEBB: Going kind of along with that as an eighteen year old does it occur to you that you're joining something that at any moment could actually be called in to action? Is that something that - really resonated with you or?

LANGFORD: No, it did not resonate. I'm glad you asked that question. Because I once again was so not from that mindset of you know, "Who am I gonna kill next?" Or, you know, there's an, you an enemy lurking in the bushes, you know it just wasn't my you know my position. And so it was interesting to find out there was this issue in the Middle East happening right around the time - well, there's always been an issue in the Middle East, you know, since time began. Those people are gonna fight 'til the end of time. So for me it was kinda like, "Oh wow!" You know politics and the military are not a good mix and I have to give kudos to the military for when I was in - I don't know what it's like now but, you know, separating the two. You know, you - politics, you have, you're not paid to think, period, you're paid to do what we tell you to do. And the military's nothing more than a job. And if you are doing your job correctly, you will be rewarded and if you're not, you will be reminded. So politics - you know it's so sad how it is today, you know politics is just kind of creeping its way into the military, which is wrong and shouldn't happen but it is. But back when I was in it, it really wasn't even a factor, you know it was...this chatter that you would here but you weren't informed because they make sure that you know you're not informed. You know, I'd be interested to find out how they deal with it today with everyone walking around with a cell phone. You know, what a waste. Because you are polluting the recruits...you're polluting their position and their job. You know, too many- and the military - I mean, Duh, the military is based on uniformity. Without uniform - and I'm not talking about the uniform you put on, I'm talking about the uniform of everything.

WEBB: Mmhmm.

LANGFORD: It's chaos. So, sad for them, you know, today. But back when I was in uniform was, "You fall in, or you fall out." And you don't have an opinion. You're not paid to think. I mean, how many times did I hear that? [WEBB laughs quietly?] "You'e not paid to think. You are paid to do the job I tell you." And I can just imagine today, you know how people are, and just, you know it's just, eugh.

WEBB: Yeah. You're from Chicago. We got a great body of water right here. You've gone through boot camp so I assume that you've been out on Lake Michigan through boot camp or something to that effect, but as you go to Virginia and then make your next couple of moves,, what was it like being on a ship for the first time?

LANGFORD: What it was like to be on the ship was that your question?

WEBB: Yup. For the first time.

LANGFORD: Yeah for the first time. Okay so I'm gonna start - it's gonna be like a story because I can only tell it in a story...

WEBB: That's perfect.

LANGFORD: So, after "A" school I...you know, left Virginia and they were like, "You're gonna fly in the middle of the night, you got, we, you're going to the Persian Gulf in the middle of the Persian Gulf, your ship is out there." And I'm like, "Oh my god, what is this." You know there was no way to kind of do research like there is today. Back - [laughs] I can't believe I, I'm saying this - but back then it was like, you know you, if you wanna do research you had to go to the library.

WEBB: Mmhmm.

LANGFORD: And I didn't wanna, I didn't have time, because it was you know, everything was happening so fast, because you are, you, your orders are based on the movement of the ship, and they can't tell you that much, so they're like, "Okay you're gonna be leaving tonight at 3 o'clock AM, get your shit together and you're gonna meet, you know, you're gonna go to the air station, you're gonna do this." So it was my first experience being on a military aircraft so I just remember in the middle of the night, you know, being exhausted and just getting up and putting your uniform on and just being, you know, that shiny new penny. So, you know, walking out to the flight line there's this giant airplane, a C-5, if you've ever seen a C-5, it kinda looks like a giant cigar with wings on it and wheels. So ... you know you're like an ant! You just follow the leader and you just kinda just do, go with what's happening in front of you. So I get on the C-5, you know, you're crawling up to where you have to go and it's all very nice, you know the first time, first, my first flight, you're sitting in the upper back part of the airplane but you're facing backwards. And it looks like an airplane! You know you're - you know it's like they're hiding this airplane inside an airplane. So you go up there and you know there's the Air Force, you know they're like stewardesses of the sky, and they're like, "Can I get you [laughing] anything?" Now this is my first experience with the Air Force not that there's anything wrong with them but they, I don't know, I don't think they should be classified as warriors, but they are, you know, "Can I get you water?" You know, so I was very familiar with the steward, stewardess experience. So that was my first thought about the Air Force. So you know I'm flying and there're - you know there're all these military guys are on the plane and, of course, they sit me next to some asshole Marine who is a smoker and back then you could smoke on airplanes and especially in the Military!

WEBB: Hmm.

LANGFORD: This guy smoked two cartons of Marlboro Reds in the entire flight. And it wasn't even a full direct flight I flew to - where did I go? Or no, did I fly-? I think I flew directly to Naval Air Station Bahrain which is in the middle of... [laughs] middle of nowhere. You know, so I don't really remember the flight that much? It was kind of like, you know, I was just trying not to die from asphyxiation, and back then my father was a smoker, I was a smoker so it really wasn't that big of a deal, you know it was kind of like, you know, Mad Men where people [laughs] it's hysterical to think about it now, I mean of course I don't smoke now 'cause it's silly, I mean it's bad for your health, but back then it really wasn't that big of a deal. I just remember being like, "God, please stop smoking, Jerkoff." Because he was high ranking official and just smoked like a chimney and I just didn't get it so that was my experience of you know flying over there. So I land in the (?) Naval Air Station, Bahrain, this giant cigar of an airplane lands there, I get out and it's in the middle of the night - oh wait no I flew to Colorado first. Flew to Colorado, from here, that's where I was, from Colorado in the middle of the night then flew to the Middle East. And ... you know landing in Bahrain it was like 125 degrees in the middle of the night. I just remember the heat from the door opening the bay opening and just the heat, and I'm like, "Ugh, I'm in the Middle East now." I just stunk, it smell - it has a certain smell to it, like every country does, it smelled. So...you know I go, and you know I go in the barracks, and, you know, they check you in or whatever they call it, so I'm there and I'm just waiting for the ship to get into position, because they're going to helo me from that base to the boat. And I'm like, "Helo, what is that?" They're like, "You're gonna get on a helicopter, and you're gonna fly from here to there." And I'm like, "Helicopter? I've never been on a helicopter." So I, you know, waiting sitting there waiting for the boat to get into position. So me and bunch of other guys maybe six or seven guys, there really wasn't that many of them, I didn't know any of them. They were Marines and sailors - you know, some Marines going but mostly sailors. You know we just kinda you know it's kinda like you're at work you know you know each other but you're not like, "Hey! You know, how are the kids?" It's not - it really wasn't like that. You're in your own world and you're kinda just focused on what you're gonna be doing next. So the helicopter comes in we load up on the helicopter with your bags - you know your life! You have your sea bag and everything that you own is gonna go with you on the boat! So.

WEBB: I assume you've ditched the robe and slippers and stuff at this point.

LANGFORD: Yeah. [Laughs] They were thrown away the first day. That's funny that you remember that. Yeah that shit was gone the first day. They threw it, everything, in the garbage by the way, everything I owned was in the trash, I had nothing. And you know it's by design!

WEBB: "You are trash," is basically what they're saying.

LANGFORD: Um, I wouldn't say trash, I would say you are a piece of clay, and you are a clay to be molded into what they want. Your belongings are trash, but you are not. So the helicopter flew over and you know here you are you're in a helicopter the sun is kinda coming up over the Persian Gulf and you're kinda freaking out because you've never been in a helicopter before and it's shaking and you're just like, "What!" I'm like, "What have I gotten myself into?" And then all of a sudden the helicopter's - you look down there's this white boat in the middle of a bowl of soup and you're just kinda like, "Oh my god how is this helicopter going to land on this boat?" And it did, landed on the boat you know perfectly, you get off, and it's kinda like you are at camp or prison, you know you're fresh meat. So you know you get off and here (?) [Laughing] and I'm like, "Oh my god, what have I got my-" You know are always thinking what did I get myself in to. That's always in your mind. And how am I going to navigate this chaos. So, you know, here I land and this guy comes - a sailor comes up to me he's like 6'5" or whatever he was, he comes up to me he's like, "You're Langford, come with me." I don't know how he knew who I was 'cause I - you couldn't see my name. So, you know, we walk on the ship and everybody's like, "Who are you?" And it's weird because it's like still nighttime and it's cool because you just came from the heat and you're walking down these corridors and they're all red and blue and green so it's illuminated kind of like a spaceship. It's really weird. So ,you know, he kind of directs me to where I was gonna, my rack was the worst one because I'm the newest guy on the ship and he's like, "Just get yourself together you know put your shit away and rest a little because you're in for, you're in for it." [Laughs] For the most part. And so it was you know put my stuff away in my rack, you know he showed me how to do that and my locker and so I kinda just...I guess I laid down you know and gathered my thoughts and then I kinda got up and I just walked around went to the bathroom. And then I remember this guy grabbing me and he's like, "Hey you're the new guys, let me give you a little tour." So, you know, he was a cool guy he walked me around he took me to the bridge which was not operable, there were two bridges one was the functioning one and then the one below it wasn't. So I just remember being barefoot and walking on the bridge 'cause I didn't have shoes, I didn't put shoes on. I just walked barefoot I don't know why. So I walked in it - I remember the floor being cold and just it being refreshing because it was like a nice cool room. And he's like, "Yeah this is you know the old bridge, we don't use it anymore." And he introduced himself and he was real friendly and, you know, cool guy. I don't know what happened to him after that but. Then the next day, it was kinda like introduction to my division which was the 2nd Division on the boat. 2nd Division being a deck division, you have your 1st, your 2nd I was on the 2nd Division and...Yeah it was introduction and it was kinda blurry I don't really remember my first few hours, days, weeks, but you know it really is about indoctrination you know with a bunch of guys, you don't know who they are, they're all salty sailors, they - you know some of them had been on the boat for years, and some of them had been on for weeks. 'cause, you know, they would bring guys in maybe in month intervals so if you were short, meaning if you were new you'd maybe been on there a month. But a month is like years in comparison.

So, immediately they were like, "Who is this guy? You know he's in our Division." It was a bunch of guys from all walks of life, Black White, Asian, whatever you know [??] they were all within the same age rank, you know, nineteen-twenty-five-ish and then some guys, you know, petty officers were like in their late twenties but to me they seemed so old because they had beards, and they had tattoos, and, you know, just crusty old sailors. And they were somewhat cool to me at the beginning...for the most part and I just remember like my first week on deck, my gunney who - was he a gunnery? Oh no, he was a master's chief, a master chief, he was a Black Dude in charge of the 2nd Division. He was crazy as crazy could be, but he was well-respected on the boat and just, you know, a cool guy you know just knew how to hang out, knew how to talk to people and but it did it in a very gruff and rough way but I respected it so he respected me. I respected him and it was cool. I can't say that for everyone on the boat, you know, immediately they were like - the boat was underway so the next couple days after I got my stuff together they were like, "You're gonna go to work." And I'm like, "Oh okay." They're like, "We're gonna hang you over the side of the boat and you're gonna paint the boat." And I'm like, "What? What are you talking about?" So, you know, some of the guy - a couple of the newer guys are like, "No, I won't do it, I'm too scared. I - you know, what happens if - 'cause remember, you're on a ship, and the ships are big and the water's down below and you're underway and the you know you're swinging on the side of the ship and you know so all the salty guys were, you know, directing, nobody wanted to do it because it was shitty job. So I was like, "Fuck it I'm - I'll do it, I don't care, it's like big deal. You know what's gonna happen to me?" So they were impressed by my ability to do whatever they asked of me and I think that's how I gained respect, you know, they were like, you know, "You're gonna do whatever we tell you." And I'm like, "Fine, you know, whatever." So I didn't complain, I think they liked that. So you know they strapped me up and threw me over the side and you know the guy before me fell in the water and it was you know the ship had to come around, you know, there's sea snakes in the water and you could die from the jellyfish - I mean it's a dangerous body of water. And everything in the water is just waiting to kill you, so - but I didn't really think about it, 'cause I figure if I fall in they'll get me. I'm not gonna - unless I hit my head on the way down I won't die. So that's kinda how I thought - plus I was fearless I didn't really care. So that was kinda my first few days of indoctrination you know they were really testing me to see if I can hang with the best of 'em.

WEBB: Is that a hazing or is that-?

LANGFORD: Great way to put it. It was a hazing experience but really it is important to kinda see if you can manage it. Are you capable of being in a position of authority or a position of responsibility and you're not gonna break? So you know, these guys - have - you have to remember the Middle East was in turmoil at the time because Saddam you know was being Saddam and Iran was being Iran and Saudi Arabia was being Saudi Arabia! You know, buncha whack jobs. So at the time they were already familiar of what they

needed to accomplish in their employees in order to be good employees whether you - whatever you wanna call us we're employees, so you know, it really was an indoctrination kind of a hazing type of process where, "Can he handle it?" And, you know, fortunately I was able to - not all the time but for the most part, I was able to handle some of the bullshit that they would throw at me. And through the process you gain respect 'cause that's the most important thing on a ship is having respect it's kinda like being in prison, like jail ... if you don't have respect you're gonna get shanked and the military is no different than prison. Not that I've ever been to prison but I would imagine it's the same, based on what I read.

WEBB: Were there actual hazing rituals or things that they made you do?

LANGFORD: Well you have, you know, the West Pac [?] where you cross the equator and that kind of hazing.

WEBB: But you probably didn't do that in the --

LANGFORD: I almost did. We were on our way to Africa - Djibouti to be exact - so we were, our ship was on its way one month and something happened so we had to turn around and go back into the Gulf but I almost did. Not that I care, you know, it's whatever, it's stupid you dress up like a female and you grease yourself up, it's really [WEBB laughs] homoerotic if you ask me. So it's kinda weird to, I don't wanna dress up like a clown and make a fool of myself but it's tradition I understand it's just like in college, you know, you join a fraternity or whatever and you gotta do what they tell you, I get it. Not that I wanna do it, I will because it's part of tradition and I love tradition for the most part that kind of tradition. So, yeah, it was happening every day, you were constantly being hazed by the higher up guys. And some of the guys that I worked with and for were lifers, fifteen years twenty years whatever. Rule of thumb: make friends quickly. I had enemies but I also had friends. It's difficult not to have enemies when you're on a boat, you know it's kind of they're like a bunch of girls, you know, it's just like you - your business is their business and it's like everyone loves gossip and it's just weird. And but, I was able to navigate it, but not that I enjoyed it, but -

WEBB: [Interrupting] Well, you described it as, you know...an office setting almost --

LANGFORD: Yeah!

WEBB: -- and there are people that you don't - not at this job for anybody listening-but there are people at your office that you don't necessarily -

LANGFORD: [Interrupting] Exactly!

WEBB: Is there a way to kinda get away from that? Or, I mean you're in a confined space I would think that it would just - [laughing] there's no getting away from it.

LANGFORD: There isn't. You work with them you know just like you were - I'm sure there're people here that you'd like to murder but, you know, it's the same on the boat you have to be professional and you have to put aside your own...thoughts and your mindset of different backgrounds or different people or whatever but it's very similar in corporate America you know corporate America, I find to be much more taxing... If you're gonna stab me, at least stab me in the front don't stab me in the back, and that's the good thing about military is that they're - you're gonna see it coming they're gonna stab you in the front and they're not gonna, you know, make no bones about it, you're - you know your, who your enemies are and they are just waiting to, for you to slip up. Especially on a boat, it's kinda weird, you have to be very careful because you can easily find yourself thrown over the side or somebody'll push you or poison you or whatever. It's crazy! [Laughs] It's cra-zy to think back, you know I knew right before I got on boat somebody had disappeared, you know, just in the middle of the night! Where did he go? They - if you have enough enemies they will make you disappear so they'll throw you over and the fish will eat you or sharks will eat you or whatever and you know it's like whatever kinda like at work. You know what happened to them where did they go? Very similar. [Laughs]

WEBB: So other than doing these, you know, painting the side of the boat what was your s specific kind of daily duty?

LANGFORD: Started out as a seamen apprentice so my daily duty was painting, mopping, cleaning, maintenance...That's it for the most part. To begin with. And then other tasks, as you gain responsibility you know I was part of a search and rescue team I was - 'cause I was a very good swimmer I was in the Navy swim team. That was my only (?) asset that I had I was just - I could outswim anyone. And that would be an asset in the Navy you'd be surprised, people join the Navy and they don't know how to fuckin' swim it's like, "Really?" It's like, "I'm a doctor but I don't like blood." You know it's like, "Duh! Why - what are you doing, why are you -?"

WEBB: [Interrupting] Every time I hear that, and, you know, usually it's World War II guys, "Uh oh, I'm from Iowa I don't know how to swim but I'm in the Navy." [Both laugh] What are you talking about? That seems like the one thing that you need to know how to do.

LANGFORD: Yeah, "I'm a carpenter, but I really don't like wood." [Laughs] "I can work with anything, just don't give me wood." ...But what was your [laughing] question again?

WEBB: Um.

LANGFORD: My job.

WEBB: Your job.

LANGFORD: My job. You know you really - think about what you see on TV, you know, you see these sailors and they're painting, mopping, cleaning, that was my job and that was my job at the beginning. But then certain things happened, what, then, brought me to my book but a large part of it was kind of chronological how it happened. You know, my first few months, it really was learning how to be a good seamen and how to be a good sailor and really learning the ins and outs and I picked it up very quickly, I picked it up very well. It was just I liked knowledge so I just absorbed as much as I possibly could and I think people recognized that so they really were pushing school on me they were like, "You really should go to school. You're - we don't know why you're here but you know you seem to be somewhat intelligent..." So I had that going for me I looked smart and I wasn't smart but I looked it so I played the part and you know my voice - you know I was always an orator so my voice always over-towered other people even being you know one-hundred and ten [pounds] wet so I had that going for me and especially in the military you have to know how to stand, you know how to present yourself, you have to be a professional, you know you have to be squared away, as they would say. You know, making sure your uniform's correct and - so all of that is part of your job and I did it well. You know, I was always on time, and that's one thing that's important you have to be present and I just knew how, you know I didn't sleep in if I needed to be somewhere I just didn't sleep. You know I [laughs] I slept an hour or whatever. I was fortunate that I had that upbringing that I did, you know taught me responsibility dadadada and all of that is important in the military. You'd be surprised, you know people are like, "Oh I'm just gonna go in and kill." No, that's not what you're just gonna do, you are also going to be responsible for a lot of other things, meaning self-awareness and being aware of who you are and what you're doing and your surroundings. Peripheral is very important and you know that part of your job is extremely important you know being able to think ahead and so that all of that is - was part of my job and I did it well. So the beginning of the shit storm then was my experience on the "USS LaSalle AGF 3 [Miscellaneous Command Ship] was...how do I wanna start, was a shore leave in Bahrain, my ship had pulled in and everything else before that is secondary and somewhat irrelevant to my experience in the military and my responsibilities as a soldier in the military, it was kinda fluff, you know it's like , "Just get up and do your job and you know that's it" and I did it well. So one night our ship had pulled in you know there was a lot of shit going on in the Middle East at that time but it was like whatever we didn't - we weren't aware of it because we weren't informed of it, you know, we would be told, "Be careful when you go out in town, there are crazy people out there that are just waiting to kill you and kidnap you." But back then, it wasn't really - we didn't think about it like we do today you know where they'll kidnap you and cut your head off. Back then it really wasn't that - it was happening, but it really wasn't to the extent it is today. So for me, it really - I didn't have any precedent, I didn't have anything to kind of bounce off of, so for me it was like, "Oh, we're in port, it's a really fun port, you know, we can go out and get drunk and be whores and kind of, you know get crazy." So that really was my goal when we pulled into port. I love to say this 'cause it's absolutely true: The military turned me into

an alcoholic. And...so that was my goal. [Laughs] You know, when you hear drunken sailor there's a reason that it's true, is because you are drowning yourself in whatever it is that you're doing to forget what it is that you're doing. So me and my friends - I had some close friends that were just of my same rank and same division and we knew how to have fun. So we pull into port, you know, typical, you know go in, and we would the typical haunt, the Gulf Hotel which is in the Middle East and it's still there to my surprise, was a local watering hole for us. I had been there prior this is just a typical night, we go and this is kinda what my book, I'm kinda giving you my book. And you know, we're doing what we do, sailors do, drinking and playing darts, and having fun and just, you know, doing whatever and you know talking with the locals and I had met quite a few locals that were of Persian descent and Arab descent and back then it really wasn't, you know, they didn't have a stigma back - at least, I didn't have a stigma with that race, or that ethnic ethnicity or that geographical area so for me it like I was just like meeting, you know?

WEBB: Mmhmm.

LANGFORD: You know, "Hey how are you, you know let's hang out and get drunk." So I knew a lot of locals and one of the guys that I had met his father was the King and I just happened to meet his son, his son was a prince and it was kinda cool to hang out at the palace and, you know, to be a dignitary and kind of live that whole experience, you know, we would go to the palace and they'd give us these silk Persian rugs and they were beach towels, basically, but they were thousands of dollars of artwork and we used them as just you know beach towels. His name was Mohammed and I don't know if he still exists but just a cool guy, met him and him and I became fast friends and then a couple visits after that, you know, we met up again and ... partied and left the bar and kind of went out to the lobby and we're sitting there and here come some MPs [Military Police], the MPs are like, "You have to get back to your ship, you know, it's an order." And we're like, "What?" You know drunk as ... drunk as a skunk. And you know get in the military police car and you know race back to the ship and you know they wouldn't tell us what was happening in the car. I don't know why they didn't, they just said, "This - these are our orders to bring you guys-" 'cause, you know, you - we couldn't be missed, you're in middle of the desert.

WEBB: Yeah.

LANGFORD: And here are a bunch of white guys, you know, in civilian clothes you put one and one together you're gonna get two. So you know the MPs knew who we were -- I don't know if - I don't know how they did but they did, dragged us back to the ship at like 150 miles an hour, not kilometers, miles per hour, when we got there the ship was already getting underway you know we were familiar with what was happening you know the ship is getting underway what's happening.

So as I'm you know getting permission to come aboard, the watchman is like, "Oh ho, shit has gone down, USS Stark was bombed and we have to get there." So you know I'm like, "Okay whatever!" So go back to my - take off my civilian clothes, put on my uniform, everyone's kinda doing the same thing, my petty officer in charge - I don't remember his name - he's like, you know briefed us basically, and said, "You know the USS Stark was just hit by an Iraqi aircraft." It was like a MIG or something - oh excuse me! You know, back then I didn't really understand what was happening, it was like, "Okay, you know, the ship got hit by -" I'm looking at that painting being over your head, it's hysterical - that the ship was sinking! You know, I'm half in the bag still I'm still drunk, it's like, what's going on? So [laughs] the ship is, you know, as I'm getting ready the ship is pulling out of port you and nobody really knows what's happening so we're kind of, you know, everyone's in the dark because you have to remember, back then it isn't like it is today, communication was only for the privileged. Once again -- it is not my job to be informed, my job is to do what I'm told. So just based on that little bit of information that I got from the watchman because he knew because he had to know why the ship was being pulled out and then you know we were kind of informed a little bit more to get ready and I was part of a crew that was responsible for what is called the Mike 8 boat and a Mike 8 boat on the ship I was on - the La Salle is a amphibious boat, it was an old Marine ship that they just painted it white but the back end kind of sinks and the back opens up and these two boats come out the back. And we used 'em as landing craft or back in wartime, they'd be used for Marines to kind of go on the beach and you know - you've seen 'em before.

WEBB: Yeah.

LANGFORD: That's exactly what it is. So I was part of that crew and my best friend who was the coxswain, he was the captain of the - you know - he steered the ship. So we you know we had a lot of responsibility, you know, our role to was kind of prep and to get everything ready for what was in store. And then in the interim we were getting word that the Stark was sinking, you know, it was - if you've ever seen a picture of it, it's - it was on the cover of *Time Magazine*, the Stark is kind of tilting in the water and smoke is billowing out of it, that's exactly what I saw and the guy who took that picture that was on the front of *Time Magazine*, he was standing right next to me. He sold it to Time Magazine. That was my experience of it, you know. We didn't see it because the - our ship was kind of - en route and my role was to be on the Mike 8 boat, inside the boat so I couldn't see it. But everyone else was on deck and you know watchmen or whatever because we were unaware if there were any more fighter pilots out there ready to kind of take us out. And the LaSalle had what are called Phalanx [Close-In Weapons System (CIWS) automated weapons defense] and we called 'em R2-D2 but they're anti-aircraft guns.

WEBB: Yeah.

LANGFORD: So we had those, thankfully, and so did the Stark but the Stark didn't turn 'em on so that's why they got bombed out but, you know, all this is happening as we are pulling up to the ship and my first experience of the Stark was the back end of the ship opening up and I can see from where I was on the Mike 8 boat, I can see the Stark and smoke and people and whatever I mean it was that close it was maybe 400 feet away and -

WEBB: How long did it take you to get there?

LANGFORD: That's a great question. I think it took maybe a couple hours? It seemed like longer but I think it took us a couple hours 'cause they were in the middle of the Persian Gulf and the Persian Gulf is a pretty big body of water. And I would say, two hours maybe? It seemed longer but I think maybe - I tried to research that for my book but I couldn't find it, meaning the timeframe it took us, I said a couple hours 'cause that's what it seemed like. And then you know the Migate boat floated out and you know all hell broke loose, you know. We pulled up to the ship, the ship is sinking, you know, fire and you know brimstone, everything you could possibly think of.

My job was search and rescue, so we were tasked with collecting the dead and collecting anything that was salvageable meaning human, human beings and yeah it was not good. It was bad. So you know, just going through the motion and being hungover and the heat and you know this was the first hour. The first hour was tasked with getting the dead and putting them on our ship because we had to get them off the Stark because the Stark was going down. And, you know, the military the dead is very important so we had to get them onto our boat to get them into the refrigeration to - so they wouldn't start to rot. I don't know if that was why but it was - we gotta take care of the dead, and we gotta take care of the injured, you know we set up a triage, and just equipment back and forth, back and forth, back and forth and this went on for like two and a half days. Maybe three days. So I had not slept for three days of just doing that. You know just being immersed in blood and guts and just grossness and you know search and recover and, you know, I was young, I was a young man. And it has a burning memory because, you know, it was that shift in who I was as a human - that was gone. This new person kinda evolved into my next role of being on the ship and, you know, having gone through that and survived it and recovering the ship - 'cause the ship didn't sink we were actually able to save it with the help of us and some other ships that were out there. So it was over a course of three days, it was a matter of just you know being arduous and, you know, to quote the admiral of, whatever his name was, Bernstein, you know, "Arduous and selfless duty in the eyes of an act of war." And I don't wanna say war because they didn't call it war, it was more of a conflict, they never-

WEBB: How do you feel about that?

LANGFORD: Yeah I don't know, I don't know what the definition of war is, I don't know what the definition of conflict is. I know I was in a shit storm. They called it a conflict, I would say

it was an act of war but I didn't give it, its title, they did. But it wasn't good. It was bad. And my book is based on minute by minute of that experience and how I survived it, how I came out of it, you know, and I had PTSD, you know, just it's a nightmare and to this day I'm affected by it. You know people say, "Oh, you know you didn't go through that much" or "It wasn't that-" and it was bad, it was bad, bad, bad that's kind of my next chapter of life, is to bring awareness to PTSD and to suicide rates in the military because you know twenty something veterans kill themselves every day - and I understand why! You know and I didn't go through that much I mean I went through bad stuff but I mean guys today, they go through way worse than I did, um -

WEBB: [interrupting] Let me ask you what kind of services after that experience did the military offer to you as kind of a way to decompress, to cope, to process to understand, did the military give you-?

LANGFORD: No.

WEBB: None?

LANGFORD: None. After that had happened, you know, we were floating out there for about three days so it was just you know smoke, blood, and everything else for three days. After that you - we went back into port 'cause we pull that thing back into port in Bahrain and it sat in port for about a month' 'cause they had to repair it. And we were kind of in and out of port, you know just making sure that nothing was gonna happen again, and being the command ship of the Middle East Force, you know, we had - it was a command - it was a spy ship basically. And you know all the communication that was going out of the Middle East was going from that ship. So that was our role, so our role had to continue because of the communication part of it. So we were constantly being out and as a target, and Iraq never really took responsibility for what they did, you know. They said it was rogue pilots, I don't believe that, I think it was part of a larger picture because at the time the president was kind of in conflict with Saddam and then the Ayatollah and there was a bunch of shit going on. It was tit for tat.

WEBB: Yeah.

LANGFORD: You know, you whack me, we're gonna whack you. That's kinda how it worked. But to answer your question about recovery and therapy, [sarcastically] hahaha, no. It didn't exist. It still doesn't. It still didn't exist after I left there, you know, that happened kind of like the few months into my enlistment? And being on the boat, I was, maybe, there for three or four months and then that happened.

WEBB: Hmm.

LANGFORD: And then I was on the boat for maybe six or seven months afterwards, and at no point did anybody ever offer any type of...what's the word? Therapy.

WEBB: Yeah.

LANGFORD: You know, any type of, you know, "Are you okay? Do you need any help?" That didn't exist. I don't know if it does anymore, I don't think it does 'cause I hear stories about it today. I think that's a big fault in the military, you know. You ask a great deal but you don't give the tools to fix what you broke and I was broken, rightfully so, and just had to power through it for the most part.

WEBB: I assume that the ship as an environment after that changes.

LANGFORD: [Quietly] Oh yeah.

WEBB: Because not just you are probably going through these kinds of - trying to process it and having this effect on you but also you're 6 months maybe this sense of danger is a little bit more acute? How -what was the environment like on the ship after that?

LANGFORD: Tense. It shifted, it changed, maybe that's why - it's why I said I wasn't the same person I was after that all happened because it shifted everything. Everyone changed, not just me I didn't go through this by myself, it was a whole ship there, I was just front line. I was on the front of it so I think that's what makes my experience a little bit different than most because there were only a handful of guys that were involved in what I did. And I mean, not it's not like a hero that's not what I'm trying to sound like I'm just trying to get --

WEBB: Yeah.

LANGFORD: -- a baseline of what happened of - just for myself, as well as, you know, what was - what happened. But the guys that I was with, weren't as - resilient I guess? They, really - it hit them hard. And it hit me hard! But I think that everyone treats stress very differently. I don't know, for some reason, I have always been able to deal with stress differently, kinda like, if the door's closed, it's closed and I don't have to deal with it but once it opens then I'm like, "Uh!" And I think that's the struggle that a lot of people on the boat dealt with, was it was hard for them to forget what had happened and they kinda, you know, like a Vietnam veteran, they're still carrying the bombs in their mind. That couldn't be further from the truth for me, you know. I, what haunts me is in my sleep. I still don't sleep but you know it's just a casualty of war and I think it- a lot of other people deal with it, you know, suicide, alcohol, drugs, whatever. And I did all that as well!

WEBB: [Laughs]

LANGFORD: Don't get me wrong, you know. I mean I had to go through the motions myself but I think the military has a lot of work to do in regards to how they fix what they break. They don't want to take responsibility for it and - which is understandable because of the business that we're in ... if you're in a business that is death and destruction then

you know that is your business and whether you are responsible for fixing it is - what you break - is, you know, the jury's out. Did I answer that question?

WEBB: I think so! So another six months or so after that incident, after the USS Stark, any other incidents after that?

LANGFORD: Yeah, there were a lot. There were [laughing] quite a few, actually. I was involved in ... the first sinking of a warship in the Persian Gulf, I was part of that. Also, when our helicopter crashed on our deck, I was part of that search rescue - search and rescue mission. That was not - it was kind of reminiscent of what had happened on the Stark. The helo crashing, I think was second, and I was like right there, you know, the helo's coming in like it did all the time, and it hit the ass-end of the ship and cracked in half. And the rotors kind of were everywhere and one missed me by a - by an inch, and everyone on deck kind of jumped down, and then it went. We watched it go down and then we had to get in the boat again and - this happened shortly thereafter. I think it was kind of ... like weeks maybe, so it was kinda, you're in that auto mode of just reacting, being proactive to what you need to do. And by the end of the Stark, it was kinda you know, "Here we go again! You know back in the mix of it!" So you know - the helicopter sinking and, you know, here me and my colleague were trying to find out where they are, and there was, you know, we saw a pilot - what appeared to be a pilot 'cause you could tell by their uniform and their helmet. He was floating and his light was blinking and the water was green because it turns green when it hits water so you can see where the injured are. So we kind of, you went around over there and, you know, I can't remember if I did or Jeff did, I can't remember but one of us, flipped him over and it was just blood and guts like no face, no head, legs were cut off, just horrible. So you know we couldn't get him to bring him on the boat so we had to get a grappling hook like a fish and fish the guy up and by then, it was like, you know, "Whatever! You know just another dead body!" So I was conditioned already to not be shocked by what I saw... based on my three days of pure torture of, you know, everything that we had to clean up. That's basically what we did we cleaned up the mess. It sounds very heroic but basically a sailor's job in war is to clean up the mess. So got him and I think there was another body part that we brought on deck and then the helicopter sunk with everyone on board and then we kinda went back and so that was the end of that - experience.

And then, a few weeks or months later...and this is kind of like my book, as I am paraphrasing my book but towards the end of my tour I was the 1st Lieutenant's bitch boy basically. I was computer literate, back in those days was, you know, "Wow you know computers." Back in the late 80s [laughing] early 90s. Seems so long ago. I was the only one that knew how to work the computer on the boat. So the 1st Lieutenant was like, "Oh my god, this guy is like a geno-wizard, he knows computers." So I was, you know, fortunate enough to get into that mix because the 1st Lieutenant is the third highest ranking officer on the ship and you get certain bennies [benefits] from being the 1st Lieutenant's boy and it makes life a little easier. You eat a little better and you sleep

a little better and you get a little bit more benefits from it. So from there, I was gifted a school because of my survival skills, they said you know, "You're a pretty smart guy, we think you're wasting your time as a sailor, as a seaman."

WEBB: Hmm.

LANGFORD: Because I was content. I really enjoyed it. I loved the boat I loved everything about it. But they were like, "No, you need to go to school and make something of yourself." And I'm like, "Oh okay, cool." So I got in A-school, F-18, jet mechanic, so that was my MOS, 8342, which is an F-18, if you're familiar with the jet! It's what the Blue Angels fly, F-18, A,B,C,D,E,F, and I think I worked on an F, I'm not sure.

WEBB: Hmm.

LANGFORD: But that was a school that was bestowed on me as a sailor, which was the best thing that ever happened, you know, it was a good gift. So, I kinda was gearing up for that, towards my end of my tour after everything that had happened, you know...So I was fortunate that I was given that opportunity. And I mean it wasn't just given to me I had to -

WEBB: [In background] No.

LANGFORD: -- you know --

WEBB: You earned it.

LANGFORD: I earned it, thank you. I earned it. I really pushed for it and found a lot of my friends were going to F-18 school because it was the flavor of the month jet, at the time. I don't know what it is now but, yeah, it was a good thing.

WEBB: Were you surprised by - I mean you started out at eighteen going to college for a very different kind of lifestyle and now you're working on these expensive you know jet planes. Were you surprised at, kind of, how the path that you took in the Navy or is it what you were hoping for?

LANGFORD: No, I was surprised. Everything was a new experience and an unexpected experience for me. I think that's what makes a good soldier or a good sailors - expect the unexpected. And for me it's always been an exploration - you know to experience something that is tangible and achievable but at the same time at your own fruition, you know. You are out there making it happen and I was able to make it happen but at no point did I expect it nor did I ever see the path I kind of just took it as it came.

WEBB: Hmm.

LANGFORD: And embraced it? For whatever it was worth. You know the schooling that I went to was like a million dollars so it was pretty good and not everybody got it. You know, if you

wanna be a cook you're gonna be a cook, I didn't wanna be a cook. And if you wanna pass out basketballs in a gym there's a job for that in the Navy and I just didn't see myself doing that, you know, I never - I always saw myself as I'm going to do the best job I can and whatever reward comes from it, is just cake.

WEBB: Yeah.

LANGFORD: And I looked at this A school as cake. It was a reward for hard work and survival.

WEBB: So at the end of your - five years?

LANGFORD: Four years eight months,

WEBB: Four years eight months.

LANGFORD: Six hours and 20 second - 22 seconds?

WEBB: So you weren't counting or anything. [Laughs]

LANGFORD: No I was!

WEBB: Well, I was gonna ask, did you - did it ever cross your mind to re up and do some more time or--?

LANGFORD: No...I was in from '86-'91. Desert Storm broke out in '90, late '90, like around December, I was still - I was supposed to get out in August of 1991, and the war was already ramping up, Desert Storm, and because I had a background in the Middle East, the United States Navy, quote unquote, "re-enlisted me at the luxury and convenience of the United States government." So they're upped me for eight more months, which prolonged my schooling and was a surprise. I was - on New Years Eve, I was at a wedding, and I got orders to get back to base in California because my squadron was going to the Middle East. [Laugh-sigh] So, you know, here I go again! So for me, I had eight months left, and I'm thinking to myself, "Are you fucking kidding me they'e gonna send me back to war, I got eight months left." And I'm pretty much a civilian by then, I'm living in Southern California -

WEBB: Mmhmm.

LANGFORD: I'm surfing, I'm living the life of Riley, I have a great fucking life. And these assholes are gonna reenlist me for 8 months. So you know it's kinda funny. But I understand you know I mean it's my job. But, "at the luxury and convenience of the United States government"? I mean can you come up with better verbiage?

WEBB: [Laughs]

LANGFORD: So...because of my tenure I was asked, "Do you wanna go to the Persian Gulf?" And all my counterparts, and my fellow Marines and fellow sailors that had not been there they

were like, "Oh, I wanna go fight for the United States." And I'm like, "You guys should go. You need to go." Because they kinda looked at me like I was a salty sailor, you know. I had been to the Persian Gulf, I had fought the war and, believe me, it was recognized. So for me, I was fortunate they asked me, "Do you wanna go?" And I was like, "Fuck no, I don't wanna go back to that shithole."

WEBB: Yeah.

LANGFORD: And I love the way people talk about Dubai and the Middle East today. Not to rap on the Middle East but it's not that great. It's hot! It's so hot. And that's part of the Middle East crisis I think it's so fucking hot there they can't get- you know - imagine living in 135 degree heat all your life? I'd be pissed off too. I always said like if we were to send them air conditioning, they would be the happiest people in the world and they wouldn't be fighting for as long as they have but [quieter] that's besides the point that's my theory and I'm sticking to it.

WEBB: [Laughs]

LANGFORD: I think that's a good joke but what - [laughs]

WEBB: Yeah.

LANGFORD: I always said that you wanna end the war? Send a giant air conditioner to the Middle East and give 'em air conditioning and they'd be happy. They're angry 'cause it's so hot, but. And that's my thought - thoughts on the Middle East. But I did not go, I stayed in sunny California and I was poolside and beachside until the end of my enlistment. And, you know, and rightfully so! You know I already had fought the fight and I wasn't looking for more. I did my job, I did it well I was decorated, you know. I have a - I have quite a few awards from admirals and from captains and military expeditionary medal, armed forces medal, I've got 'em all. Do they mean anything? No they don't. But it looks good on a resume! You know? But yeah, so my last few years - my last three years in the Navy was cake, it was wonderful! I mean I lived in one of the most richest places in the United States, Southern California, Orange County. You know back in the day, Laguna Beach was, you know, wow, surf and sun. So you know, I did my shit first year, you know I fought the fight but then I was rewarded three years after that with a very comfortable existence. You know, I was in a training squadron for F-18s and, basically, just trained pilots and personnel on how to fly an F-18 as a plane captain - that's my title, Plane Captain. It sounds like, "Ooh, I flew a plane", I didn't fly a plane I was a grease monkey.

WEBB: Hmmm.

LANGFORD: I was a mechanic like a auto mechanic but I was a plane mechanic so I can take that thing apart in my sleep and I still can today.

WEBB: Hm.

LANGFORD: And - that was my job. And I loved it! It was a great job. You know I loved engineering. I've always been in technology, you know, I've always embraced technology. I've always embraced software. I've always embraced hardware. An F-18 is basically a flying computer.

WEBB: Right.

LANGFORD: Just a schlep is in there just to land the thing but for the most part it's a flying computer.

WEBB: Hmm.

LANGFORD: And I loved it I embraced it everything about it. I loved the jet propulsion, I loved just everything about it. It was fascinating. But then, you know, after that happened I didn't want to be a grease monkey. I didn't want to be dirty anymore. I was too smart, you know? For my own good. And prepared myself for school and got everything ready, you know, in line...I was gonna be a lawyer. So you know I was gonna go to school to be a lawyer and then be a politician and that was my calling. So went to the University of Wisconsin got my Pre-Law degree and then I decided that I should probably work at a law firm before I commit three years of my life to it. So I start working at one of the best law firms in the world, Foley and Lardner, headquartered in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, is a big corporate law firm, you know, college, blahblahblah, you know it's like who cares? College is silly, you know, it's big party as far as I'm concerned. And I did it well because I had already seen the world, so I went to school on the GI bill and my friends in college were kids, you know they were eighteen, nineteen, twenty, And they had not even tasted life, you know. I had already been to hell and back. But they didn't know 'cause I didn't tell 'em.

WEBB: I was -

LANGFORD: [Interrupting] - until I got to know them.

WEBB: I was gonna ask if you had a hard time then relating to that group of people.

LANGFORD: We had something in common, it was drinking. You know when you're in college, it's a big party. So I hung out with fraternity guys and you know athletes and whatever. And moved in to a rugby house - I don't know why I was living in a rugby house but I was living in a rugby house - and my friends, you know, it was immediate. [Soft snap] You know I came to school at the University of Wisconsin with a surfboard 'cause I was a surfer and they were like, "Who's this crazy guy from California, you know, at the University of Wisconsin with a surfboard?" So that was my kinda in with these guys and, you know, they took me under their wing and taught me the college life 'cause they had already like freshmans and sophomore and I was like a freshman but I was twenty -

WEBB: Yeah.

LANGFORD: -- two or something.

WEBB: Yeah.

LANGFORD: But I didn't look twenty-two but I was twenty-two.

WEBB: Yeah.

LANGFORD: 'Cause they just thought I was some guy outta high school, you know, or whatever. Like most GI bill guys do.

WEBB: Okay so. [Sighs] You go through college, you get a job at a law firm. Do you pursue law beyond that or do you make another change kind of in what it is that you wanna do [laughing] when you grow up?

LANGFORD: Yes really good questions Thomas.

WEBB: [Laughs]

LANGFORD: I think that...I was just kinda going through the motion you know that was my plan 'cause I had five year objectives.

WEBB: Yeah.

LANGFORD: It's how I live my life and that was part of my objective was to go to law school but then working at a law firm you know - if you've ever worked at a law firm you learn, that it's not what it's all cracked up to be. Meaning it looks wonderful from the outside but to be in it is kind of - not the same. And my role because I started out as a - what they called a "conversion expert". So my role was to take their current documentation and their platform and their network and convert it to a new one. So they were - it was actually a really interesting time in history because, you know, the Internet wasn't like it is today so software IT...so. And the great thing about law is that they have lots of money.

WEBB: Hmm.

LANGFORD: So when you have lots of money you can spend on lots of things and in law you're as good as the information that you have at your fingertips so they spared no expense at having the latest and the greatest information at their fingertips so you know and that's why I come in. So being a software guy, it was always something that was secondary to my objective which was being a lawyer. So I kinda put the two and two together: I was in law but I was also a software guy or an application guy, just could figure it out. I don't know how but I just did it just came very natural to me and the managing partner recognized that. so he was like, "You're really good at this shit you know it's like we could use you." So they took full advantage of everything that I had to offer and I kind of just ran with it and it was a great project, it was a great program, so we just converted everything from old way to new way meaning from an old windows type of environment

to a new environment and, you know. so it was interesting, it was a new job, it was like - it was a job. And my role was to meet with attorneys and interview them and find out what they needed and dada and in the interim I would ask them, "How do you like being a lawyer? How do you like doing this?" And all of 'em, all the partners, they were just broken down men, alcoholics, you know wife beaters, philanderers, I mean you wanna talk about the - a motley crew, you go to any corporate law firm and you're gonna find a group of monkeys I'm tellin' ya. So - and that was my audience so I'd be like, "Oh my god, this guy looks awful. And he's like in his forties, like I can't imagine myself doing this and turning into him!"

WEBB: Mm.

LANGFORD: Their children hated them, they were on their third wives, they were fucking everything in the office, and I just didn't wanna be part of that. And that was my world! You know, I'm in a glass tower at one of the best law firms in the world - not to speak disparagingly of this firm, but that's the culture. You know when you have a lot of money and you have free will, bad things happen. So here you have a group of white men, rich, powerful, they're the worst, and I didn't wanna do that. So I kinda marry the two together. I -

WEBB: [Simultaneously] Yeah.

LANGFORD: -- did law, and I was a software guy, and I have still do it to this day, but I did it actively for ten years, I was a what they call trainer, technical trainer, or an implementation consultant. So I would go to some of the best firms in the world and implement software and configure it and train it and support it and it's kinda what I do, it's my business. But I don't really do it in law that much 'cause I got out of it, I was so sickened by it, I mean I was involved in this one case, I can't really talk about it, but big tobacco litigation case. I was the lead, my role was to manage it and some of the characters that I was involved in, were not good, you know, if you've ever seen movies about tobacco and big money that was my - that was my life and I just - I couldn't do it anymore.

WEBB: Mm.

LANGFORD: I'm an ethical guy. I have scruples. And I couldn't - you know you couldn't give me enough money to do it anymore. And it was to the point of I would get sick because - you know because when you're an IT guy in big law every - you see everything, everything is going by your desk and you wanna talk about non-disclosure? I mean I have signed my life away over the years of information that has gone by my eyeballs and some of it, you know I'm basically...I'm supporting evil.

WEBB: Hmm.

LANGFORD: I was. And I couldn't do it anymore. So I got out of law. I mean don't get me [laughing] wrong it was - I mean the money was good.

WEBB: [Laughing] Yeah.

LANGFORD: Everything was - you wanna talk about - I mean these were the days, like in IT when champagne and town cars and hotels and expense accounts, I mean I had it all. But there was a price. You know you...the price you pay is your - being who you are is at the foundation the core of who you are and a lot of people sell out. If you wanna sell out that's your business, I don't have to, I don't need to and you know and I turned my back on an industry that really gave me everything but, once again, there's a price. You know, you see people who are successful and professional in that industry and you peel away piece by piece and you find out exactly who they are. And I didn't wanna do that, but anyway! So in 2007 there was a shift in software and it was called the Cloud! I've always been involved in the cloud - we just call it that now, but I've always been involved in it. When you are in law they call - we call it networking, obviously, so we - I've always had a network in my world, in my corporate world because we needed to communicate and transfer information anywhere in the world so if we are in the United States and we have a case in China you know we need to be able to access documents, so you what we call the cloud today I've always been involved; It's just funny how they call it - you know it's like "Oooh the cloud!"

WEBB: Yeah.

LANGFORD: But you know I invented -

WEBB: We explained this to, yeah.

LANGFORD: I mean I invented it, you know, it was like I was part of that world.

WEBB: Huh.

LANGFORD: You know, Microsoft was my client and my the firm I worked for, that was their corporate in house council, so I had the ears and eyes of the Gates and so I was involved in all of that development for software because we were kind of the law? Law was kind of a testing ground for Microsoft in corporate America, people don't know that but it's true, so we kinda tweaked it and made it so that it could be you know a household name in corporate America, and it's just now happening now where you know you have Office 365 and the Cloud and dadadada. I mean, c'mon I mean, I was doing that in the '90s. But you know, it's fun for people to play today you know it's like, "Oooh I'm a computer person." But yeah. So I've always been involved in that trajectory of technical and software and hardware and it kind of led me to the next phase, which was software as a service and working with corporations that are implementing the cloud software, Enterprise Software, which is a big buzzword today. So that is my bread and butter, is

Enterprise Software and implementation, so I travel the world and do it. Yeah. My first job with Enterprise was with Ericsson in Stockholm, Sweden, so I kinda got a taste for that. I was like, "Ooh this is really cool." I've always traveled the United States and some Europe with law but not until I got into enterprise when I started traveling the world.

WEBB: Hmm.

LANGFORD: And, you know, implementing and training and whatever. Yeah.

WEBB: So you finally got to see the world that the [laughing] Navy promised you way back when.

LANGFORD: Yeah! That's a good point! Yeah I mean I've - I think I picked the right career for what I was designed for, because the military taught me how to live out of a suitcase.

WEBB: Mm.

LANGFORD: And I kind of, in order to be - effective today, in today's market, you really have to be able to be mobile, and to understand mobility and to be flexible and to go where your clients require you to. I haven't worked full time, in so long. I don't even know, I'm fortunate that I don't - I can tell corporate America to kiss my ass because, you know, I don't need your shitty job. So you know, I'm a consultant and a contractor so I'm a hired gun.

WEBB: Hmm.

LANGFORD: So I really have always done what I was initially trained to do I'm just doing it in the civilian world.

WEBB: So when did the idea of writing this book sort of first, start to percolate a little bit in your mind?

LANGFORD: I've always written but just short stories for myself I've never shared them with anyone, it was kind of my therapy.

WEBB: Mmm.

LANGFORD: In college, I had a professor who absolutely hated me and told me I was the worst writer and I will never write because I could barely even speak English so that guy drove me to write the book because he was such an asshole [WEBB laughs] and he hated me and I hated him and he - I would write, "The cat is blue." and he would say, "That's the worst sentence I've ever seen." And I- I'll be the first person to admit - I'm not an English major!

WEBB: Mmhmm.

LANGFORD: I'm an IT guy! I don't need to be an English major! But I have a story. My story is valid. Whether it's correctly with adverbs and nouns and plurals and whatever is not my worry.

WEBB: Yeah.

LANGFORD: You know, I could care less. If it's correctly designed - punctually. But he thrived on that and he pointed me out at every turn.

WEBB: [Laughs]

LANGFORD: "You're a terrible writer, you will never write." And I was like, "Fuck you, I'm gonna write this story that has been brewing in me for so long." And in college - you know - and I forgot about it and then I started writing technical manuals more because that was more of interest to me but I've always - the story was always there - it just needed to be put on paper. And then one year I took a year off, I think it was - three years ago? I took a year off and I wrote it. And - so I've - I remember writing the chapters, the names of the chapters I wrote years ago, and then I just kind of fill in the blanks. That one year, and it took me a year to write it, it took a long time because it was therapeutic. I mean I had a breakdown and [crying noise] and then during the course I found out a lot of the guys I was on board with died, I don't know how they died but they just, they're dead, and all of 'em were my good friends so I really wrote it for them, for the most part.

WEBB: I was gonna ask and, you know whether you wanna talk about this or not, whether the process of writing that and I assume researching and going back opened up any new issues for you that maybe you had been able to kinda put aside or bury?

LANGFORD: Great question. Yeah, it opened up a lot of wounds and it - that was the therapeutic, the part that I needed, that I required as a functioning adult. I've always been a functioning adult, but what you see is not necessarily what you get, and I was always good at...I was a functioning alcoholic, so the alcohol kinda seeped its way in.

WEBB: [Quietly] Mmm.

LANGFORD: And, like I said, the military taught me how to be a boozer, and I took that into my college life, I took that into my professional life, and it - and I was so good at it, because part of my role, as a professional, as a civilian is to entertain, so I would be the guy that would be sent out to entertain the clients. "Send the drunk! Send the clown." You know. So for me, it was - that - and I was good at it, I was so good, but I was functioning, and I was able to get up in the morning, and stand in front of a group of people, and, you know, be the clown.

WEBB: [Quietly] True.

LANGFORD: Welcome to corporate America, it's so stupid but that was my job. Part of it, you know. But when I decided to sit down and write the book is when I came to grips with the demon. You know, that booze in my life, and I was like, "Oh my god, like, this is why I'm drinking, this is why I'm suppressing that emotion." So it was very good that I wrote the book - and I get a little choked up - because you know who I am today, is not who I was when I started writing the book and that year it took me a year to kind of power through and to understand why I'm - why I am the way that I am. So to answer your question, why I wrote the book and how I wrote the book and when I wrote the book really was a discovery of - and a recovery of the past. So I kinda put that away - 'cause I quit drinking, I think I quit drinking like four years ago. And I mean I was a boozehound, I mean I just was good at it. But I wasn't in - like I didn't wake up in the morning and be like, "Ugh I need a drink." That wasn't me. I was the guy on Friday and Saturday that you called, if you wanted to party. That was me! But on Sunday, you know, I wheeled it back starting out. But then I noticed, you know, then it went from Sunday, then I would drink on Sunday, and then Wednesday, why not Wednesday? Why not Thursday? I'm in the airplane, let's start drinking, now. You know, so it was just, it was gradual. And then I noticed, I'm like, "Okay, I'm - things are being affected, it's affecting my business, it's affecting me, it's affecting my health, dadadadada." And I always said I was gonna quit at a certain age and that's what I did. So I quit. And that was a really good experience for me because then it taught me, "Hey! Let's write this book. And in the interim, let's self-discover, and lets you know some self-awareness, here you big Drunk." So for me it was really a good experience to write the book and to understand why I was suffering as much as I was. Now when I say suffering, everyone's definition of it is different.

WEBB: Yeah.

LANGFORD: You know I have PTSD, I know I do. And thank - I can thank the military for that. At my own volition! You know, I mean I joined it I understood the - I understood what the dotted line meant. But I never - seeked help. How I seeked help was drinking, and a lifestyle that afforded me everything I wanted. You know you give certain things to a man and he can go a little cuckoo. And then not only that, but, you know, you throw in the fact I'm suffering from PTSD, I don't know what it is, I know that I have trouble with a lot of things, some of them just being in open spaces or loud noises or a lot of people. You know I have fear of everything for the most part. So that's my PTSD. But I drank to suppress it. But by stopping that I have fixed quite a few of the things that I - because in corporate America, I would imagine here you would have your business of, you know your corporate events and dadada and everybody's drinking, dadada, and I was the best at it. You know, I would get in the room and you know, just give me a glass of wine and work the room and everything was good. But people didn't know what I was doing afterwards - and neither did I. Which became a problem. So during the course of writing the book, it was fixing myself so that I wouldn't you know go to the top of the building and jump off. 'Cause it got to that point where it was like, "Okay you have everything,

why are you dying?" You know what I mean like you're just [disgusted noise]. So for me it was, once I stopped the drinking, my PTS cleared up.

WEBB: [Quietly] Hmm.

LANGFORD: It was just was like amazing, like - and I think it's different for everyone. But I think a large component of why a lot of military guys are suffering from PTS is 'cause they're boozing and their taking pills and when I had sought help with the VA you know immediately they're [snaps] like, "Take these pills." Or, you know, "Just take these pills." And I'm not a pill popper. I've never been a pill popper. I like a lot of things but pills aren't one of 'em.

WEBB: Yeah.

LANGFORD: And I would take these pills and you know and I went through therapy and you know nobody can fix it. And then you take pills and you mix alcohol and you have PTSD and that's sort of a great recipe for disaster.

WEBB: Yeah.

LANGFORD: And that is the solution for a lot of military veteran guys: Stop the boozing. Stop the pills. And I'm not a poster child I'm just saying what works for me.

WEBB: Mmhmm.

LANGFORD: You know, once I did all that and worked through my demons through the book and the booze and the pills that were prescribed to me by the Military, I mean I'm surprised I'm sitting here because when you are incoherent on pills that are prescribed, by physicians, that don't know their ass from a hole in the ground, they know nothing about PTSD, they know nothing about military background, they know nothing about war experience, but yet they're gonna give me a pill that's gonna make me better? I don't think so.

WEBB: [Very quietly] Hmm.

LANGFORD: So you know, I've always been a self-fixer. So I'm like, "Oh I'm gonna figure out - I'm gonna see how I can make myself right again." And the book was part of it, the beginning, and then you know the booze and the pills and everything else...

WEBB: Hmm.

LANGFORD: The only thing. And I think that if...they were to prescribe marijuana for PTSD, especially for combat guys, I think that would solve a lot of problems. But it's almost like a cocktail. You have to make sure you're chemicals are right and alcohol and pills and pot and everything else is just a mix for disaster. So how I fixed myself was get rid of all the junk and just do it naturally. And you know the jury's out on whether it works or not but I'm a

case study, I am here to tell you that it works. But it takes years of - making it work. You know, I'm not fixed yet. I mean I'm still a little nuts but in a good way, you know I'm all about helping the next guy and really, you know. And that's kind of the next chapter in my life, is getting the word out for guys that are suffering with PTSD and you know it's like there is a formula, you have to stop what you're doing. And I don't think the military has figured it out because they have too many people in power that - and I'm, when I say power I mean politicians and physicians, that they're, they don't have a stake in the game, their stake in the game is same old, same old. Or, you know, they're in bed with Pharma or their- you know and it's a monster and for me, it's as simple as saying, "No.". No is a powerful word and for some guys - I know I kind of went off on a tangent but you're listening so I'm telling you - I think it's a real easy solution, it really is. Stop the shit! You know? And it works.

WEBB: Hmm.

LANGFORD: And when I say shit I mean prescription.

WEBB: Yep. Just gotta...

LANGFORD: And it really kinda brings me back to why I'm here. I think it's extremely important to help other veterans suffering 'cause you know PS - PTS is different for everyone and everyone has a different level of it but at the core of what it's doing and how it's affecting people is a very simple formula in how you correct it. And I don't think that the VA - I mean they're, oh my god, I don't even [WEBB laughs], don't get me started on the VA - but I think they're misinformed. And the people who are directing and/or professing a certain fix for guys and girls, I think is wrong. And I think that they're barking up the wrong tree. And there's only a few people kind of saying you know how to fix PTS or PTSD and, you know, it's all about pharma - "You'll be fine, just take this pill. Just take this pill, and the sunshine will open up." No that's not true, it doesn't work, and you gotta pay the piper sooner or later.

WEBB: Yeah and well, it's also detrimental to tell people that this pill's gonna fix you and then why isn't this pill fixing me? Why am I still having some of these same issues, there must be something wrong with me, 'cause the pill is supposed to fix me.

LANGFORD: Yep! And the pills don't fix you! And I learned that and but, by no direction of who is responsible for fixing me you know what I mean? Like you have the VA and they're job is to - I don't know what their job is - but they're, they say that they're there to help and I find it troubling in 2017 that we're still trying to figure out what is the right answer. And you have these people with degrees, they don't know their ass from a hole in the ground, I mean I've seen them, you know how many doctors I've seen?

WEBB: Hmm.

LANGFORD: They don't know jack, they know how to - regurgitate information based on statistics but individuals are not statistics, individuals are a unique organism and it has to be handled accordingly.

WEBB: Yeah.

LANGFORD: So it's a different topic but that's why I'm here. I feel a requirement, a necessity to help other guys that are suffering from what I suffered through and I'm old I'm on my way out but there are younger guys that are suffering - women and men, who are killing themselves and/or dying for no reason, because they don't have an answer and I feel that I kinda have an answer, but you know how do I get that out there, how do I help other people, and by writing getting you know circling back to why I wrote the book, that's the real reason.

WEBB: Hmm.

LANGFORD: Is - you know my blurb in my book it's like I say that I suffer from PTSD and this is my solution and how I recovered from it but by no means am I trying to be like, "Oh, look at me, you know, wow, I -" that's not that case, I wanna help other people, other individuals who are...suffering and who don't have direction, who don't have the right tools they require in order to fix themselves and they're being misled by people in power - meaning [lowers voice] doctors, physicians, therapists, whatever - that don't know their fucking ass from a hole in the ground. I gotta apologize for swearing, but it's the only way for me to kind of...to say it and I'm angry about it because...I don't know how many times I could've been picked off by the VA because of their stupidity. And I know it still exists, I know it because I see it all the time I read about it it's like, "What the fuck are they doing? Like how come they're so ignorant and so blind to what -?" And the bad thing about it - and this is not my soapbox about alcohol - some people are just not designed to drink! And you - put in PTSD and it just makes it that much worse! That's my point. And that's why I wrote the book and that's why I try to help other guys or women because the reason you are not able to fix yourself is because you are polluting yourself with the wrong chemicals. And it really is about chemical make-up and about getting the right mix, and I'm just fortunate that I'm able to just sit here and say, "You know what? I figured it out what helped me and maybe my formula will help you." That's all I'm saying! That's kinda why I'm here. That's why I wrote the book.

WEBB: Okay!

LANGFORD: Yeah.

WEBB: I think it takes voices like yours, books like yours, to get other people to start talking and having a real conversation.

LANGFORD: Yeah!

WEBB: And once people start talking then, you know, "This is what works for me, this is what works for me, oh that's very similar."

LANGFORD: Yeah.

WEBB: "Let's - build upon that." And that's - it's gonna be kind of a grassroots solution I think -

LANGFORD: Yeah.

WEBB: -- from the people that are actually going through it because like you said the doctors and the VA or what have you - they don't know.

LANGFORD: They don't know! And - but...I'm an educator.

WEBB: Hmm!

LANGFORD: I won't profess anything unless I'm positive about the information that I'm sharing, knowledge is power. And for them to do what they're doing is almost unethical. And they don't - you know, you hear the horror stories about veterans - recent veterans and old veterans - "You know, the VA they, all they do is give me these pills and they keep giving me these pills and they keep saying, "Take these pills." And the reason that I'm emphasizing that is because that's there solution. That's not a solution.

WEBB: [Whispers] Yeah.

LANGFORD: That is a band-aid. And you cannot put a band-aid on PTS, you can't. It is going to get you and it's going to suck you in and it will destroy because - depending on the level of your PTS and - I don't put the D in there because I don't think it's a disorder I think it's an actual -

WEBB: Yeah.

LANGFORD: It's an actual symptom.

WEBB: Yeah.

LANGFORD: And it is difficult to navigate and you know I'm - fortunate once again that you know I - my head is just you know I'm kind of right there above it but at any moment it's just waiting to kind of absorb you and it I think it depends on the level of your background or the level of your experience in the military, you know traumatic events and mine was somewhat traumatic for me because I was young and dadadada but I think my experiences are not that dissimilar to the ones that are happening now. I think the people that are going through it now is just it is on - it's on ten, it's on high the volume is so turned up that they're worse! And then you know these young people come back and you know it's like you try to put them into their old life - that is gone! Let it go. So that's why college was good for me, because I was able to turn off my old life and kinda like,

"Whew! Look at you know I'm in college and it's so much fun!" And you know you get involved in it but I think a lot of the people who join the Military join for the same reason but when they come back they're kinda put back into their old role, you know. It's "Jimmy from the Block" and you know, can't get a job and is uneducated and, you know, with the same girl or boy that they were with before. Or, you know, Mom and Dad are still like, blah blah, that is the worst thing you can do for somebody that has PTS.

WEBB: Yeah.

LANGFORD: And - you know I just wanna help that's all I wanna do. [Softer] That's what I wanna do. [Tapping]

WEBB: Well, we've gone through pretty much everything I had outlined. We typically end these interviews with me just asking you whether you thought we would go over something today that we didn't and -

LANGFORD: No!

WEBB: [Quietly] Okay.

LANGFORD: [Interrupting/simultaneously] I think this was exactly what I thought it would be --

WEBB: Okay.

LANGFORD: -- an interview.

WEBB: Good.

LANGFORD: And thank you for allowing me to kind of vent. You know, any time you can kind of share your story especially as a veteran it's very therapeutic because you kind of make a breakthrough, whatever size it may be. You know, and I find myself kind of you know, on the verge of like [moans] but it is good because you'll share this with whomever and I'm hoping that - you know, it's funny that I sent an email to, I can't remember her name, but she's like a director, here?

WEBB: Mmhmm.

LANGFORD: Because I- I'm very interested in kind of sharing my story more! And having Pritzker as a kind of a as a sounding board, or a venue for me to kind of share that. So I sent an email to - I can't remember her name - I'll tell you in a little while, but she never responded. Teri gave me her card, she's a director here of -

WEBB: Megan, probably.

LANGFORD: That's her!

WEBB: Yup!

LANGFORD: And I was hoping that she would respond - but didn't. Which is fine! But - that kind of leaves me with a - blank spot of being involved.

WEBB: Okay. Let's conclude this interview, I wanna say thank you for coming in and sharing your experiences and sharing your insight I actually do think that that was extremely important and -