

## ABSTRACT

### THE EFFECTS OF REINTEGRATION ON PRIOR-ENLISTED COMBAT VETERANS: A QUALITATIVE STUDY

By

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The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore the challenges and barriers faced by combat veterans while they underwent the reintegration process into mainstream society following their return from deployments. Areas addressed included combat veteran's emotions upon returning home from deployments; type of assistance they received from their support systems; how military culture impacted their familial and/or support system relationships; problems they experienced while adjusting to their former routines; and any residual sentiments they experienced from their deployments that influenced their reintegration process. Fourteen combat veterans who resided in Los Angeles or Orange County, California were interviewed.

Combat veterans stated being unable to discuss their sentiments regarding their deployment experiences, due to a lack of shared experiences with both civilians and their families. When they rejoined civilian life, they surrounded themselves with other former military servicemen. Despite their struggles, these combat veterans stated their families provided immense support.



THE EFFECTS OF REINTEGRATION ON PRIOR-ENLISTED COMBAT  
VETERANS: A QUALITATIVE STUDY

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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS .....	iii
LIST OF TABLES .....	vi
CHAPTER	
1. INTRODUCTION.....	1
Statement of the Problem .....	1
Importance of Examining Reintegration .....	3
Purpose .....	4
Definition of Terms .....	5
Military Acronyms .....	7
Social Work and Multicultural Relevance .....	8
2. LITERATURE REVIEW .....	11
Prior-Enlisted Combat Veteran Reintegration.....	12
Issues with Examining Reintegration Indirectly .....	13
Veteran Support Systems .....	14
Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder .....	15
Reintegration Perspectives .....	16
Summary.....	17
3. METHODOLOGY .....	18
Research Design .....	18
Researcher’s Role .....	18
Sampling Strategy .....	19
Recruitment .....	20
Procedure .....	22
Interviews .....	24
Data Analysis.....	25
4. RESULTS .....	26

CHAPTER	Page
Themes .....	27
Participants' Ethnographic Profile .....	40
Combat Veteran Demographics and Information.....	59
Examined Questions Explained.....	61
Summary.....	64
 5. DISCUSSION.....	 65
Limitations.....	67
Strengths .....	67
Ethical Considerations.....	68
Implications for Practical Application.....	70
Suggestions for Future Research .....	73
Reflexivity of the Researchers.....	74
 APPENDICES .....	 76
A. CADRE APPROVAL LETTER.....	77
B. INFORMED CONSENT LETTER .....	79
C. RESOURCES .....	83
D. SCREENING INTERVIEW SCRIPT .....	85
E. BASELINE SURVEY .....	89
F. INTERVIEW GUIDE .....	91
G. FLIER .....	93
H. VETERAN'S NETWORK APPROVAL LETTER.....	95
 REFERENCES .....	 97

## LIST OF TABLES

TABLE	Page
1. Combat Veteran Demographics .....	60
2. Combat Veteran Information.....	61



## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

#### Statement of the Problem

According to Amara (2013) and the U.S. Census Bureau (2014), 16.1 million of the 21.8 million active duty veterans were deployed in the U.S. Armed Forces. Furthermore, 2,500,000 military service members from the both active duty and reserve component were serving in U. S. Armed Forces (Amara, 2013; Globalfirepower, 2015). As a result of the September 11, 2001 attack on the World Trade Center, 2,333,972 U.S military service members have been deployed to Iraq, Afghanistan, or both (Amara, 2013). Thus, data suggest that the number of veterans will only increase as soldiers return from Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF), between October 7, 2001 and December 28, 2014; Operation Iraqi Freedom (OIF), between March 17, 2003 and August 31, 2011; and Operation New Dawn (OND), between September 1, 2010 and December 15, 2011, and complete their time of service (Bagalman, 2013; Torreón, 2015). A heightened concern in light of these military operations includes: post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), homelessness, divorce, substance abuse, and other issues (Foran, Wright, & Wood, 2013). These aforementioned concerns generally hinder a combat veteran's reintegration process, thus highlighting the need to further examine barriers to reintegration.

A significant amount of research, to date, examines combat veteran reintegration as a result of another problem veterans currently experience, rather than investigate it as the primary source of their problems upon their return from deployments (Brown, 2011). Topics researched thus far where combat veteran reintegration appears as a secondary issue include PTSD, the impact of military culture, and other mental health diagnoses (Bagalman, 2013). By investigating these factors, beneficial groundwork has begun in assisting this ever-increasing population; however, without exploring reintegration first, optimum insight will not be achieved. While the aforesaid issue remains, other wartime veterans continue ageing; thus, services to support their mental and physical health will need to be maintained and improved as they also continue to grapple with their military-related experiences (U.S. Census Bureau, 2014).

#### Importance of Examining Reintegration

Although one study directly examined the effects of reintegration on military personnel returning from deployment, an imperative factor to note is that their participants were still on active duty in the armed forces when this study was completed (Rivers, Gordon, Speraw, & Reese, 2013). As a result, these soldiers had full access to resources located on their military bases. In addition, these soldiers could utilize each other for support in order to process the experiences they were struggling with (Rivers et al., 2013). Combat veterans, however, are not afforded this same luxury, due to no longer being connected to a military base where these resources were readily accessible. Therefore, by investigating combat veterans' experiences with their respective reintegration processes, the community, and more importantly their families, can provide a more tailored support effort to future returning veterans.

Another study conducted on behalf of returning veterans examined homelessness among the veteran population. This study revealed that due to the veterans' lack of job stability, their reintegration processes were hindered significantly (Mares & Rosenheck, 2004). Lack of job stability is a significant issue since statistics show that 12% of the homeless population is veterans (Kleykamp, 2013). Accordingly, the veterans are unable to initiate the reintegration process if they are unable to support themselves financially. Provision of this information is useful since it allows both researchers and communities to be aware that homelessness is correlated with veterans reintegrating; however, it still fails to explore the issue of reintegration directly (Mares & Rosenheck, 2004). Due to the aforementioned reasons, conducting a study directly examining the challenges and barriers faced by combat veterans will be highly beneficial to future research. This insight into the veterans' needs and how their social support systems can positively influence their reintegration will be determined.

As previously stated, combat veteran reintegration is especially important due to the great influx of those returning home from their deployments in the post 9/11 era (Amara, 2013; U.S. Census Bureau, 2014). In addition to this great influx, in order to provide effective interventions, knowing their coping methods used thus far with reintegration will allow advocates and mental health practitioners a better grasp on which interventions to utilize in the future (Brown, 2011; U.S. Census Bureau, 2014). Ultimately, by gaining more knowledge on all of the preceding elements, future combat veterans' reintegration processes into mainstream society are expected to be smoother and less emotionally taxing. Furthermore, with additional research, supplementary

details can be unearthed pertaining to what exactly the combat veterans believe they lack within their personal relationships, thus further impinging their reintegration process.

### Purpose

The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore challenges and barriers faced by combat veterans as they reintegrate into mainstream society following their return from deployments. This study addressed the five following areas: (a) combat veterans' emotions upon returning home from their deployments such as estrangement and depression; (b) type of assistance combat veterans received from their support systems; (c) how military culture impacted their familial and/or support system relationships; (d) problems the combat veterans experienced while adjusting to their former routines; and (e) any residual sentiments they experienced from their deployments that influenced their abilities to reintegrate. Exploring these topics will allow for improved program development that will better address the concerns involved with how veterans' social support systems can better assist with their reintegration process following their return from combat deployments.

This study allowed for the opportunity to sample combat veterans with various combat deployment experiences from various U.S. military branches. In addition to their deployment and post-deployment experiences, their pre-deployment experiences were also explored in order to obtain a better understanding of what stages they were at in their lives upon joining the military. This afforded the researcher the chance to gain full insight into who these combat veterans were before, during, and after their reintegration process into mainstream society. Thus, in order to deliver that insight, the themes discovered through the coding system will be explained in detail, followed by a more in-

depth exploration of each combat veteran participant in this study. Each combat veteran was examined based on five overarching themes in order to establish a foundation of who they are as people. This ethnographic insight will allow for a better understanding of the combat veteran from start to finish as well as further establish the importance of examining the reintegration program immediately following their return from their combat deployments (Probst, 2015). This study is significant since little research exists regarding the exploration of barriers and challenges to the combat veteran reintegration process. Additionally, in order to protect the identification of the combat veterans who participated in this study, pseudonyms were used in place of their actual names.

#### Definition of Terms

*Battle buddy(ies)*: A soldier assigned to another soldier as a partner both in and out of combat. It is understood that this relationship goes beyond simple friendship, and becomes familial and lifelong (Dunz, 2010).

*Combat veterans*: Veterans who served in combat during a period of war and a period of hostilities. Combat veterans are eligible for hospital care, medical services, and nursing home care for two years after discharge from the military for any illness (St. Lawrence County Government, 2012).

*Deploy*: Moving troops to different positions or locations around the world for military action (Bobis, 2009).

*Homelessness*: A person who lacks housing and is required to seek temporary placement in supervised facilities or live in makeshift shelters on the streets (National Health Care for the Homeless Council, 2014).

*Military culture:* The collection of values, attitudes, and beliefs, which provide people with a common way of interpreting events. Military culture is a result of a combination of the above factors and describes a shared institutional ethos that influences the expectations regarding behavior in areas such as discipline, teamwork, loyalty, and selfless duty for those in the armed forces (Coil, Weiss, Draves, & Dyer, 2012; Greene, Buckman, Dandeker, & Greenberg, 2010).

*Minority veteran population:* African American/Black, Hispanic, and all other races. All other races exclude African American and Hispanic, but includes Alaskan Native, American Indian, Asian, and Pacific Islander (Harada et al., 2002, National Center for Veterans Analysis and Statistics, 2013).

*Operation Enduring Freedom:* October 7, 2001-December 28, 2014. Military operations began in Afghanistan as a result of terrorist attacks on the United States. Following the longest war the United States has been in, on December 28, 2014, the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) and the United States agree to end the combat mission and officially mark the end by rolling up the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) Flag (CNN Library, 2014).

*Operation Iraqi Freedom:* March 17, 2003-August 31, 2010. President George Bush ordered Saddam Hussein to leave Iraq, but on May 19, 2003 military operations began (CNN Library, 2014).

*Operation New Dawn:* September 1, 2010-December 15, 2011. Considered the new official designation for the war in Iraq, a short ceremony passing USF-1 Command from Army General Ray Odierno to Army General Lloyd J. Austin. These U.S. military forces were left to train Iraqi National Forces (CNN Library, 2014).

*Post-traumatic stress disorder:* A mental health diagnosis that occurs when symptoms are exhibited for more than a month. These symptoms are elicited as a result of a traumatic experience such as war-related incidences, and they include but are not limited to: recurring and upsetting memories, increased jumpiness, and troubled sleep (American Psychiatric Association, 2013, U.S. Department of Veteran Affairs, 2014)

*Reintegration:* Readjustment to community life, upon returning from deployment (Sayer et al., 2010; Sayer, Carlson, & Frazier, 2014).

*Social support system:* Primary group of people that helps the individual mobilize their psychological resources and master their psychological burdens during times of stress. They can share his tasks and supply the individual with extra supplies of tools, skills, and cognitive guidance to assist them in handling their situation (Brieger, 2006).

#### Military Acronyms

*EAS:* End of Active Service

*IED:* Improvised Explosive Service

*MOS:* Military Occupational Specialty

*OEF:* Operation Enduring Freedom

*OIF:* Operation Iraqi Freedom

*OND:* Operation New Dawn

*NASW:* National Association of Social Workers

*PTSD:* Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder

*ROTC:* Reserve Officer Training Corps

*VFW:* Veterans of Foreign Wars

## Social Work and Multicultural Relevance

According to the National Association of Social Workers (NASW) *Code of Ethics*, the primary mission of the social work profession is “to enhance human wellbeing and help meet the basic human needs of all people, with particular attention to the needs and empowerment of people who are vulnerable, oppressed, and living in poverty” (NASW, 2015, para 2). Combat veterans are among the most vulnerable in society due to their high risk for negative outcomes such as PTSD and homelessness. It is social workers’ ethical duties to promote social change with and on behalf of this vulnerable population. The study will contribute to the development of an effective program to help veterans reintegrate into mainstream society.

A wealth of information on how combat veterans with PTSD are affected exists, which provides insight into how veterans are coping upon their return to civilian life (Sayer et al., 2010; Sayer et al., 2014). In addition, there is information with regards to their increased likelihood of mental health problems and lack of employment (Kleykamp, 2013). With a direct focus on what role reintegration plays for returning combat veterans, social workers will better understand what services they can provide them along with how to better educate their support systems on topics of how to interact and care for them when they return (Coll, Weiss, & Yarvis, 2011).

Additionally, by understanding the veterans’ reintegration process, social workers can better facilitate family or social support systems discussions or group discussions with recently returning veterans (Coll et al., 2011; National Association of Social Workers, 2012). This can be accomplished because the social worker will be able to inform the veterans what possible stressors to expect and inform their family or social



support systems of how to interact with their family member. Steps to accomplish these aforementioned goals would be to create programs that would provide combat veterans with both educational resources and an emotional support group to vent or share their frustrations (Coll et al., 2011; Institute of Medicine of the National Academies, 2013; National Association of Social Workers, 2012).

Furthermore, with social workers understanding the combat veteran reintegration process, a more expansive network of resources will be available. Rather than having to wait until problems arise while combat veterans are reintegrating they can be addressed early on when they return to their units and decide to leave their military service or EAS. This study can contribute to multiculturalism within the social work field due to the diverse population sampled. Due to the increase in racial diversity and gender equality in the military, social workers will benefit from learning if there are different ways to support veterans based on these different backgrounds.

### Women and Minorities

More specifically, an important characteristic to note about the post-9/11 veteran population is the significant increase in women veterans as well as the increase in the minority veteran population (Amara, 2013; Brownson, 2014; National Center for Veterans Analysis and Statistics [NCVAS], 2013). Women in the military have steadily increased over the years. In World War II, of the four million soldiers deployed from the United States, 5% were female; this minute number decreased to 3.3% during the Korean War (Amara, 2013; NCVAS, 2013). When the Vietnam War erupted, this percentage increased to 12.7%; however, the significant increase occurred during post 9/11 where female veterans now make up 27.7% of the military population (Amara, 2013; Mobile

Riverine Force Association, 2014). Another important note is that prior to the Gulf War, female veterans' jobs were primarily related to the medical or administrative fields. In contrast, women who join the military today can be deployed to a combat zone, where they would be expected to diffuse bombs in an Ordnance Unit, unearth information for a Military Intelligence Unit, or converse with the local populace in a foreign country in order to maintain the peace (Brownson, 2014).

From the Vietnam War until now, a major increase is also seen in the minority population joining the military. During the Vietnam War, 88.4% were White, 10.6% were Black, and 1% belonged to other races (Amara, 2013; Mobile Riverine Force Association, 2014). In the post 9/11 era, however, 76.1% reported being White, while the other 23.9% reported another race including African American, Hispanic, Asian, and others (Burk & Espinoza, 2012; U.S. Census Bureau, 2014). As a result of these demographic changes within the military, social workers can benefit from being made aware of this, in order to tailor their assistance around these changes.

Lastly, by having a succinct understanding of what returning combat veterans require resource wise, social workers can better facilitate their program implementation to meet these arising needs (Coll et al., 2011; NASW, 2012). In 2011, a Joining Forces program was created and implemented by the Vice President, Joe Biden, and the First Lady, Michelle Obama (White House, President Barak Obama, 2015). As findings from future research are continuously implemented, the Joining Forces program with the support of the NASW can continue to improve accordingly.

## CHAPTER 2

### LITERATURE REVIEW

For this study, the literature review will highlight five areas: (a) prior-enlisted combat veteran reintegration; (b) arising issues with combat veterans; (c) veteran support systems; (d) PTSD; and (e) reintegration perspectives. First, studies about prior enlisted soldiers and their reintegration processes will be discussed. Enlisted soldiers will be the scope of this study, rather than officers. This approach is due to the major differences experienced by enlisted soldiers and military officers (MacLean & Edwards, 2010). Enlisted soldiers are trained to follow, while military officers are trained to lead. Additionally, enlisted soldiers are not expected to go to college prior to joining military service. In contrast, military officers can only receive their commission upon graduating from a college or university. As they continue their career as military officers, they are expected to continue their education. Male combat veterans as opposed to female veterans are the focus of this study due to the differences in experiences between the two genders. Male veterans are trained to fight and be engaged with the enemy. Female veterans until recently were trained in combat support units, where they facilitated operations but were not directed to actively engage the enemy on the frontline (Brownson, 2014).

The issues with combat veterans and what role combat veterans' social support systems play will be discussed as well. The roles these social support systems play are significant because when combat veterans return, they return to these very same people they left seven to fifteen months earlier. PTSD is examined in order to determine whether or not its prevalence can be decreased if reintegration were explored directly rather than indirectly. Lastly, reintegration perspectives are presented in order to provide a baseline from which this study can build upon its conclusions.

#### Prior-Enlisted Combat Veteran Reintegration

Wartime is a devastating time for all parties involved. Not only for the civilians who suffer direct harm or witness pain befall their loved ones, but also the prior-enlisted veterans who witnessed these tragedies during their combat deployments (Sayer et al., 2010; Sayer et al., 2014). Following their combat deployments, many of these former enlisted soldiers return home having to reassume the roles they had prior to leaving. This issue is becoming increasingly prevalent as the country's combat veteran population continues to rise, as troops return from Afghanistan and Iraq (Martinez & Bingham, 2011). Sayer et al. (2010) and Sayer et al. (2014) researched this topic by focusing on the side effects of war that veterans were experiencing, while they were receiving treatment from the Veteran's Administration. The findings indicated that problems among combat veterans exist as they attempt to reassume the roles they had prior to leaving (Sayer et al., 2010; Sayer et al., 2014). Although these studies provide useful information regarding combat veterans and their reintegration process, another study delving deeper into the reintegration process solely would be useful (Sayer et al., 2010; Sayer et al., 2014).

### Issues with Examining Reintegration Indirectly

Most studies to date have examined combat veteran reintegration through indirect means. In other words, combat veteran reintegration has been investigated as a secondary factor rather than a primary factor among researchers. In order for effective services to be provided to combat veterans' returning from deployment, however, it is essential for researchers to begin examining the direct effects reintegrating veterans are experiencing. Additionally, the issues they face as a result of beginning the reintegration process following their return from deployments should be examined. Walker (2010) notes that mental health problems among reintegrating veterans result in social exclusion, but similar to other studies, reintegration was not the sole purpose of the study. A significant amount of research thus far involves PTSD and the role reintegration plays, but once again reintegration and its effects on veterans is not the primary focus (Walker, 2010).

Military culture needs to be examined as well, because the military holds its own set of values and beliefs that are learned by every newly enlisted soldier (Coil et al., 2012; Greene et al., 2010). Failing to see the importance of military culture will significantly hinder the communities' understanding of the combat veteran reintegration process overall. Additionally, the effects of military culture is an important factor to note since the level at which the combat veterans are acculturated will contribute to the pace at which they reintegrate into mainstream society following their return (Bodnar, 1999; Coil et al., 2012; Greene et al., 2010).

## Veteran Support Systems

When combat veterans return from their deployments, they generally return to their families or where they resided prior to their deployments. Thus, examining combat veterans' social support systems becomes an important factor to consider. Both the community and families of combat veterans would greatly benefit from understanding how to provide better care and communicate with them as a result. With an improved understanding, combat veterans' social support systems will be able to assist them with a smoother reintegration process. Huebner, Mancini, Wilcox, Grass, and Grass (2007) conducted a study to investigate parental relationships among returning combat veterans. These researchers found that although parents were exceptionally supportive and happily accepted their sons and daughters returning home from deployments, there remained a disconnect of understanding with how to assist them (Huebner et al., 2007). Due to the parents' lack of shared understanding, the returning sons and daughters experienced a disrupted reintegration process into their social environments (Huebner et al., 2007). This study is valuable, because it provides information regarding veterans and the tensions that arise within their family systems when there is a significant disconnect or lack of shared understanding (Huebner et al., 2007).

## Spouses

Spousal relationships are also important to examine because statistics show that 79.4% of veterans are married at one time or another during their military career (Renshaw, Rodrigues, & Jones, 2008). Through understanding the spouses' role in combat veterans' reintegration process, mental health practitioners can better grasp how spouses should be factored in when assisting veterans with readjustment to civilian life

(Asbury & Martin, 2012; Renshaw et al., 2008). Another study shows that as the length of deployments increases, the likelihood of divorce also increases upon the soldiers' return (Negrusa & Negrusa, 2014). This validates the importance of investigating what spouses should or should not do when the combat veterans return from their deployments, in order to prevent future spousal stressors and divorce (Asbury & Martin, 2012).

### Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder

A common mental health issue that arises in military personnel who have deployed is PTSD. Statistics compiled show that 20% of veterans from Iraq and Afghanistan have been diagnosed with PTSD (Kleykamp, 2013). This disorder encompasses vivid memories of painful experiences soldiers have experienced in combat, and these symptoms can greatly hinder their ability to function on a day-to-day basis following their return from deployments (American Psychiatric Association, 2013; Maddux & Winstead, 2012). If veterans are suffering from PTSD, their symptoms can impede their ability to maintain a job, have positive social interactions and result in pushing away their loved ones (Wright, Kelsall, Sim, Clarke, & Creamer, 2013). PTSD is important to examine within the confines of the reintegration process, because it is critical to determine whether PTSD occurs as a result of a poor reintegration into civilian life or vice versa. A better understanding of when this disorder arises can further improve treatments for PTSD as well as the reintegration process overall. Currently, a paucity of research has examined whether PTSD symptoms have occurred as a result of a challenging reintegration process.

## Reintegration Perspectives

Perspectives regarding veteran reintegration thus far are limited. One qualitative study, however, found that upon their return to civilian life, they experienced a severe disconnect between themselves, their family members and people within their community (Demers, 2011). Additionally, they felt misunderstood and out of place and as a result needed to reestablish their identities (Demers, 2011). Within this study, findings proved that military culture had a significant impact on their reintegration process and despite being aware that their families wanted to help they were unaware of how to inform them of what they needed to feel comfortable with themselves (Demers, 2011). Although this study provided great insight into the veteran reintegration process, a deeper understanding can be achieved by delving into the views of what the combat veterans desire from their social support systems.

A theory presented in another study suggests that open communication during deployment is the key to facilitating the process of veteran reintegration (Hinojosa, Hinojosa, & Högnäs, 2012). This study's primary focus was on the family and their interactions with veterans while they were deployed as well as when they returned (Hinojosa et al., 2012). The researchers determined that if open communication did not occur between the veterans and their families during the deployment, reintegration into the family was significantly challenging when the veterans returned from deployment (Hinojosa et al., 2012). Although these findings are useful, this study did not examine the veterans' reasons as to why there was a lack of communication. Exploring other reasons for why the veterans did not communicate during deployments is crucial in order to aid future veterans with their reintegration process.



In addition to communication, another important factor found to influence reintegration was the sense of feeling united (Janzen, 2014). This study examined the flipside of a veteran, which is an ex-combatant. Despite their opposing experiences, they too require the same assistance in order to reintegrate into their respective societies following war (Janzen, 2014; Torjesen, 2013).

Lastly, a study focusing on veterans and their transition into the community college system determined that if resources were provided at the community college, reintegration overall can be easier (Selber, Chavkin, Marshall, & Shaffer, 2014). Selber et al. (2014)'s study also provides valuable information regarding veteran reintegration by informing the community that at the education level options can be implemented to assist them with receiving an education.

### Summary

The literature review presented above illustrated issues facing prior-enlisted combat veterans with respect to their reintegration. The literature review also examined issues with examining reintegration indirectly. It also examined issues related to veterans' support systems, PTSD, and reintegration perspectives. The literature review provided insight from various studies supporting the benefits of conducting a qualitative study to explore challenges and barriers faced by combat veterans as they reintegrate into mainstream society following their return from deployments in order to develop effective programs to assist with their reintegration process.

CHAPTER 3  
METHODOLOGY

Research Design

A qualitative research design was used. More specifically, face-to-face in-depth interviews of prior enlisted combat veterans were completed in order to provide a better understanding of their experiences regarding their reintegration. Utilizing qualitative research methods allowed for both a deeper and more personal one-on-one interaction with the combat veterans (Rubin & Babbie, 2013). Furthermore, greater well-rounded knowledge on the reintegration challenges combat veterans face upon their return from their deployments was obtained. The employment of one-on-one interviews offered richness to the study overall; rather than relying on statistics to derive understanding of the issue, first-hand narratives were gathered as a more appropriate alternative (Rubin & Babbie, 2013).

Researcher's Role

Throughout this study, the researcher created, gathered, and compiled all the information required to complete the study. The experiences within the researcher's repertoire played a key role in understanding and facilitating the interviews with the volunteer participants throughout the study. This experience includes being part of the Reserve Officer Training Program, where the researcher is learning and training to be

part of the United States Army as an officer, which assisted in their understanding of the jargon and lingo used throughout the interviews. Another essential element the researcher used were techniques learned from working with veterans at the Veterans Administration Hospital in Long Beach as an intern in their inpatient psychiatry unit.

In order to remain objective, the researcher followed an interview guide, which allowed for standardization throughout all the interviews conducted with each participant (See Appendix F). Additionally, through the use of interviews, the researcher was afforded the opportunity to build rapport with the participants, which allowed for trust to be built between the interviewer and the interviewee.

#### Sampling Strategy

A subcategory of purposive sampling was utilized in order to obtain participants. More specifically, snowball sampling was used to recruit participants due to the ease of accessibility and proximity (Rubin & Babbie, 2013). This particular technique was deemed feasible due to the scope of the study, in addition to the time constraints placed on the study overall. Snowball sampling is employed when the researcher obtains participants for their study by utilizing their social networks (Rubin & Babbie, 2013). The two locations that provided the best snowball sampling were through Army ROTC and Vet Net Ally located on the California State University, Long Beach campus. Both programs provided approval via letters (See Appendices A and H).

#### Sampling Inclusion Criteria

In order to participate in this study, the combat veteran was required to meet the following criteria: (a) Gender: male; (b) Age range: 18-55 years; (c) Geographic

location: residents of Los Angeles or Orange County, California; (e) Previously deployed combat veteran; (f) Prior enlisted; and (g) Language: English speaking.

### Recruitment

During the recruitment phase, participants for this study were recruited through fliers disseminated throughout the Army ROTC and Vet Net Ally programs both located on the California State University, Long Beach campus (See Appendix G). The researcher's phone number was located on all fliers in order to allow interested veterans to contact the researcher. Combat veterans who responded to the fliers were briefed of the purpose and eligibility requirements to participate in this study via telephone. Beyond the standard requirements indicated by the baseline survey, participation of combat veterans was also indicative upon their continued interest in the study (See Appendix E). If the combat veterans were deemed eligible and expressed interest to continue participating in the study, they were asked to schedule an individual, face-to-face meeting during December 2013 to January 2013. At this time, the interview phase of the study commenced.

### Steps Prior to the Interview Phase

During the month of December 2013, fliers were disseminated within the Army ROTC and Vet Net Ally program located on the California State University, Long Beach campus. Those who were interested in the study responded by calling the researcher's number listed at the bottom of the fliers. Utilizing the created screening interview script, the researcher, upon receipt of the phone calls from interested combat veterans, were given details about the study (See Appendix D). These details included, the requirements to participate, confidentiality policies, and initial rapport building. Additionally, the

participants were informed that an audio recording of the interview would be created in order to reinforce the researcher's memory of the conversation's entirety; however if they chose to opt out of the audio recording, the information obtained from the interview was solely based on hand written notes. Those who agreed to proceed were informed at that time that the interview phase of the study had commenced.

### Interview Phase

The interview phase of the study occurred on the California State University, Long Beach campus in the Human Services and Design (HS & D) Building, Room 108 and lasted approximately 60-120 minutes. Approval for a private office by California State University, Long Beach Army ROTC Cadre was obtained on September 24, 2013 (See Appendix A). The interviews with the selected combat veterans were conducted throughout the months of December 2013-mid-January 2014.

Two days prior to all scheduled interviews, the researcher contacted the combat veteran via telephone to provide a friendly reminder of their interview time and the location of the interview. In addition, during the reminder phone call, the researcher provided information on two parking options for the participant. The first option was parking along Palo Verde Avenue and the second option was the Research Foundation Building parking lot on Anaheim Road on the California State University, Long Beach campus for a one-time non-reimbursable fee of \$5.00. A map was provided depicting where the HS & D Building is located, in relation to Palo Verde Avenue and the Research Foundation Building. The researcher requested that the combat veteran arrive 15 to 20 minutes prior to the scheduled meeting time in order to allow ample time to find parking and the HS & D Building. The researcher waited outside the HS & D for the

combat veteran, 10 minutes prior to each meeting. Then, upon the arrival of the participant, the interview phase commenced. The researcher provided an in-depth explanation of the study and formally requested that combat veterans sign and date the informed consent form in order for the interview to continue (See Appendix B). They were also informed that at any time they felt uncomfortable they could either discontinue the study, or request to not answer any of the questions without any risk of penalization to them.

### Procedure

This qualitative study was conducted in two phases. The phase breakdown proceeded as follows: Phase 1—recruitment phase and Phase 2—interview phase. During these phases different procedures were followed in order to successfully complete this study.

#### Phase 1—Recruitment Phase

As previously mentioned, during this phase, combat veterans were recruited by their responsiveness to fliers posted within the Army ROTC and Vet Net Ally program located on the California State University, Long Beach campus. Combat veterans, who responded and continued to express interest following a verbal brief on the synopsis and requirements to be eligible for the study via telephone, were asked to move into the interview phase.

#### Phase 2—Interview Phase

In-depth interviews, lasting approximately 60-120 minutes consisted of both semi-structured and open-ended questions. Two days prior to the interview, the combat veterans participating in the study were reminded via telephone of the time and place of

the interview as well as provided with parking information. Before the interview commenced, they were verbally briefed on the specific parameters of the study. If at any time the prior-enlisted combat veteran felt uncomfortable during the interview phase, they were informed that they could stop the process without any penalizations to themselves. In addition to explaining the study, the combat veteran was also informed that the interview would be audio recorded and confidentiality was of the utmost importance. However, the combat veteran had the option of opting out of the audio recording. When that happened, the researcher informed them that hand written notes would be utilized as a way to document the interview instead. For the combat veterans who agreed to be audio-recorded, they were allowed to receive the original audio recording following the researcher's transcriptions of the interview. Concluding the verbal briefing, if the combat veteran agreed to continue participating in the study, they were asked to carefully read and sign the informed consent form and fill out a baseline survey, which included the sample inclusion criteria. Upon the combat veteran's agreement to participate in the study, the interview phase commenced. At this time, they were asked questions and allowed to disclose any information they are comfortable with sharing. When the interview was completed, the combat veterans was thanked again and provided with a \$5.00 gift card to Starbucks. At this time, the combat veterans who participated were informed again that if they had any questions or concerns following the interview phase, they could either call or email the researcher. When all fourteen interviews were completed, the interview phase of the study had finished and data analysis commenced.

Rather than have a distinct post-interview phase, prior to the interview beginning, the combat veterans were given a list of resources with contact information for counselors and veteran hotlines (See Appendix C). In addition, the participants were informed at the end of the interview, that they could call the researcher if they felt the need to discuss any residual feelings they were experiencing due to the study.

## Interviews

### Screening Guide

The screening guide was included within the baseline survey during the interview phase. The following questions were located on the screening guide: (a) How old are you? (b) Where do you reside? and (c) Are you a prior enlisted combat veteran? This allowed for written documentation, in order to reinforce the prior-enlisted combat veteran's eligibility to participate in this study.

### Interview Guide

Questions covered in the interview phase included: (a) What was your experience like following your deployment as you reintegrated into civilian life?; (b) What role do you believe your social support systems played?; (c) What impact did military culture play on your reintegration process, if any?; (d) Who were the most helpful during your reintegration process?; and (e) If you believe you completed your reintegration process, do you feel any residual feelings reoccur occasionally? If so, who or what do you turn to for help?



## Data Analysis

### Grounded Theory

This study utilized a systematic theory known as grounded theory (GT), which consolidated and examined data, in order to formulate a theory regarding combat veteran reintegration. Rather than formulating a hypothesis and using it as the basis for this research study, the researcher compiled data from the interviews conducted, and based on recurring themes, created a coding system (Rubin & Babbie, 2013). This coding system allowed for categories to be formed. Once the categories were produced and analyzed, a hypothesis was developed regarding the combat veteran's reintegration process.

### Coding

Upon completion of interviews, a coding system was utilized in order to identify major recurring themes. Themes were determined through listening to the verbatim transcriptions procured during the interview phase. Once these themes were identified, they were further examined based on the study's intent. Conclusions were formed accordingly.

## CHAPTER 4

### RESULTS

The purpose of this study was to explore the challenges and barriers faced by combat veterans as they reintegrate into mainstream society following their return from deployment. This study utilized semi-structured interviews in order to guide and facilitate conversations about combat veteran's reintegration experiences. The questions were as follows:

1. What was your experience like following your deployment as you were trying to reintegrate into civilian life?
2. What role do you believe your social support system played?
3. What impact did military culture play on your reintegration process, if any?
4. Who were the most helpful people in your reintegration process?
5. If you believe you have completed your reintegration process, do residual feelings still occur occasionally?

These questions proved fruitful, as a great deal of information within these one-on-one, face-to-face interviews were obtained. This chapter begins by thoroughly explaining the themes that arose from the coding system used during data analysis. In the latter part of this chapter, an in-depth examination of each combat veteran participant will be described using an ethnographic approach, which will allow for a holistic

understanding of them as a person (Alcadipani, Westwood, & Rosa, 2015). Finally, a summary of the answers to each of the questions will be presented.

### Themes

Comparable to other processes, the reintegration process is considered an ongoing process, which is not only challenging, but is also complete with unforgettable experiences, unfading friendships, and personal growth. Following the interviews and data analysis, six themes were discovered. These themes provided a specified view of what the participants experienced throughout their reintegration process. The themes were as follows: (a) Armored vehicles to sedans—driving; (b) Internalization of emotions and memories; (c) Interactions: military versus civilian; (d) A sense of understanding; (e) It is what it is; and (f) My family did all they could. These themes will be explained under their section.

#### Theme 1—Armored Vehicles to Sedans—Driving

An overwhelming majority of the combat veterans interviewed mentioned that when they returned from deployment they experienced difficulties with driving their cars in the civilian world. Although they were experiencing an array of emotions, their ability to drive was not a result of these feelings. Many stated, however, it was due to no longer being used to driving civilian cars in the civilian world, where driving laws had to be followed. While deployed they were allowed absolute control of the roads, and if someone was driving on it, he or she had to move out of the way for military personnel. Additionally, combat veterans did not need to think about the maintenance of the armored vehicles they were driving, due to them being sturdier and considerably larger than a regular sized sedan. One participant stated:

Mmm...when I was in Saudi Arabia I got to drive as fast as I wanted, gas mileage didn't matter, breaks in the car didn't matter, we just turned it in and get a new one and so when I came back you know I think traffic became an issue for me, because I would uh, I was afraid my car would fall over at 60 mph I was going so slow. So um, you know I would get upset in traffic.

Thus for many combat veterans, driving became a chore due to needing to be consciously mindful of traffic laws, while also acknowledging that their car is unable to drive at 100 miles per hour without overheating and breaking down. A participant stated:

Driving was an active and conscious effort it was exhausting, because you're supposed to just like drive. You keep going. So going from driving an armored truck to driving my little cougar sports car you can't drive through people, thing, stop signs, stop lights, pedestrians crossing the street, kids, driving in neighborhoods, parking where you're supposed to park, driving was an active and exhausting effort.

### Theme 2—Internalization of Emotions

Another theme that arose among the combat veterans, who participated in this study, included their struggles with internalizing all of their emotions following their return from deployments. All the participants in this study stated they internalized what they felt when they returned from their deployments. Their reason was due to the belief that their social support systems would not understand since they lacked shared experiences. Furthermore, despite many of them experiencing stressors from their deployments they did not express the emotions they were grappling with, because they

did not want to ignite worry among their social support systems. In addition, the participants did not want to be treated with kid gloves. One participant exclaimed:

I wanted to punch them. It's like they were dancing, walking on egg shells trying not to crack anything you know, like I felt like they thought I was fragile or I felt that they thought "oh, we got to be careful he's going to snap" you know and that didn't help. I am like, I am not going to break!' they'd "oh, I am so sorry" and I am like "don't do that!"

Spouses. Beyond social support systems, a few of the combat veterans did not share any of their deployment experiences with their wives. Some reported that the one or two times they attempted to discuss their experiences; they noticed their spouses evading the topic. As a result of these incidences, the combat veterans vowed never to bring up their deployment experiences with their spouses again. Steven stated:

When I was in Afghanistan I called her and I was like you know...and she asked me how I was, so I was like I don't want you to be surprised but our Team Leader has been shot and paralyzed you know and then, like things have been kinda rough here and I was trying to tell her about it, and she was just like "stop I can't hear this"...so to me I was kinda like "I am never going to talk about it with you again" and I just really haven't been able to since.

Another reason for the combat veterans to choose not to share their deployment experiences or residual feelings with their spouses was because they wanted to prevent their spouses from feeling burdened with such stories. They also did not want their spouses to worry about them. Ray expressed:

Yeah, uh yes but no um, I guess it wasn't really a matter of could, but it was matter of did I want to. I mean obviously due to reasons I wasn't going to them everything going on and I couldn't tell them everything that was going on and not just for security purposes but for the purposes of their mental health. I tell them everything is fine, I don't tell them about the mortar attacks or if I did it was you know not the frequently it really was just to give them peace of mind.

These two reasons caused all participants with spouses to decide to withhold their sentiments and memories of their deployments. Furthermore, they believed it was not worth mentioning because their social support systems did not share these experiences with them and thus would not understand the weight of these feelings.

Unmentionable memories. For many of the combat veterans, specific memories resulted in them not wanting to share their experiences with others. They felt that some of the choices they made while deployed might cause others to judge them if they shared. Additionally, many of these experiences resulted in survivor's guilt. Survivor's guilt occurs when a person outlives another in a traumatic situation (Betz & Thorngren, 2006; O'Connor, Berry, Weiss, Schweitzer, & Sevier, 2000). Jordan reported:

For me, it, to be honest it probably was uh, I guess you would call it survivor's guilt, I felt like I was unable to discuss what happened with family or friends because of memories of friends I knew have uh died overseas and you know they couldn't be able to have the same experiences as I, and that was probably one of the toughest things for me.

As a result these unmentionable memories were endured silently because they did not want their characters tarnished by their choices, nor did they want to re-experience the memories that resulted in losing their battle buddies. Jorgen stated:

His name is Christopher Polk April 12, 2007. Patrol Base Dog it was a suicide bomber went in there and then uh it detonated. Christopher was sleeping and a few others, there were 2 great interpreters were there too. 4 people died that day and I remember it was like ground 0, it was like the World Trade Center collapsed and I remember getting there and it everything was smoke and debris and it was just, and I remember I was there vividly. And I remember pulling bodies out of concrete and the ground...and I remember seeing Christopher Polk you know there and uh the kid was always smiling, always smiling, and I remember they pulled him out and I remember seeing him and I just got weak and I collapsed like my knees, they literally got weak and I remember just couldn't breathe I sat down looking at him and I remember when they pulled his body out and they put him on a litter and they were moving his body and I remember that he died with a smile on his face and um the first thing I seen was his hand, when they pulled him out of the concrete his hand that was just like mangled, but his wedding ring that he had on with his wife um or of course but I seen his wedding band and uh I knew that was him and oh my god sure enough they move another piece of concrete, it was him, and pulled him out of the concrete and I remember they picked him up and moved him out, he had his iPod on, he still had his iPod on and uh to this day I always think about what was he listening to, you know what I mean and uh they pulled him away uh SPC Barbados passed away too, he was the one who won a

Silver Star because uh he seen a suicide bomber like we were right here, there was this road here and a suicide bomber; just breached the obstacles we put out um to impede and fix uh vehicles and he fired and he killed the driver but the vehicle was on the road and there was like a secondary initiation device and they blew it up but if that vehicle were to move up to the place where it detonated everyone would have been gone, everyone would have been dead. But um, Barbados man, he saved a lot of lives. And I do feel guilty, you know, and I don't normally like to talk about it.

Drinking. Due to suffering through difficult memories and experiencing the stressors of readjusting to a civilian environment, many of the combat veterans who participated in this study mentioned that drinking became a way of coping with this array of emotions. In order to stifle the stress and pain of their memories, they would become exceedingly inebriated. Additionally, for a majority of the participants, the time frame in which they engaged in excessive drinking was six months at minimum but no more than eight months. Steven stated:

Yea, I mean I think I was just in a real bad mood. I have seen a lot of dead bodies, people die, and people hurt, yea I was stressed out about um school and the transition and I was stressed out about like things that had happened on deployment I mean even if it wasn't about someone dying or getting hurt, deployment is you were working 20 hours a day, if you're not sleeping, or working out, or eating, or going to the bathroom, you're working a lot of times and at least that's the way it was for me so there's a lot of things to get stressed out about over the period. And it was relieving, which is why I was doing it so



um, I kinda like would drink at the VFW or at home, but...I don't think I had a physical need to drink alcohol or anything like that. It probably lasted about 6 months.

Reckless. Additionally, when these combat veterans engaged in extensive drinking with their friends, they engaged in reckless behavior. This included driving while drunk and engaging in unnecessary fights. It was not until life-altering situations occurred when they finally realized they should stop drinking. Moreover, it is important to note that while alcohol does impair decision-making skills, their initial interest to start drinking was directly contributed to their struggles with their deployment memories and not having an outlet in which to express them. This reinforces the fact that because combat veterans were experiencing difficulties with their reintegration process they decided to engage in these negative coping behaviors. Felix expressed:

My 2<sup>nd</sup> big wake-up call was in March 2009 and that day I did supply for 1 year. As a supply SGT you don't always go out into the field with you unit. While they were in the field I went to my friend's birthday and I was super drunk uh, I got pulled over by LAPD as I was driving back home down in LA and the cops told me I was going fast, and asked if I was drinking and I said "yes!." And I happen to have my body armor and helmet on the passenger seat because we were supposed to go to the field that day but they ended up letting me stay, I remember the cop looking down and up and side to side, we looked at each other and did some kind of nod and took off. He drove by me, and said do you think you can make it home? I was like "what?" And he was like "do you think you can make it

home?” And I was like “I made it this far,” hahaha. So they ended up letting me go, and that was my big wake up call.

### Theme 3—Interactions: Military versus Civilian

When combat veterans returned home, many of them experienced problems with social interactions, particularly with civilians, due to their civilian peers asking unnecessary and inconsiderate questions regarding their jobs and roles in the military. If they chose not to answer these questions, their peers continued to antagonize them relentlessly. This undoubtedly irked all the combat veterans and reinforced their mindset about keeping deployment experiences private. Bryan reported:

Have you ever killed anyone? How many people have you killed? Just idiocy, just insensitivity, you know they say ignorance is bliss, people are completely ignorant of what they're actually...what that question actually does. That question isn't a question isn't a question of have you ever killed anyone, it's rude, it conjures up memories of what has happened. You know um, its...taking a life is never something you can honestly joke about.

Additionally, many revealed that when they went into civilian environments they did not converse with anyone unless approached, nor did they willingly tell others they were once in the military. Unfortunately, for many of the participants it came down to the question of, “whom I can trust.” When they spoke with others, it generally involved those who were also prior military service members. Furthermore, they stated how easy it was to distinguish who was in the military and who was not. Jordan stated:

I stay quiet and keep to myself at work, don't say much. Some of them military, some of them are civilian. They say things that irk me I just sit there and don't

say anything and pretend I am too stupid to understand. But, yes with that I do tend to gravitate towards prior service guys, who are there; but normally I keep to myself.

Most of the combat veterans stated that they only sought out those who were also previously in the military. It was easier to spend time with people who had shared similar deployment experiences and understood the military culture. Bryan exclaimed:

Very much so! Yeah and I found that I tend to uh, gravitate towards and seek out military people when making new acquaintances. It definitely does now too.

When I was at CSULA, I spent all of my time at the Veterans center. They understood the mentality because they lived it too.

#### Theme 4—A Sense of Understanding

Although most combat veterans experienced a reintegration period of at least six months, the researcher noticed that combat veterans, who were able to reflect on their experiences in an objective manner, experienced a quicker reintegration process into civilian life. Undoubtedly, having social support systems proved significantly beneficial. However, those who were not able to gain a sense of understanding tended to engage in negative coping behaviors such as driving recklessly. Ray indicated:

Um, well, um I don't think there were a whole lot of negative side effects, I mean to be honest I think I, I took whatever happened, um really well I think that I, I mean I didn't have PTSD, I understood what had happened, even after the BN lost a few people due to accidents I think a lot of my mental health staying green was that I understood what had happened, and I understood how things happened um I think it was that understanding you know why they died why I stayed alive and

you know what our job was there, I think a lot of that understanding helped with my mental health being you know helped.

Three of the combat veterans that participated stated that they achieved this sense of understanding within a month of returning from their deployments. Several others took more time to gain this sense of understanding, but stated that they reintegrated soon after this achievement. Anthony said:

Um...sometimes, but then I think the stress comes with that, you're like oh I can handle this to a point, and then you take a deep breath, take time to understand the memory, and you think about things and you just deal with it.

Spirituality. In addition to a greater sense of understanding, some combat veterans discussed how spirituality had a significant role in their reintegration process. Prior to leaving for his deployment, this combat veteran attended church with his family weekly, but following his enlistment into the military he stated that being spiritual no longer seemed important. After he returned, Isaac struggled with reintegration and admitted that he was cycling out of control with drinking, partying, and feeling lost. Isaac reported:

Yeah, pride is one of those things...I'd like to think God smacked me off my horse, kinda like made me swallow my pride all at once because it was like crazy. Like crap, I am just a regular person you know, haha. But yea, it was an eye opener for me. That's like one of the hardest things for soldiers, swallowing their pride and realizing they need help. I was kinda very closed off person, but I know that my aunt would tell me that stuff..., she would tell me about God and all this stuff it would make me really reflect on myself and, it made me change like, I've

been back from Iraq I think 3 years, something like that, so it was a long time ago, it took me 6 months for me to get over my anger problems but um yea it took about that amount of time and I had to quit drinking. I started going to church and stuff like that. And uh I would say not, because of that change I made when I started going to church and prayed to God and all this stuff so now I think that's one of the biggest weightlifters that helped my reintegration process.

#### Theme 5 - "It is what it is"

A popular phrase that arose throughout the interviews with the combat veterans was "it is what it is." This phrase arose as a result of a mentality that developed due to military culture, where soldiers are expected to behave in a tough manner and overcome obstacles that are presented, while deployed (Coil et al., 2012). Thus, when they returned from their deployments, these combat veterans viewed the reintegration process as another aspect or phase of military life that they needed to simply overcome. Jordan stated:

After a while it is what it is, you're up at 0 dark 30, then you go to bed 0 dark 30 and you do the same training over and over again. Depending on your MOS, I can't speak for other, but for Combat arms I do the infantry side. I know that some of the soft standard support MOS's were different. So you know, it is what it is, so when you come back you do the same thing, it's a routine, you just resume it, and it is what it is.

Time. As a direct result of this "it is what it is" mentality, many combat veterans who participated in this study stated that time was the biggest factor dictating their reintegration process. Time was the culminating factor in the success or failure of their

reintegration process. The other factors above such as social support systems, spirituality, and understanding, are the pieces. Jorgen affirmed:

Time definitely, time is one remedy and spends some time with your loved ones as well. You definitely have to see mom, see dad and sis's because uh, sometimes...I know a lot of guys plenty of guys who committed suicide because their loved ones was their wife and their wife cheated on them and stuff like that and they just...it's a bitter sweet of this woman, she cheated on me but it's like I destroy things I'm used to killing things I'm used to uh what my enemy...I'm use to neutralizing my enemy so it's like I love this woman but then again she is my enemy so I don't know, I'm not even trying to talk in a suicidal mind frame because I don't know how it is, I have never had the desire to kill myself or commit suicide I don't know why because it's like uh you get all this training for survival you know what I mean? And at the end you're perfectly safe, why kill yourself. So all that work you have done is in vain it's for nothing.

Many of the combat veterans stated that if they had known that the reintegration process would take time, it would have alleviated their stress levels. The participant's biggest desire, following this study, is that this message is imparted to other combat veterans returning from deployments, in order to minimize the residual effects they will undoubtedly experience during their reintegration processes. Anthony indicated:

So I just think that the veteran needs to know that it will take time and don't let your pride get the better of you. I would say that um, a factor for a lot of people is if you struggle it's seen as a weakness, I think that everyone has different thresholds of what they can handle. I would say if you need help, you need to get

help. But it will take time, so try to be patient, though it'll be hard because being patient will be hard, haha.

### Theme 6—Family and Social Support Systems

All the combat veterans who have a family stated that their families did all they could, to be supportive, loving, and caring. The participant affirmed that their family and social support systems were attending to their needs, but despite the deep level of care they were given, they could not allow themselves to share their sentiments regarding deployment. Ray affirmed:

Mm, no, I think my family did the best they could. I think that um they couldn't have don't anything better. I am fine with my family. It wasn't just my mom and dad, it was my whole family, from my mom's side and dad's side.

This reasoning was mentioned previously, which proves that it is a process the combat veteran needed to work through over time. Thus, in addition to believing that their family did all they could, to show support, they preferred to internalize their stressors in order to prevent burdening their families and social support systems. Alex reported:

I guess it wasn't really a matter of could, but it was matter of did I want to. I mean obviously, due to reasons I wasn't going to them everything going on and I couldn't tell them everything that was going on and not just for security purposes but for the purposes of their mental health. I didn't want them to worry, so I would tell them fragmented information. I preferred to keep the extremity of the stress to myself rather than drop it on them.

## Summary of Themes

Overall, this study provided valuable information. It showed that combat veterans experience challenges with reintegration and that these challenges arise as a result of them enduring the reintegration process. The six themes within this chapter clearly defined what combat veterans experienced upon their returns from their deployments. These themes were: (a) Armored vehicles to sedans—driving; (b) Internalization of emotions and memories; (c) Interactions: military versus civilian; (d) A sense of understanding; (e) It is what it is; and (f) My family did all they could. The last two topics to be addressed within this chapter include examining the participants through a more defined lens and lastly understanding the five questions the participants answered.

## Participants' Ethnographic Profile

Fourteen participants were willing to participate in this study. For the confidentiality of the participants, pseudonyms are allotted to each participant. The descriptions were meant to allow for better insight into each combat veteran based on where they went when they initially returned from their deployments, who their social support systems were, military culture's impact, and what they are currently doing post-military. Additionally, the descriptions of the combat veterans are supported solely by the transcripts and notes obtained by the researcher during their interviews.

By understanding these four areas about each participant, these combat veterans will cease to be mere subjects participating in a study. Instead they are viewed as combat veterans, an identity well deserved (Vest, 2013). Table 1 is provided at the end of the section to summarize each combat veteran who participated.



## Steven

Initial return. When Steven initially returned he went home to his wife, whom he had not seen in fourteen months. The deployments were tough for him and his wife, due to the substantial strain it emplaced upon their relationship. A significant amount of his decision to initiate the End of Active Service (EAS) process was to work on his marriage with his wife.

Social support systems. Steven had his wife, who was applying to nursing school roughly around the time he returned from his sixth and final deployment. Aside from his wife however, his social support systems were few since he was estranged from his family due to his choices of joining the military. His parents live back East and he is beginning to rebuild a relationship with them but their conversations still remain fairly formal. Steven also mentioned two friends that live relatively near him. He says that they are the only two people he can truly confide in due to sharing the same Marine Corps experience:

I mean I didn't want to talk to anyone you know, I had my wife and we were trying to figure each other out again, but it was just hard you know. I talked a lot to my friend who lived somewhat nearby and he helped a lot with the process of returning since he had left a few years earlier from the military.

Beyond these people in Steven's life, he states that his interactions with peers at school are minimal. He minimizes his interactions with his peers, in order to avoid speaking with people that do not understand.

Military culture's impact. According to Steven, military culture had a significant impact on his reintegration process:

Yea, without military culture, it was really I mean you can't have the same conversations anymore, you can't I mean, you're basically at work and are surrounded by rough individuals and I always felt like I was kinda...I don't know if I ever fit in like that, but with those guys but at the same time I'd rather hang out with people like that than the people I see in the civilian world, you can't have the same kinda conversations, you can't talk about the same kinda stuff, you don't really know I mean, I think that in the military it's really easy to kinda like form friendships really quickly because of those common experiences and, and that's just not available to you in the civilian world and it sort of sucks.

Post military. When he decided to EAS for his wife, he knew he had to do something to maintain income flow. This trickled down to one of two choices, either rejoin the working world or attend community college. After working at Target, he quickly realized that this option would not last forever; thus, he decided to go back to school. Steven is now attending a well-known university and plans to enroll in their Army ROTC program to become an officer. He believes his reintegration process is as good as it can be. Steven states that he and his wife have finally returned to the same level of comfort and happiness in their relationship; and for the most part life is falling into place.

### Richard

Initial return. When Richard initially returned from his deployments he stated he moved in with his family and lived with them until 2011. Despite the anger, anxiety, and depression he felt when he returned, he did not tell his family.

Social support systems. Richard states that his family was a great support when he returned from his deployment. Although he made the choice to not share his experiences or the feelings he was experiencing with them, Richard states his family was very supportive and loving when he returned. At the time he was not married and states, “If I would have been married, it would have probably ended in divorce. I have no doubt about it.”

In order to cope with his feelings pertaining to deployment, he internalized them, particularly his survivor’s guilt. Richard stated he went out and drank on a daily basis with his civilian friends who never deployed. He also made it clear, that even though he enjoyed spending time with these people, they were nothing more than people he spent time with to have fun. This was primarily because of their lack of shared military experiences.

While attending a vocational school, he also did not have a significant amount of peer interaction because he was not able to relate to them. Richard made it clear that if he chose to interact with anyone, they were prior service members, similar to him.

Military culture’s impact. The impact military culture had on Richard was significant. Not only did he realize how much camaraderie and esprit de corps influenced him, he also noticed how ingrained the mannerisms he adopted from the military became in his civilian life.

Post military. It has been 5 years since Richard was deployed. He is now married with one child. He finished school and is now working in the private security sector using his degree. Richard believes he has come a long way in his reintegration process,

and although he will never forget those experiences, time was a great healer in his reintegration process.

### Alex

Initial return. When Alex returned from his deployment, he completed a required briefing at his unit and went home to his wife and 3 children. He resumed his civilian job with the company he worked for prior to his deployment. While his wife was both supportive and caring, his sons were simply happy to have their father back. With respects to his home life, life returned back to how it was before he left.

Social support systems. Upon his return he went home to his family, which is Alex's main support system. If he felt the need to converse with someone, he generally turned to friends he deployed with. When he returned to work, this co-workers asked where he was and one of his co-workers whom he spoke with regularly said:

When um the guy I work with daily said on 9/11, which was a couple of days after I deployed, he said there were people who were Middle Eastern, in the office cheering. And he is saying that he got all upset and he stormed out of there and I mean I found that..... it's pretty much safe to say that 9/11 you know, somebody from every country in the world except probably Cuba and North Korea somebody from any other country besides there, there was somebody in that building that died so everybody kinda took it on the chin there, and for anybody to turn around and cheer you know, they weren't very sensitive to the plight of their relatives as well.

This not only shocked Alex, but it also reinforced his lack of trust toward Middle Eastern people, which resulted from his deployment. Aside from the aforementioned co-worker, this factor contributed to his lack of peer interaction at work. He said:

Um, you know...I worked in an organization, with the state that has immigrants from the Middle East and yea, it's hard to trust them, you know, I found that but, you know...I just think that was the whole nature of what happened to this group of veteran's.

The main setback he experienced was in regards to the question of whether he cheated on his wife while he was gone. This question arose when Alex's wife learned that females would be deployed with her husband. Prior to this, she had been under the impression that he would be surrounded by males all the times. Over a six-month time frame, questions of infidelity arose, but eventually ceased.

Military culture's impact. Although military culture played a role in his life, he said it was more of a balancing act in which he transferred many of his military skills to his civilian job. He did not have issues telling people in his civilian job what needed to be fixed; since in his military job as a first sergeant infantryman, behaving assertively was essential to accomplishing their missions. Alex stated:

If they miss a step or do it incorrectly I just say "hey, sorry you didn't do so well today," "these are the mistakes you made along the way," and "this is what we need done," so that kinda revolves back to my civilian work but it is really easy you know from the military training, "hey did you do this task correctly," "did you perform this first aid task correctly" to "make a concrete cylinder correctly."

Post military. Alex is still working at his same job and is enjoying his relationship with his wife and three sons. Due to his age and how long he was married to his wife prior to his deployment, Alex suggests that much of his reintegration process was dependent on these two factors. Minus one lingering habit, he believes he is as reintegrated as he can be:

Couple of years, even now, I'll find myself, I'll make a circle around my car, you know I don't know why, it's ...it's probably like a bear in the zoo, you know it's November, time to go to sleep, you know, I don't know why.

### Jonathan

Initial return. When Jonathan initially returned from his deployment he headed back to his base in Fort Bragg, North Carolina. His unit was not required to resume work immediately:

In Atlanta I would go visit every once in a while for 4 or 3 day weekends and a lot of friends dad back from Mexico lived in South Carolina. Most of the time it was buddies in my unit, haha.

He discovered that while deployed his patience diminished severely and driving angered him immensely.

Social support systems. Luckily for Jonathan, his family members were very supportive and caring. Additionally, he still had friends in the surrounding area whom he went to party with on the weekends.

Military culture's impact. For Jonathan, military culture has played a significant role within his everyday life. Prior to joining the military, he stated that he was anything but neat and tidy. Now he is proud to say that beyond his room always being dress right

dress, he utilizes the core characteristics he learned in the military at his civilian job. Rather than feel nervous driving a truck with highly prized values, he states he is confident and disciplined.

Another key takeaway from Jonathan's military experiences, which he admits influenced how he raises his son, is that he taught his son that fashionable, expensive items are not needed, as he witnessed children in Iraq in the street playing with rocks but still being perfectly happy.

Post military. Now Jonathan has a son, whom he loves and cares for greatly. He and the mother are not married but share a civil relationship for the sake of their child. He is thankful for the military, since it allowed him to mature and care for his child in a responsible manner. Jonathan still works for same company and enjoys his job since there are a lot of prior service members he spends time with.

### Bryan

Initial return. When Bryan initially returned from deployment, he moved back California from Texas into his place. He spent a great deal of time with his friends whom he attended high school with. Additionally, he immediately began looking for jobs and was able to find a job as an assistant manager at a retail store. This depressed him because he believed it was a downgrade from what he had been doing in the Army. Thus Bryan stated that:

I felt cut off completely. Here I was an E5 in the army I had 3 supervisory subordinates of my own I was running and intelligence section, and I had 3 other SGTs below me I had, 3 other 5s sitting in my 6 spots because I was the senior E5. I had 2 4s sitting in my 5 spots. And 3 more PFCs to run everything else, and a

few add-ons. People who were just donated. I go from that and now I am applying for managerial positions.

Mental health wise, he also struggled with residual memories from deployment but instead of sharing it with his close friends he behaved as if nothing was wrong.

Social support systems. Aside from his close friends from high school, Bryan says he had no other social support systems. His home life growing up was not ideal due to having a father who preferred drugs and a mother who preferred the other sibling to him. Frequently, his mother would kick him out. He stated that he spent time at a friend's house for weeks at a time, since his friend's mother would allow him to stay. Now when Mother's Day occurs, he buys his friend's mom flowers and a card.

Military culture's impact. For Bryan, military culture played a significant role in his life. According to him, some of the qualities he possesses are good but some are not. He states that maintaining orderliness and cleanliness is of the utmost importance. Additionally, he has no patience for people that play games, and he is extremely prompt. Bryan further explained that:

Yea, I would say there have been some very positive aspects I can key into with military culture, but there are also some negative and detrimental aspects. Like my ability to be compassionate, sometimes it's very hard for me because of trust and just the military mentality of drink water and drive on... You get angry about people complaining about small things, they'll be whining and complaining about something you're managing, while I'm managing others things and managing one giant overarching thing that's bigger than, and they're complaining about



something that's crippling them. I want to look at them and shake them. It's just very frustrating.

Post military. Although Bryan still struggles with a severely low tolerance for people playing games and has trust issues with anyone he meets, overall he is happy. He graduated last June with a Master's degree in Social Work. Bryan also stated that he is as reintegrated as he can be, but there is still room for achieving his perfect sense of self.

### Alistair

Initial return. When Alistair returned from his deployments, he returned home to his daughter and previous wife. He stated that unlike other veteran's, nothing was too different for him due to how his household worked. Alistair attributed the lack of changes, to moving from Nigeria to the United States when he was twenty-six years old.

Social support systems. Alistair's social support systems consisted mainly of his daughter. Despite being married, in his opinion the marriage was already over and he did not consider his wife to be significant part of his life. When he finally settled back into civilian life, he filed for divorce, and decided to move to the West Coast.

Military culture's impact. According to Alistair, military culture played a significant role on his life, especially when it came to child rearing. Alistair reported:

Well, I think this in when the military comes in, uh, I am a strict disciplinarian, I have always been strict before I joined the military but I got more so in the military. His personality paralleled to the Army way.

Although he admits that much of his cultural background is Nigerian rather than American, he confirms that the way the military trained him solidified his persona to a more rule-abiding disciplinarian.

Post military. He recently remarried and had another daughter. His intentions are to move back to Nigeria as an American consultant, where he was been hired to work in the private sector. Alistair states that despite feeling less emotional due to his deployment experiences, he is as reintegrated as he can be.

### David

Initial return. When he returned from deployment, he returned to his wife and newborn baby. He was expected to attend mandatory briefs with his unit but following the briefings he took time off to be with his loved ones. According to David, when he spent time with friends those first few months, all they did was drink significant amounts of alcohol.

Upon his return, he stated feeling a culture shock because while deployed he was not being hugged or coddled by anyone, thus when he returned he had to readjust to the idea of his family wanting to show him frequent affection.

Social support systems. David had his wife and child, as well as his parents in the area who were really helpful when he returned. David stated, “She handled herself during the deployment it was very good. It helped me out a lot.” Additionally, his family was exceptionally helpful while he was gone, thus mitigating her having to raise the child on her own.

Military culture’s impact. According to David, military culture provided him with a different type of support and foundation from his family. He gained a sense of connectedness and camaraderie, which allowed him to feel as if he belonged to a brotherhood.

Post military. He currently lives with his wife and child. Additionally, David maintains a busy life, with school and work, and also remains in contact with people from his unit. For birthdays and holidays, they still converse over the phone or through email. They also send gifts when their wives give birth.

### Jordan

Initial return. When Jordan returned from his multiple deployments, he admits that he experienced a tough time coping with all that he saw and did. He was angry and would snap at anyone who ticked him off.

Social support systems. He mainly felt bad for his family (wife and two children) who received the biggest blow of his internalized emotions. Jordan explained that such emotions are due to his inability to be in public places for extended periods of time. He also stated experiencing stressful flashbacks that arose sporadically. He believes that if it were not for his family, reintegration would have been impossible.

Military culture's impact. Similar to other veterans, military culture is not just a part of him, but it is who he is. As a retired non-commissioned officer, the military was part of his life for more than twenty years. Although he works in the civilian world as a security officer for a private company, he still identifies himself as a soldier and all his friendships are with people who have shared his military background.

Post military. Jordan now lives with his family, has retired recently from his military career, and works for a private company as a security officer. He stated that reintegrating back to civilian life is a step-by-step process, in which time is a significant factor to his healing process. In a few short words he summed up his reintegration process as "It is what it is."

## Felix

Initial return. The sum of Felix's deployments resulted in a complex return. He and his previous wife divorced, he remarried, and he was taking care of two children. Dealing with his first wife after the divorce was challenging because it caused him a significant amount of grief over child support, alimony, and various other matters. Fortunately, his second wife was more understanding, worked to increase his comfort, and did not try to antagonize him.

Social support systems. Due to the unfortunate circumstance of experiencing a divorce, Felix's social support system fluctuated between his deployments. These experiences resulted in residual effects during his deployments. During his first tour, he was married to his first wife, and had his daughter, however by his second deployment, he and his first wife were no longer on corrigible terms. Throughout his third and final deployment, he was talking to his future second wife, whom he did not marry until he decided to EAS from the military.

Military culture's impact. For Felix, military culture's impact was significant in the sense that it became a new way of life, in which he embraced whole-heartedly. Felix avowed, "It's who I am, it's who I will always be." Additionally, the nuances he adopted from the military transferred over to his civilian life. He did not forgive people's weaknesses and assumed people were trying to evade work. Despite these elusive qualities, he feels they have made him more effective in his civilian life.

Post military. Now that he has completed his military service, Felix lives with his second wife and child. He also works in a National Guard unit. Most of his time is spent with his family. He believes that reintegration is something that is achieved over time

and thus has accomplished as much as he can for the current moment. Felix declared that if he is to reintegrate more fully, time is the determining factor.

### Jorgen

Initial return. When Jorgen returned he felt thrilled and excited, because for him coming home was a glorifying experience, in which he looks back on with delight. He confirmed this by stating:

Um, well, coming home, coming home, I felt like a gladiator in a coliseum it was uh, it was just everyone just cheering for me, well us, not just necessarily me, cheering for us, throwing rose petals I mean not necessarily, but hypothetically speaking it was just, we felt like gladiators and we uh, went in there, but everyone was so happy and again, joyous serenity but everyone was silent...

Beyond attending the mundane required briefings, Jorgen returned to his unit, moved apartments, and spent a lot of time with his friends who were also from his old unit. He felt safe with them as opposed to civilians, whom he did not share his experiences with while deployed.

Social support systems. Jorgen considered himself fortunate to have quality people in his life. His mother was a big social support system throughout his deployments. Additionally, he had a steady girlfriend, who he felt was supportive and caring. Aside from these two social support systems, Jorgen relied on his friends from his unit.

Military culture's impact. Jorgen stated that military culture has made him a better person. Similar to many veterans, he matured significantly both mentally and physically and reports that:

I am a better man because of the military because I have a better understanding or better aspect, better view of life, itself, uh it really did set my priorities straight um I am more responsible I hear it all the time from my friends, every time I'm going home and they're like man you're 31 years old you look great...

Post military. Jorgen is now involved with teaching and guiding cadets who are training to be future officers of the U.S. Army. He enjoys being able to impart his wisdom to future officers, who will utilize these learned leadership skills with enlisted soldiers similar to him. In addition to working with cadets in ROTC, he primarily spends time with people he works with in ROTC.

### Isaac

Initial return. When Isaac returned, he stated that he was really happy to see his family again and be at home; however, when he began drinking alcohol an array of residual feelings arose, which elicited anger. He attributed most of his anger towards the memories of being deployed, where he and soldiers from his unit spent 8-hour days in guard towers. While there he would have to listen to them be vent about their wives who cheated. Isaac as a result became mad for them, and began feeling sorry for himself. He stated this occurred because he had not spoken to his family, which resulted in feelings of self-pity and self-loathing.

Social support systems. Despite these negative feelings, Isaac still loved his family. He stated that many of the feelings arose because he was left alone with his thoughts for hours at a time in the guard towers. Isaac stated that his family prayed for his safe return daily.

Military culture's impact. With regards to military culture, Isaac stated that the military became a way of life for him. In this regard it has been challenging to the military mannerisms that have become so ingrained into his persona.

Post military. Isaac is attending community college and enjoying his return to civilian life. He says that the reintegration process is still under construction, but that he has accomplished a lot. Similar to other veterans, time is a big determinant in being able to heal.

### Kristopher

Initial return. For Kristopher, returning from deployment the second time was challenging because he was surprised by all the anger he felt. While deployed, he stated feeling happy and proud of what he was doing, however when he returned home, he was quick to snap, even at his wife. Rather than spending time in public places, he would spend time with his family at home.

Social support systems. Aside from his friends in his unit, Kristopher's social support systems consisted of his wife and extended family, whom he remained in close contact with while deployed. When he returned from deployment this family greeted him by having small gathering, which he looks back on happily.

Military culture's impact. Due to joining the military out of high school, he states that military culture has left an permanent imprint on his life. Even now he considers himself a soldier. He rejoined as a National Guard's man, in order to remain connected to the military way of life. His view is further supported when Kristopher states, "You know it shaped me since I was a kid because I went in when I was 19 and uh

it's had the biggest impact on my life expect my family. I am solidier and I am completely.”

Post military. In addition to recently joining the National Guard where he trains with an Army unit once a month, he works in the security sector. He also maintains more friendships with people who are prior service like him, because of shared experiences.

Ray

Initial return. When Ray returned from his deployments he decided to leave the military. However, after trying to find jobs in the civilian world, he quickly realized that a higher level of education was needed in order to find a worthwhile job. Ray continued by saying:

Haha you know what, I kinda wish I did my research because the job market sucked. Yep, 2008, the job market ducked, and that was probably the worst feeling going from, a place where you know your job, you knew that you fit in, the security, you know, you felt good about, I felt good about what I did, to not being secure, haha, not having a job and that jobs that I was able to almost get; they were being taken away, entry level positions, being taken away from kids with grad degrees and these are people with, that you shouldn't even need a Bachelor's degree it's an entry level position you know maybe it requires a Bachelor's degree or some type of experience, so it was kind of upsetting to see, haha, that happened to me and to realize that you know it's either go back into the military or try to make it happen. And I decided to try and make it happen, um a couple of, or 5-6 months later I'd get laid off you know find other jobs, and end up with an almost minimum wage job, haha, paying to go to local community



college just to get done with my general education, so I can transfer and use the GI Bill to live.

Thus, he enrolled in community college and continued to live with his parents and pay rent.

Social support systems. Ray's social support systems included his parents and some friends he maintained contact with from the Marine Corps. Initially, his parents were not supportive of his decision to join the military but later changed their opinion when they saw how much he matured. Ray reported:

Yea, I think and I think that my family would attest to it, that I am good advocate for done correctly, what the military can provide as far as, not just physically provide...stability money, blah, blah, education but it can also provide you know good character, a sense of what a good person is, what a good person does, how to conduct yourself in a respectable way uh where people appreciate you as a person and appreciate what you do, so yea I think I uh my family's changed, in the perception of the military.

Military culture's impact. Prior to joining the military, Ray described himself as someone with no direction and no sense of purpose. The military changed his sense of purpose and allowed him to mature and gain a sense of motivation. He adopted its values and still lives by them on a daily basis. Ray stated that his character, as a result of military culture, is very important to him and if someone questions his character, it becomes personal.

Dissimilar to other veterans, Ray stated that his reintegration process was not as challenging. He admitted that it took a while to get used to being in a civilian environment, due to all the military nuances that became so ingrained into his persona.

Post military. Now that he is out of the Marine Corps, he is attending school and will be earning his bachelor's degree in Dance. He is married and has two children. Additionally, he was commissioned as a 2<sup>nd</sup> Lieutenant in the U.S. Army in 2014.

### Anthony

Initial return. Anthony had multiple deployments and in between those deployments he attended training schools. Rather than going straight home following his deployment, he went to Drill Sergeant School to train as a drill sergeant. When he finally did return home, he spent time with his wife and daughter.

Social support systems. Anthony's social support systems fluctuated due to going through a divorce during one of his deployments and remarrying. His relationship with his daughter, however, remained exceptional. Additionally, as time elapsed his relationship with his mother improved. Initially, she was in disagreement with his decision to join the military because he had received football scholarship out of high school. He stated that his father was never a factor in his life.

Military culture's impact. Military culture gradually transformed the way he thought and behaved toward others. Anthony's introspective personality shifted into a slightly more outspoken form:

Everything you think, the language, the way you look at things, it completely changes who you are like uh values; I had values, I am Christian so I had a foundation but more specific things you think of with Army values um, lingo, the

way you talk, no one really understands, but that's just the normal so everyday stuff. I use to have a filter with the things I would say to people but now I more speak my mind than I would before and like um unfortunately, it's not necessarily a good thing I am more um...honest to a fault I guess.

Post military. Rather than training enlisted soldiers, Anthony's job now is to teach and guide cadets as they train to become future 2<sup>nd</sup> lieutenants of the U.S. Army upon graduating with a bachelor's or master's degree. He is married to his second wife and remains close with his daughter. Despite some residual effects from his deployments, he states that reintegration is a time-based process.

#### Combat Veteran Demographics and Information

Table 1 provides information regarding the participants' demographic information obtained from the baseline survey. Ten out of the fourteen participants resided in Los Angeles County, California. The remaining five lived in Orange County, California. The most common income level among the participants was 20-50k at 35% ( $n = 5$ ). The most common educational level attained by the participants was a high school/GRE level at 57% ( $n = 8$ ). Also, 7% ( $n = 1$ ) person received a vocational education, 7% ( $n = 1$ ) received a bachelor's degree, 14% ( $n = 2$ ) received a graduate degree. An important factor about those participants who received a higher-level education is that they are 30 years old or older. A majority of the participants' marital status was married at 64% ( $n = 9$ ), while the remaining was single at 35% ( $n = 5$ ).

The ethnic background of the participants was diverse. The two largest, however, were White at 35% ( $n = 5$ ) and Hispanic also at 35% ( $n = 5$ ). Fourteen percent ( $n = 2$ ) were African American, 7% ( $n = 1$ ) was Asian, and 7% ( $n = 1$ ) was Middle Eastern. The

last demographic variable examined was age. The average age of participants in this study were 31.5 years of age. The youngest participant was 22 years old and the oldest was 51 years old.

TABLE 1. Combat Veteran Demographics

Name*	Age	Ethnicity	Marital Status	Education	Income	County
Steven	28	White	Married	High school/GRE	<20k	LA
Richard	26	Hispanic	Married	Associates	<20k	LA
Alex	50	White	Married	Associates	>100k	OC
Jonathan	29	Hispanic	Single	High school/GRE	20-50k	LA
Bryan	32	Arab	Single	MSW	20-50k	LA
Alistair	51	African American	Married	Graduate	80-100k	LA
David	22	Hispanic	Married	High school/GRE	20-50k	LA
Jordan	43	Asian	Married	High school/GRE	50-80k	LA
Felix	31	Hispanic	Married	High school/GRE	>100k	LA
Jorgen	31	African American	Single	High school/GRE	20-50k	LA
Isaac	26	Hispanic	Single	High school/GRE	<20k	OC
Kristopher	42	White	Married	Vocational School	80-100k	LA
Ray	30	White	Married	BS/BA	20-50k	OC
Anthony	32	White	Single	High school/GRE	50-80k	OC

\*Names are pseudonyms

Table 2 provided below presents each participant's branch of service, MOS, the number of deployments, and when his or her last deployment occurred. A majority of the participants were from the U.S. Army at 85% ( $n = 12$ ). The remaining two participants were from the Marine Corps at 14%. The majority of participants were in the Infantry MOS at 71% ( $n = 10$ ). The remaining four MOS's were all represented at 7% ( $n = 1$ ) each MOS: Intelligence, Engineer, Cavalry Scout, and Cryptographic Technician. Of the 14 participants, 35% ( $n = 5$ ) were deployed once, 21% ( $n = 3$ ) twice, 35% ( $n = 5$ ) three times, and 7% ( $n = 1$ ) was deployed six times.

TABLE 2. Combat Veteran Information

Name*	Branch	Military Occupational Specialty (MOS)	Number of Deployments	Last Deployment
Steven	Marine Corps	Infantry	6	March 2013
Richard	Army	Infantry	2	June 2009
Alex	Army	Infantry	1	April 2002
Jonathan	Army	Infantry	1	March 2006
Bryan	Army	Intelligence	1	May 2005
Alistair	Army	Engineer	3	January 2012
David	Army	Infantry	1	August 2011
Jordan	Army	Infantry	3	April 2012
Felix	Army	Infantry	3	November 2008
Jorgen	Army	Calvary Scout	3	April 2012
Isaac	Army	Infantry	1	October 2010
Kristopher	Army	Infantry	2	November 2008
Ray	Marine Corps	Cryptographic Technician	2	January 2008
Anthony	Army	Infantry	3	September 2012

\*Names are pseudonyms

### Examined Questions Explained

Throughout the study, five specific questions were examined. Concluding the in-depth interviews and coding process, overarching answers were discovered for each question. With the answers to these questions, which are far from simple, a more succinct picture of what veterans have endured is provided.

### Reintegration Process

The first question, which encompassed how the combat veterans' process went while they reintegrated, showed that it was teeming with mixed emotions. They knew what they needed to sort through but were unsure of where to begin. These mixed emotions generally consisted of anger, impatience, anxiousness, depression, and sense of feeling out of place.

### Social Support

The next question revolved around who was in their lives when they were deployed and whom they went to see when they returned from deployment. All the combat veterans in this study went home to their families, which consisted of spouses, parents, and friends. Familiarity was the biggest key, in the sense that after being immersed in a hostile environment for so many months, knowing that there was someone who would love them when they returned was deemed helpful and comforting.

### Military Culture and Reintegrating

The question involving whether military culture had an impact on combat veterans incited a resounding “yes!” All combat veterans who participated in this study, stated that military culture resulted in a life changing experience; physically, mentally, and emotionally. Military culture impacted them physically because they were use to a regimented way of working out that many still maintain, despite not being in the military. Mentally, a lot of them have become more confident and decisive due to being trained in life or death situations. Emotionally, many of the combat veterans who participated in this study believe that they have become less emotional or are more guarded with displaying their emotions. These two factors are due to military training which teach them military philosophy of “drive on” mentality and never unveiling any weaknesses to the enemy.

### Integral Factor - Time

Throughout the study the researcher kept her ears open for what the combat veterans believed was the most helpful factor in their reintegration process. The combat veterans admitted that although they thought it was awesome that their family was

supportive and loving, time was the determining factor that dictated their reintegration process. Without a doubt, however, their families were the key in facilitating their reintegration because without them it would have been impossible. Beyond social support systems, combat veterans simply needed time to cope with the mixed emotions and residual memories they were experiencing upon their return. In addition to time, their military friendships were a great reinforcement in their reintegration process.

### Residual Memories and Feelings

The combat veterans within this study stated that most certainly they experience residual feelings from deployments but in the form of memories. Memories that arise, conjured a trifecta of feelings including, happiness, sadness, and longing. They stated that the residual memories arise if they are out somewhere or if they hear something. Jorgen stated, "I am walking and I see a piece of trash in on the sidewalk, and I think start checking myself and around me to see if it may be an IED." Richard also stated, "I hear a kid cry in the store because they want a toy, and I think back to the kid sitting in the dirt playing with rocks with a huge smile on their face."

Despite these memories and feelings arising, it did not hinder them as time progressed because they learned to let it go and accept it for what it is. These aforementioned questions provided valuable information to understanding the surface of what combat veterans experienced. With this overview and the analysis of the six themes obtained through the coding process, combat veteran reintegration can be understood as the primary factor rather than the secondary factor.

## Summary

In this chapter, the major themes were highlighted and described thoroughly. Upon the analysis of themes, a succinct depiction of who the combat veterans were was provided. Tables were also included in order to present their military experiences and demographic information. Most importantly, questions were answered regarding the combat veteran reintegration process. This established that if assistance is provided immediately upon their return from deployment, it is less likely that they will experience negative repercussions with reintegrating. Additionally, two essential factors required for a successful reintegration were having a social support system and time. The last chapter will incorporate the discussion section and address limitations, strengths, ethical considerations, implications for practical applications, as well as suggestions for future research.



## CHAPTER 5

### DISCUSSION

This qualitative study examined the challenges and barriers faced by combat veterans as they reintegrate into mainstream society following their return from deployments. The five questions allowed for a wealth of firsthand information to be unearthed regarding the combat veteran reintegration process. However, in addition to a plethora of information being gained, these combat veterans were able to share their experiences without fear of judgment. Many admitted that it was surprisingly therapeutic. They also disclosed how they were able to achieve an improved sense of self-awareness concerning their reintegration process. Both of these findings are consistent with another research study that involved listening to veterans' firsthand experiences of returning home from deployments (Wilson, Leary, Mitchell, & Ritchie, 2009). Other participants viewed it as a way to help their battle buddies (future combat veterans) who have yet to endure the reintegration process. This idea revolves back to military tenants and values that both soldiers and veterans hold onto dearly: I will always place the mission; I will never accept defeat; I will never quit; and I will never leave a fallen comrade (McMaster, 2008).

Despite location, branch, and military status, military service member's loyalty remains strong, as all the participants reported that despite the struggles they experienced on their deployments, they pushed through their assigned

missions. Beyond their assigned deployment missions, the unspoken mission upon their return was to reintegrate into mainstream society, which was consistent with other research studies (Institute of Medicine of the National Academies, 2013; Janzen, 2014). Due to this survival mechanism, the terms such as defeat and quit never became an option while deployed. This survival mechanism that remained with them when they returned from deployment was also employed in their reintegration processes and has aided in their ability to assist future combat veterans who will experience the reintegration process. They shared their experiences in this study in hopes that any information gathered would be utilized efficiently and beneficially in future program development.

For most of the combat veterans who participated in this study, having their social support systems in the vicinity facilitated the smoothness of their reintegration processes. Drinking occurred as a way to cope with the emotions they were unable to share with those around them, due to the lack of shared experiences. In addition, civilians contributed to the participants' frustrations by relentlessly questioning their roles while in the military. These findings are supported by Gross et al. (2014) study that found similar findings. As a result, combat veterans veered toward friendships with prior service member at work or school, or purposely did not interact with other if no prior service member were are their workplace or schools sites. These findings are also consistent with the findings of Coil et al. (2012) study.

A surprising finding indicated that driving became an issue for combat veterans due to having to transition from large armored military vehicles, to significantly smaller and less durable civilian vehicles. In hindsight, this finding appeared obvious. Prior to

the study, however, this idea was not considered. Although this study was able to invoke useful information for future combat veterans, limitations arose which are worth mentioning for future researchers.

### Limitations

A limitation of this study includes the sampling because although the type of sampling employed allowed for ease of access to combat veterans, it also limited the pool of combat veterans since they are only obtained through word of mouth (Rubin & Babbie, 2013). The sampling method employed limits the generalizability of the results to a broader group or population. Issues that arose during the study were related to difficulty building rapport and other logistical problems. Overall, the researcher was able to build rapport with participants well; however, one of the combat veterans was unwilling to fully share the scope of his experiences. It is important to mention that the combat veterans were informed that they did not have to share any information they did not want to share, but they were also told that any information withheld would influence the depth of results. Logistical problems that arose for the researcher were mainly due to difficulty taking notes without appearing distracted or rude. The audio recording undoubtedly assisted, but a more efficient note taking system during the interviews would have made the process easier and could have allowed for more in-depth findings.

### Strengths

Strong points within this study include firsthand encounters with combat veterans which allowed for an in-depth exploration of their experiences. Additionally, the semi-structured interview format assisted with the interviews by allowing the combat veterans to guide the direction depending on what they shared (Barriball, 1994). Snowball

sampling permitted ease of access to combat veterans because the researcher was able to locate willing participants for this study, and rapport building with the combat veterans was not as challenging because they were already familiar with the researcher's experience with the military. As previously noted, combat veterans prefer only to interact with those who have had military experience; therefore, the researcher pursuing a military career and wanting to assist future combat veterans allowed the participants to become more comfortable during the interviews.

### Ethical Considerations

While ethics can provoke both limitations and strengths, it is important to view this subject separately from limitations and strengths, due to its importance to promote the protection of humans overall. In other words, if ethical considerations were viewed simply as a limitation or a strength it can be inferred that examining the protection of people was not seen as important to the researcher (Cox & McDonald, 2013). In this study, however, measures were taken in order to prevent the re-antagonizing of the combat veterans who participated in this study.

### Well-Being of Participants

Throughout the study, the researcher was aware and careful not to reinjure the combat veterans emotionally or mentally. Whenever a study involves human subjects, this becomes a significant concern because while information is being sought out, the researcher should not cause any harm to the participants (Denzin, 2009). In order to mitigate the possibility of reinjuring the combat veterans, a list of resources were provided during the interview phase of the study. Also, the combat veterans were verbally informed that at any time they felt too overwhelmed they could terminate their

participation in the study. Throughout the entirety of the study, only one combat veteran appeared hesitant to share the full scope of his reintegration experiences. All the participants completed the study, and this researcher hopes that the steps taken to protect the combat veterans were enough.

### PTSD

Another inevitable ethical consideration that remained on the forefront was PTSD. Although the participants were not asked questions regarding their personal experiences with PTSD, the topic arose due to its inherent tie to military service members who have been deployed (Purtle, 2014). It is important to note that in this study those experiencing PTSD indicated that their reintegration process felt particularly challenging. Their reasons were attributed to either a lack of social support or the inability to share their feelings and thoughts with those around.

PTSD is undoubtedly a life hindering disorder if left untreated. The fact that many combat veterans endure such a complex disorder following an equally complex experience is heartbreaking. Combat veterans are altruistic people who have placed their lives on the lines for the goodness of others. Thus, to pay the respects they deserve, it is important to find out how to eliminate or at least decrease their chances of experiencing these symptoms. Therefore, within this study, although it was not the study's direct intent to find out the causes of PTSD among combat veterans, it was a hope. With the help of the combat veterans who participated, it has been determined that PTSD tends to arise as a result of a difficult reintegration process.

Those combat veterans who were not experiencing overly challenging reintegration processes had a greater social support system. They also had an

understanding of the bigger picture; they understood how their roles on their combat deployments were merely a piece of a bigger puzzle and they were just doing their job. It was these two essential factors that allowed them to cope and work through their reintegration process. In no way did they state that it was easy, it was merely different. For those who experienced more challenges including PTSD lacked a social support system and did not have the sense of awareness of the bigger picture. It was not until they sought mental health assistance that these combat veterans were able to heal their emotional scars and receive that support they could not find immediately after they returned. In both scenarios a key factor to note was that time was also an essential element to all the combat veterans' reintegration processes. These findings analyzed in the results section and furthered discussed in this section have allowed for ideas for future research and practical application.

#### Implications for Practical Application

This study has allowed for numerous applications for future practice in the form of resource connection and social support groups within the workplace, schools, and on military bases prior to the combat veteran becoming a combat veteran. These options are good starting points since findings indicate that if the combat veteran is supported from the start, their reintegration process tends to be smoother.

To start, if the combat veteran is not feeling comfortable speaking with anyone due to the lack of shared experiences, they should be advised to seek out support groups where they can spend time with other combat veterans. Thus, if the combat veteran is attending school whether it is community college or a 4-year university, the faculty and staff should be willing to actively promote the services they have for combat veterans. If

no such services exist, the school administration should work to implement an organization or group for prior military service members who are returning to school. This way the combat veterans who are returning to school will not be subjected to feelings of isolation. Additionally, these organizations should in some way recognize their service by positively promoting awareness on how to interact with combat veterans; they are people after all and not cold blooded killers (Probst, 2015).

Similarly in the workplace, an awareness and intolerance policy should be promoted for ill treatment of prior military service members. This is not to suggest that combat veterans who decide to go back to work should be placed in the limelight; instead they should be allowed their privacy and work without feeling pressed by others to answer questions they do not wish to. Workplaces should try to promote acceptance of combat veterans similar to how they promote equal opportunity and non-discrimination against people with disabilities (Whaley & Belhadjali, 2009). The idea behind this future application goes back to the findings where combat veterans who participated in this study felt harassed by their peers with a continuous stream of questions regarding the violent acts they committed while deployed. This should be viewed as reprehensible since it is bullying in a verbal form, particularly if the combat veteran is stating he or she does not want to discuss these topics and the coworker is still insisting on knowing the sensitive information.

Lastly, community colleges, universities, and workplaces could explore and discuss ways to express their appreciation and support for combat veterans (Probst, 2015). Opportunities could be created for students, employees, and faculty to interact with combat veterans on days beyond Veteran's Day. This would prove to the combat veteran

that they do not have to feel isolated and that civilians are willing to learn about their experiences from their point of views rather than assume. Additionally, it would instill a level of comfort among combat veterans because they will not feel tossed aside, which tends to occur when they decide to reintegrate into the civilian world. Another way workplaces and school campuses could show interest is by incorporating surveys upon their entry in order to discover their interests, show the combat veteran that on behalf of the school or workplace they have their interests at forefront, and determine what they need.

With the results of this study, decision makers depending on their fields can investigate and assess the current policies on combat veteran treatment or begin creating and implementing programs towards supporting the combat veteran population upon their return to higher academia or the workplace. However, it is not to imply that workplaces and schools should overlook the current programs they have; rather, they should reevaluate their current standing and make changes accordingly, based on what is now known about combat veterans who are returning to these places within the civilian world. Every step taken to include the combat veteran should also include their support systems, particularly their spouses in order to facilitate their communication as well as to assist them in achieving a level of cohesiveness that existed prior to their deployments. Their spouses and social support systems also endured constant worry for their loved one who was deployed in addition to being required to remain strong for their children who needed their care.



### Suggestions for Future Research

Opportunities for future research on combat veterans are on the rise especially due to the influx of combat veterans returning from deployments (Amara, 2013; U.S. Census Bureau, 2014). This study concentrated on the reintegration process and the challenges that are presented while they strive to assimilate back into civilian culture, particularly male, prior-enlisted combat veterans. However, there are a few other types of military personnel groupings that should be considered for future research including: (a) female prior-enlisted combat veterans; (b) officers with combat deployments both males and females; (c) a comparison of combat veterans who were deployed from the National Guard or Reserves versus those from active duty; (d) comparison by military branch; and (e) specific MOS's (Brownson, 2014; MacLean & Edwards, 2010; Vest, 2013).

Research in these areas would provide a more specific understanding of combat veterans at all levels. This would be immensely beneficial since combat veterans from the junior enlisted to the field grade officers are expected to increase due to the recent closing of war with the Middle East. Additionally, their experiences are vastly different, due to the expectations they must uphold, not only within their specific branches but also within their specific ranks. These experiences and expectations would indubitably play a role in their reintegration processes and are thus, worth exploring. Examining these areas is also essential, since a limited amount of research exists regarding veterans' reintegration processes (Sayer et al., 2010; Sayer et al., 2014). This study for the time being fills a void on the combat veteran reintegration process, since its findings show that if they are assisted when they immediately leave the military, their reintegration process will be less stressful, and problems generally experienced will significantly decrease.

### Reflexivity of the Researcher

Throughout the progression of the study, the researcher reflected on her role, actions and experiences that influence the study overall (Gilmore & Kenny, 2015). Certainly there were times when she became entangled in their experiences and how they altered them as a person. When this occurred, the researcher reminded herself that despite the complexities of their experiences they do not want pity, and thus she would take a step back and acknowledge what they had done and moved forward with the study. After all, the researcher's interest in the combat veteran population was ignited by the desire to work with military personnel in the Army; in order to alleviate any discomfort they felt from their deployments. This desire was attributed to working with her Cadre in the Army Reserve Officer Training Corps, where they expressed how frustrating it is to be amongst civilians and feel so out of place. Additionally, they expressed the challenges of gaining access to resources and that their only support systems beyond their spouses, children, and parents were prior military service members exactly like them.

While interviewing these combat veterans, the researcher felt fortunate to hear their experiences firsthand, from the funny narratives about their battle buddies falling off the armored vehicles while driving through Qandahar, to pulling dead bodies out fallen buildings. These anecdotes are no longer mere memories but they have been immortalized into print in hopes that these experiences will be lessons for future decision makers (Wilson et al., 2009). Ultimately these combat veterans participated with the intent to assist their future battle buddies who will unquestionably experience the reintegration process and all the trials that are linked to it.

The researcher feels immense gratitude toward those who willingly participated because they offered me an unforgettable opportunity. Not only was she able to offer some solace and appreciation for their work through validation, but also they assisted in her self-development as a future officer in the U.S. Army. The researcher ensured that she expressed her thanks. Although they equally thanked her for showing interest in this field, the researcher believes that it is her duty to investigate this area if she plans to serve this group of people properly. Without a doubt the researcher knows that with the stories they shared these combat veterans have impacted her more than she could have ever influenced them. The researcher is certain that she will always remember their stories and will occasionally wonder how they are doing. These fourteen participants allowed the researcher to hear stories that their families have never heard, with hopes that future combat veterans reintegration experiences will be easier. The trust they have instilled is greatly appreciated and the researcher can only hope that with this study she has at some level met that responsibility.

## APPENDICES

APPENDIX A  
CADRE APPROVAL LETTER



REPLY TO  
ATTENTION OF

**DEPARTMENT OF THE ARMY**  
UNIVERSITY OF SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA  
DEPARTMENT OF MILITARY SCIENCE  
PED BUILDING, ROOM 110 LOS ANGELES CA 90089-0653

September 24, 2013

Dear Lea Elliott,

I am absolutely inclined and on board with the research study (The Effects of Reintegration on Prior-Enlisted Combat Veterans: A Qualitative Study) you are conducting to further seek out knowledge and a listening ear to our men and women who have served our great Nation. I support 110 percent and will provide my office as well as use Army ROTC here at California State University, Long Beach to recruit participants for your study. I admire your concern, the desire to learn, and also personifying patriotism while also serving here in the ROTC program. I look forward both to your future endeavors and equally interested in what Veterans have to say regarding their Reintegration experiences post deployment. I am at your disposal. Thank you.

Very Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Jose Abad-Hernandez", is written over a circular stamp or watermark.

Jose Abad-Hernandez  
CPT, AD  
CSULB Army ROTC  
Military Science Instructor  
(Office): (562) 985-5320  
(Cellular): (787) 409-6617  
Email: Jose.Abad-Hernandez@csulb.edu

APPENDIX B  
INFORMED CONSENT LETTER

## **CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH**

Title of study: The Effects of Reintegration on Prior-Enlisted Combat Veterans  
You are asked to participate in a qualitative research study for a thesis project conducted by Lea Elliott, a Masters of Social Work student, from the California State University, Long Beach. You were selected as a participant in this study because you meet the following criteria: 1) male, 2) prior-enlisted Combat Veteran, 3) within the age range of 18-55, 4) reside in the areas of Los Angeles County or Orange County, 5) were deployed, and 6) primary language is English. Exceptions may apply.

### **Purpose of this Study**

The purpose of this study is to explore challenges and barriers faced by Combat Veterans as they reintegrate into mainstream society following their return from deployment. This study addresses various areas of the Combat Veteran's reintegration experiences, which will be verbally briefed prior to the interview. Exploring these topics will allow for program development that will better address the concerns involved with how Veteran's support systems can better assist with their reintegration process returning from deployment.

### **Procedure of this Study**

This qualitative study will be conducted in two phases. The phase breakdown will be as follows: Phase 1—Recruitment Phase, which include explaining the study's purpose and requirements of eligibility and Phase 2—Interview Phase, which involves the researcher and you, participant, to meet face-to-face, sign the informed consent form, complete the Baseline Survey, and conduct the interview. You will be informed that an audio recording of the interview will be created, but if you choose to opt out of being audio recorded, hand written notes will be utilized instead. Additionally, you may discontinue at anytime without any risks of penalization.

### **Details of the Interview**

The Interview Phase of the study will occur on the California State University, Long Beach campus in the Human Services and Design (HS&D) Building, Room 108 and will last approximately 120 minutes. Approval for a private office by California State University, Long Beach Army Reserve Officer Training Corps (ROTC) Cadre has been obtained. The interviews will be conducted throughout the months of December 2013-mid-January 2014. If at any time you, the Combat Veteran, feels uncomfortable you may 1) discontinue the study or 2) request to not answer any of the questions, and continue without any risk of penalization.

### **Potential Risks and/or Discomforts to the Participants**

1. A foreseeable psychological risk, discomfort, and/or inconvenience is that through the discussion of the Combat Veteran's reintegration process, memories relating to their deployment(s) may unintentionally reemerge, particularly if any of the Combat Veterans were diagnosed with Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). The intent of the questions during the Interview Phase are not to elicit



any trauma but to explore the steps the Combat Veteran took in order to reintegrate. However, due to the nature of the study it is a noteworthy risk and measures will be emplaced in order to prevent its occurrence.

2. Another risk that can arise is a Loss of Confidentiality, and thus a precautionary measure will also be emplaced to evade this incident. The two precautionary measures will include: 1) pseudonyms upon the commencement of the Interview Phase, as well as 2) ensure that the audio-recordings are secured in Room 224 of the Social Science and Public Administration (SSPA) Building on the California State University, Long Beach campus. Only the researcher and the researcher's supervisor will have access to this cabinet, through the use of a key.

## **Potential Benefits to Subjects and/or to Society**

### Benefit to Participants

As a Combat Veterans in this study, you would benefit because you would be provided access to educational resources. Furthermore, by participating in this study you may benefit due to the ability of venting any frustrations and/or share memories in regards to this topic. In order to express appreciation for your time and willingness to share your experiences in completing this interview, you will receive a \$5.00 gift card to Starbucks.

### Benefit to Others

The community, other researchers, and Combat Veteran's support systems will be provided with insight to better assist their loved ones and other Combat Veterans with their reintegration process.

## **Payment for Participation**

As a participant you will be provided with small token of appreciation upon completion of the interview: a \$5.00 gift card to Starbucks.

## **Emergency Care and Compensation for Injury**

If you are injured as a direct result of research procedures not done primarily for your own benefit, you will be provided with resources offered at the Veteran Affairs Medical Center in Long Beach, which is adjacent to the California State University, Long Beach campus.

## **Confidentiality**

Any information that is obtained in connection with this study and that can be identified with you will remain confidential and will be disclosed only with your permission or as required by law.

The audio-recordings produced during each individual interview will be destroyed upon completion of the study during the month of June 2014 and will not be heard by anyone outside the study.

If the participant wishes to review/keep their audio recording, they may do so upon completion of the study when the researcher is finished using it during the month of June 2014.

**Participation and Withdrawal**

You can choose whether to be in this study or not. If you volunteer to be in this study, you may withdraw at any time without consequences of any kind. Participation or non-participation will not affect you or any other personal consideration or right you usually expect. You may also refuse to answer any questions you don't want to answer and still remain in the study.

**Rights of Research Subjects**

You may withdraw your consent at any time and discontinue participation without penalty. You are not waiving any legal claims, rights or remedies because of your participation in this research study. If you have questions regarding your rights as a research subject, contact the Office of University Research, CSU Long Beach, 1250 Bellflower Blvd., Long Beach, CA 90840; Telephone: (562) 985-5314 or email to [irb@csulb.edu](mailto:irb@csulb.edu).

**SIGNATURE OF THE PARTICIPANT:**

I understand the procedures and conditions of my participation as described above. My questions have been answered to my satisfaction and I agree to participate in this study. I have been given a copy of this form.

Participant's Name (print): \_\_\_\_\_

Participant's Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Today's

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

APPENDIX C  
RESOURCES

## RESOURCES

1. Veterans Crisis Line
  - a. Veteranscrisisline.net
  - b. 1 (800) 273-8255 (TALK)
  - c. Press '1' for Veterans
  
2. Veterans Administration Medical Center—Long Beach
  - a. Longbeach.va.gov
  - b. (562) 826-8000
  - c. Address: 5901 E. 7<sup>th</sup> Street, Long Beach, CA 90822
  
3. Vet Center
  - a. *Website*
    - i. Vetcenter.va.gov
  - b. *Combat Call Center*
    - i. (877) 927-8387 (WAR-VETS)
  - c. *Los Angeles Vet Center*
    - i. 1045 W. Redondo Beach, Suite 150  
Gardena, CA 90247
    - ii. (310) 767-1221
  
  - d. *West Los Angeles Vet Center*
    - i. 5730 Uplander Way, Suite 100  
Culver City, CA 90230
    - ii. (310) 641-2653
  
  - e. *North Orange County Vet Center*
    - i. 12453 Lewis St, Suite 101  
Garden Grove, CA 92840
    - ii. (714) 776-0161
  - f. *South Orange County Vet Center*
    - i. 26431 Crown Valley Pkwy, Suite 100  
Mission Viejo, CA 92691
    - ii. (949) 348-6700

APPENDIX D  
SCREENING INTERVIEW SCRIPT

## Screening Interview Script

*(Phone Conversation)*

**Combat Veteran:** Hi, I am calling because I saw your flier regarding your study.

**Interviewer:** Hi, thank you for responding. How are you doing?

**Combat Veteran:** *respective response (I am fine, etc...)*

**Interviewer:** That's good. If it's alright I will go ahead explain in a little more detail the study I am doing and ask a couple of screening questions to see if you qualify. How does that sound?

**Combat Veteran:** *respective response (That sounds fine, etc...)*

**Interviewer:** The study I am conducting is a qualitative study in which I am looking to further examine the effects of combat veteran reintegration post deployment. I hope to find out more in-depth information regarding their experiences while reintegrating and from there determine how the community can better assist them and their families. I will also ask questioned regarding your support systems and the role you feel they played while you were going through your reintegration into mainstream society. Do you have any questions?

**Combat Veteran:** *respective response (Yes, will..., No...etc.)*

**Interviewer:** *If there are questions I will respond, then continue on to asking the screening questions.*

**Interviewer:** Now that I have answered your questions OR since you do not have any questions, I will state the requirements to be qualified for this study.

**Combat Veteran:** *respective response*

**Interviewer:** 1) You must be a male who is between 18-55 years old, 2) reside in Los Angeles County or Orange County, 3) be a prior enlisted combat veteran 4) have been deployed, and 5) speak English.

**Combat Veteran:** *respective response*

**Interviewer:** *One of two responses concluding the screening interviewer...*

**Interviewer:** Based on these requirements do you qualify to participate in this study, OR Thank you for your interest, however, based on your responses you do not qualify to participate in this study. I am sorry.

**Combat Veteran:** *respective response (Yes or No...)*

**Interviewer:** Do you wish to continue?

**Combat Veteran:** *respective response (Yes or No...)*

**Interviewer:** *for those that do qualify to participate in the interview, phone conversation will continue with explaining the next steps and scheduling an interview time. For those who do not qualify, I will thank them again for their interest, apologize to them for not qualifying, wish them the best of luck and thank them for their time.*

**Interviewer:** Once again, I would like to thank you for your interest in participating in this study. Based off the screening interview you qualify to proceed. The next steps will be to set up an interview time. During that interview time we will meet and I will provide more information about the study as well as have you fill out a consent form and a baseline survey. From there the interview will commence. Do you have any questions regarding anything I have mentioned or in general?

**Combat Veteran:** *respective response (Yes...OR No...)*

**Interviewer:** Now that I have answered your questions, let us set up a time to meet and begin the interview process.

**Combat Veteran:** *respective response (OK...)*

**Interviewer:** Sounds good, so *(insert scheduled interview date and time)* is when we will meet at the California State University, Long Beach Campus on the Palo Verde Street side, in front of the Human Service Designs Building. Just to let you know, I will call a day before our scheduled interview to reconfirm. Thank you again; I look forward to meeting you. If you have any questions between now and our scheduled interview date, please do not hesitate to call me back on this number. Other than that, if you do not have any other questions, I will let you go. Have a good day and I look forward to meeting you *(insert scheduled interview date and time)*.

**Combat Veteran:** *respective response (Thank you...)*



APPENDIX E  
BASELINE SURVEY

## **BASELINE SURVEY**

*(Administered During the Scheduled Interview following the completion of the Consent Form.)*

**1. How old are you?**

\_\_\_\_\_

**2. What is your ethnicity?**

White          Asian          Hispanic          African American  
Native American

**3. What is your marital status?**

Married          Divorced          Single          Widow

**4. What is your highest educational level attained thus far?**

High School Diploma/GRE          Associates Degree  
BS/BA Degree          Vocational/Trade School  
Graduate Degree

**5. What is your income level per annum?**

< 20k          20-50k          50k-80k          80k-100k          > 100k

**6. Which county do you reside in?**

Los Angeles County          Orange County          Other

APPENDIX F  
INTERVIEW GUIDE

## INTERVIEW GUIDE

Questions covered in the Interview Phase, scheduled during throughout the month of January 2014, will include:

1. What was your experience like following your deployment as you were trying to reintegrate into civilian life?
  2. What role do you believe your support systems played?
  3. What impact did military culture play on your reintegration process, if any?
  4. Who or what was most helpful for you during your reintegration process?
  5. If you believe you have managed to complete your reintegration process, do you feel any residual feelings reoccur occasionally? If so, who or what do you turn to for help?
- 

*Thank you for your participation in the study examining, "The Effects of Reintegration on Prior-Enlisted Combat Veterans: A Qualitative Study". Your willingness to share your personal experiences and assist with this research endeavor is greatly appreciated. If you have any questions or wish to receive the results and/or your audio recording upon completion of the study, please do not hesitate to call the following phone number: (415) 990-99573, and ask for Lea Elliott.*

APPENDIX G

FLIER

# U.S. ARMED FORCES

**PARTICIPATE IN AN INTERVIEW  
FOR A STUDY, TO SHARE YOUR  
EXPERIENCES ABOUT LIFE AFTER  
DEPLOYMENT.**

**Criterion:**

1. Resident of Los Angeles or Orange County
2. Previously Deployed
3. Prior-Enlisted Combat Veteran
4. Speak English
5. Between Ages 18-55
6. Male

**\$5.00 STARBUCKS GIFTCARD WILL BE  
PROVIDED AS A TOKEN OF APPRECIATION  
FOR YOUR TIME.**

**If interested please call the  
number below, your stories will be  
well received.**

**(415) 990-9573  
Lea Elliott**

APPENDIX H  
VETERAN'S NETWORK APPROVAL LETTER

DATE: October 31, 2013  
TO: Lea Elliott  
FROM: Wilson Sim  
Vice President, Veterans Network

SUBJECT: Letter of Approval

I authorize Lea Elliott to work with the Veterans Network for the purpose of writing her thesis, *The Effects of Reintegration on Prior Enlisted Veteran: A Qualitative Study*.

If there are additional questions, I may be contacted at 562-453-5911 or [mrwilsonsim@gmail.com](mailto:mrwilsonsim@gmail.com).



Wilson Sim  
Vice President, Veterans Network



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## REFERENCES

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